

Innovative
Education in
Northern
Canada

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Presentation to:

**MANITOBA'S COMMISSION
ON KINDERGARTEN
TO GRADE 12 EDUCATION**

on behalf of the Flin Flon School Division





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Dear Commissioners:

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to present to you and for your willingness to accommodate us. As Trustees we care passionately about public education and the success of students in the province of Manitoba. Based upon data developed by PISA we understand that there is a strong correlation between student success and educational systems which a) promote equity for all students and b) respect teachers and invest in building teacher capacity. As Trustees this has informed our strategic planning and decision making.

Being an isolated Northern School Division, we face many of the challenges experienced by all Northern Manitoba School Divisions. Many of our students live in poverty. We have a high population of Indigenous students, many of whom suffer from the intergenerational trauma of the residential school system and the 60's Scoop. We have limited access through the provincial health system to mental wellness workers. Many of our teachers are in the first or second years of their career. We do not have ease of access to the Ministry of Education resources and teacher professional development that large urban centers take for granted. We have however been able to respond to these needs innovatively and quickly because of our small size. We have developed a number of programs to meet the needs in partnership with numerous community organizations to support Indigenous and impoverished students. We hired mental health workers when none were available through the public health system. We developed a variety of in house embedded professional development opportunities for our teachers. Our school wifi connectivity is state of the art allowing our staff and students access to the world through our student developed Virtual Reality Laboratory and use of synchronous and asynchronous e-learning. We were able to achieve this because we are small and could respond quickly to emergent needs.

In conclusion, we believe that smaller educational governance units can respond more nimbly to the educational needs of Manitoba students and educational workers. We thank you for once again for taking the time to review our presentation and reflect upon our ideas.

Sincerely,

Leslie Fernandes



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Overview

The vision statement of the Flin Flon School Division is as follows:

The Flin Flon School Division is a culturally diverse community of learners working together in a safe and inclusive environment where all will be successful. As educational leaders, we are committed to excellence, continually challenging ourselves to foster the development of all individuals to their academic and social potential

The three pillars of our [strategic plan](#) are Academic Success, Student Engagement and Mental Wellness. These speak to our core belief that equity in education, respect for teachers and meaningful teacher professional learning are the pillars to building excellence in student achievement.

We would like to focus on the following areas from the Commission's terms of reference since these speak most directly to our strategic plan, our division vision statement and our lived experience:

1. **Student learning** – What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?
2. **Teaching** – How can teachers and school leaders become most effective?

Under each reference point, we would like to discuss; a) strategies that are working well in our division and b) suggestions for improvement. As we prepared our presentation it was obvious to us that there were many points of intersection in the two reference points.

We have embedded hyperlinks in this document in order that commissioners can immediately access relevant referenced Flin Flon School Division documents. We have also attached these documents as appendices.

We will conclude the presentation with a list of seven recommendations for the Commission's consideration.



Student Learning

What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?

Strategies that Work Well to Promote Equity and Student Success:

We have developed in house a number of successful strategies for increasing equity across our Division. All of these are locally funded and were priorities for the School Division. No extra money was requested from the Ministry of Education. Many of the Initiatives involve working with community partners for direct funding, donations, or reciprocal use of services.

1. Kindervention:

It was evident from our EDI data that many of our students arrived in



Kindergarten with significant gaps in their school readiness. The Kindervention program was created for students who would be entering kindergarten the following September. The Division has funded 20 half-day sessions from January to May. The curriculum focuses on developing lacking school readiness skills and is

delivered by a retired kindergarten teacher. Skills development is tracked and our data indicates that the gaps are reduced for nearly all of the students who participate in the program.

2. School Nutrition Programs:

Data from our guidance counselors and school administrators indicated that roughly 30% of our elementary students were arriving at school hungry. Breakfast was not available at home. There was also a strong



correlation between students who arrived without breakfast and students who we referred to the office for discipline problems, who were underachieving in class and who had frequent absences. Through a combination of local partnerships with

community grocery stores, the local food bank, and grants from the Breakfast Fund of Canada a full breakfast program has been



implemented. The program is available for all students. In the four months since the inauguration of the program, we have tracked attendance and office referrals. Attendance has improved by roughly 20% with our frequent non-attenders and we also see fewer late arrivals. Office referrals for all students are down significantly during the morning period. We are still collecting data around student achievement but preliminary results do appear to suggest increased student focus during the morning period.

3. Hockey Academy:

Our data indicated that student engagement and student success was poor with our most at-risk junior high students. Often this was exacerbated by poverty. We looked at a variety of engagement strategies and hockey seemed to be the most promising. [Flin Flon is a hockey town](#). The players on the local hockey team, the Flin Flon Bombers, are community heroes. We decided to start a hockey academy with a twist. Typically hockey



academies are designed to produce elite players. Ours was the opposite. At risk students, most of whom had never played hockey were invited to enroll. Hockey equipment beyond the means of most of these students was either provided free by the local Canadian Tire store or purchased by the local Rotary Club. The Flin Flon Bomber organization provided free ice time from 7:30-9:00 weekday mornings. The teacher coach picked the students up at their homes with a division bus. On the ice, the Bomber team members volunteered to help coach the students. The skills learned in the academy fulfilled requirements for the grade 6-8 physical education curriculum. The Division was able to offer this type of programming at no cost to the Division or the students involved partially due to the localness of the initiative and the personal relations developed in a small organization.

We tracked engagement results using three metrics:

- Behaviour Referrals to the Office
- Daily Attendance
- Academic Achievement



Over two years there was a 55% decrease in office referrals among students participating in the hockey academy.

We also saw significant improvement in the attendance of students participating in the program.

Attendance Data Flin Flon Hockey Academy



Furthermore, teachers reported steady improvement in focus and performance in the classroom

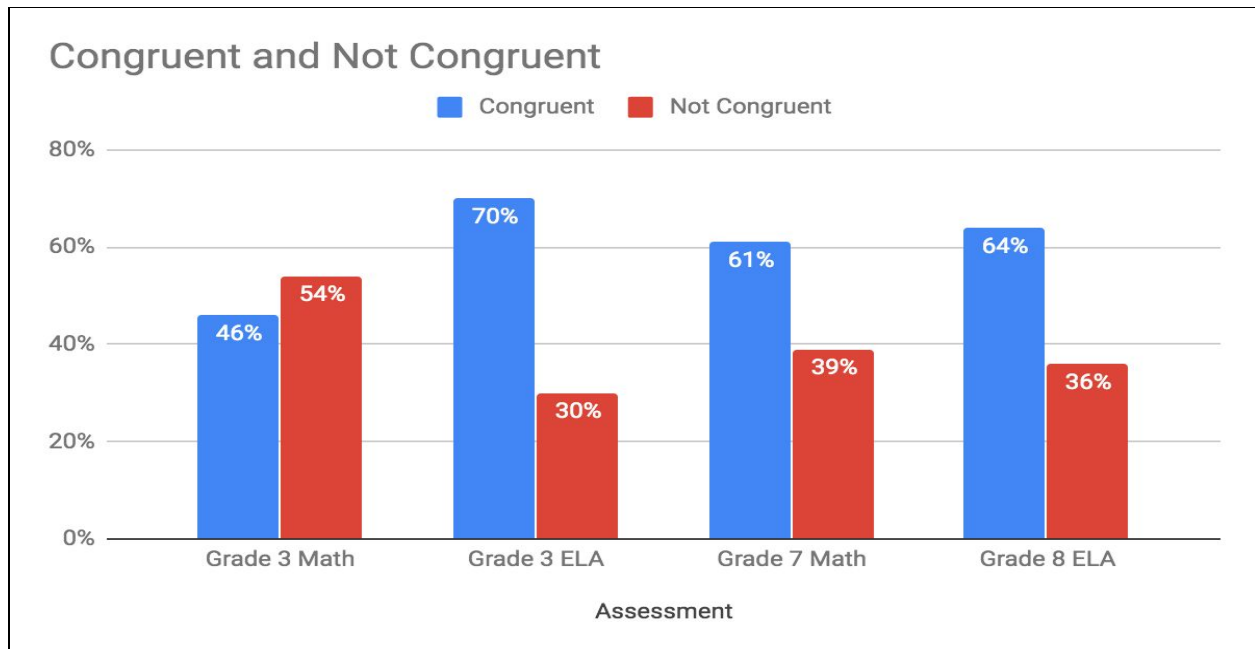


Strategies that Worked well to Develop a common understanding of Assessment and Evaluation Practices:

1. Provincial Assessments, Report Cards, and Curriculum

Divisional Background: As we drilled down into the data from the Ministry Assessments we noticed that there was a lack of congruence between Report Card Assessments and Provincial Assessments. The chart below indicates the discrepancy between the two reporting mechanisms. Methodologically, we compared the report card data reported nearest to the time of the provincial assessment.

Data for 2017-2018 School Year



As we drilled down into the reporting categories for the Provincial Assessment and the Provincial Report Card it was obvious that they were not absolutely aligned. For example, teachers were asked to report on Knowledge /Understanding, Mental Math/Estimation and Problem-solving on the grade 7 report card. On the provincial assessment, teachers reported on Orders Fractions, Orders Decimals, Represents Numbers in a Variety of Ways, Uses number Patterns to solve problems and Uses a variety of Strategies to explain Mental Math. When this was compared to the Grade 7 Provincial Math Curriculum the categories looked quite different. Outcomes were divided into four groups: Number Sense, Patterns and Relations, Shape and Space, And Statistics and Probability. The Provincial Assessment categories represented a very small subset of a rich provincial curriculum. (See [Glance Across the Grades: Kindergarten to Grade 9 Mathematics](#)) We found a similar pattern in Grade 3 Math and ELA and Grade



8 ELA assessment and reporting. It was very obvious to us that before we could address the issue of improving literacy and numeracy we needed a common metric for measuring our results. Because we are a small organization we were able to address the issue within one school year. We started with ELA. We borrowed from the best evidence-based approaches and created ELA Toolkits. These provide common assessment rubrics and common language for teachers. With this common approach, we more clearly see where there are gaps in student learning and develop research-based strategies and best practices to improve student achievement

Flin Flon School Division ELA toolkits

- a. [Example of Kindergarten Toolkit](#)
- b. [Example of Grade 5 Toolkit](#)

2. Manitoba Curriculum in Relation to PISA assessments:

As a school Division, we have been working through the 2015 PISA results looking particularly at best practices for successful schools. One of the key skills that it attempts to measure is the ability to apply learning to new information and data. It looks to evaluate not what one knows but how one applies what one knows to new situations. It privileges critical thinking as opposed to recall of content knowledge. When looking at classroom practice and curriculum design in Manitoba there was not a strong intentional and explicit focus on this skill in our Division. One of the ongoing plans for teacher professional development is explicit training in teaching with critical thinking in mind and designing programming which intentionally targets these skills.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Ensure alignment between Provincial Testing, Provincial Report Card and Provincial Curriculum;
2. Explicitly include critical thinking in all aspects of Manitoba Curriculum [See Critical Thinking Consortium](#);
3. Consider creating smaller educational governance units throughout the province, which allows for local flexibility and more immediate response to emergent school community needs.



Teaching

How can teachers and school leaders become most effective?

Background: A large body of evidence based research indicates that the most important [factor influencing and improving student performance](#) is the classroom teacher. Simply, to improve student performance work at improving teacher performance. There has also been significant research into what successful teachers do. A key element in promoting the development of high yield teaching practices is through effective and meaningful teacher performance evaluations and supervision for growth.¹ Models for creating alignment between best practices for [teachers](#), best practices for [school leaders](#) throughout an educational organization already exist. When these are harmonized with [School Improvement Plans](#), [Divisional Improvement Plans](#), Ministry of Education strategic goals and teacher professional development, a robust engine for systems wide improvement is created.

As a school division we recognized the powerful synergy when Division Improvement Planning, School Improvement Planning, Effective Leadership Practice and Effective Teaching Practice were aligned. There is no provincial structure for creating this alignment in Manitoba so we developed it locally. Because we are a small educational organization we were able to develop and implement these changes very quickly.

Strategies that Work Well to Promote Effective Teachers and School Leaders:

1. [Teacher Performance Appraisals linked to Strategic Goals](#).

Starting with the Division Improvement Plan we looked at a number of provincial and state teacher performance appraisal systems. We worked with principals, vice-principals, teachers and our local Manitoba Teachers Society (MTS) representatives. We developed a [Teacher Supervision for Growth Handbook](#) and [Performance Appraisal Template](#). We piloted the

¹ Darling-Hammond, Linda. *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right: What Really Matters for Effectiveness and Improvement*. Hawker Brownlow Education, 2014.



process and the template with teachers and administrators for a year. We collected feedback, made changes based upon the recommendations we received and fully implemented the program the second year.

2. *Principal Performance Appraisals linked to Strategic Goals.*

We followed the same approach used for Teacher Performance Appraisals with our principal performance appraisals.

(See [Principal/Vice-Principal Supervision for Growth Hand book](#) and [Principal Performance Appraisal Template](#))

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Alignment of Ministry, Division and School goals;
2. Provincially Standardized Principal Performance Appraisals linked to evidence-based best leadership practices and Ministry Strategic Goals;
3. Provincially Standardized Teacher Performance Appraisals linked to evidence-based best teaching practices and Ministry Strategic Goals;
4. Alignment of Teacher Education Programs and Teacher Professional Development with Provincial Strategic Goals.



Overall Recommendations

Student Learning:

1. Align provincial testing, provincial report card and provincial curriculum.
2. Explicitly include critical thinking in all aspects of Manitoba Curriculum and train teachers to intentionally teach critical thinking skills.

Teaching:

3. Align Manitoba Ministry of Education, School Division and School level goals based upon desired student achievement outcomes. This could be facilitated by creating a standardized strategic planning process and SIP/BIP (School Improvement Plan/ Board Improvement Plan) template.
4. Create Provincially Standardized Principal Performance Appraisals linked to evidence-based best leadership practices and Manitoba Ministry of Education Strategic Goals. Models for this already exist in other provinces such as the Ontario Leadership Framework and the Ontario School Effectiveness Framework.
5. Create Provincially Standardized Teacher Performance Appraisals linked to evidence-based best teaching practices and Manitoba Ministry of Education Strategic Goals;
6. Align Teacher Education Programs and Teacher Professional Development with Manitoba Ministry of Education Strategic Goals.

General Recommendation:

7. Consider creating smaller more [nimble](#) educational governance units throughout the province, which allows for local flexibility and more immediate response to emergent school community needs. Smaller units also allow for more focused accountability regarding Ministry of Education Strategic Goals and Initiatives.



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