

# THE PLAIN VIEW

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## Grandma's Letter to the Editor

I am a grandmother. I have great grandchildren in some Manitoba schools and I am very concerned about Bill 64.

When I was a girl, I attended a three room school in Snowflake: three rooms, 100 students, three teachers, grades one to eleven. That small, rural school employed skilled teachers and produced students that went on to become doctors, lawyers, nurses, dentists, architects, police officers, pharmacists, farmers and more. When our sons started school, the old building had been replaced with a new grade one to eight school. This meant that, for grade nine, they were bused to Crystal City. Buses started picking kids up about 7:30 am and kids arrived home about 4:45. Schools were different again when my grandchildren attended school. I am familiar with change and I understand that it happens and can be necessary. My great grandchildren are now facing it.

I have read many articles regarding Bill 64 printed in Manitoba papers but I have yet to see any articles that mention being in favour of Bill 64. They all mention the opposite. Many mothers and fathers and grandparents seem to share my concerns.

The government had a long consultation process where they surveyed and listened to many different groups of people about the education system. They reviewed the system and determined that improvements needed to be made. Bill 64 was developed. The problem, though, is that it seems like Bill 64 does not address the concerns that the various groups had. It seems like its goal isn't to improve education and give people more voice, but instead to give appointed officials more control over education. In addition, it seems to introduce problems to the system.

Bill 64 removes limits on how long students can be on the bus. This means that children, big and small - tots to teens - will be spending still more time on buses, and we all know what Manitoba winters can be like. In addition, waking up extra early and starting the day with a long bus ride creates tired students. A tired student has difficulty learning. Long daily bus trips are not my only concern: this seems to set the stage for closing smaller schools and sending students on long bus rides to larger ones. Closing schools is a death knell for communities.

Schools close, students get bused away, grocery stores close, farms get sold, buildings remain empty. Communities fade.

Our Minister of Education, Mr. Cliff Cullen, wrote an article in the April 6th Western Canadian. I quote, "Manitobans can be assured that the process will be inclusive, balanced, flexible and transparent. We want to continue to listen to all Manitobans about how we can improve our education system to ensure our students have the best chance to succeed."

Bill 64, however, includes a plan to do away with local school boards. School boards give the parents a chance to know what is happening in our schools. Parents need, and have a democratic right, to know this! There is a good chance board members know some of the students, and school boards are available locally for parents and students to express concerns to or to bring problems to. I remember - more than once - students from our small town going to the board with issues. This would never happen if the school board was in Winnipeg. How would a school board situated in Winnipeg be able to

have any real personal contact with all schools and families in Manitoba? Local school boards also allow for there to be local insight and input into the specific needs of our children in communities across the province. How could a small number of appointed officials in Winnipeg know what our local kids need? Mr. Cullen might argue that his vision for new and improved parent advisory councils will fill that role, but the need is already being met with our current school boards.

I understand that things change, but I don't think the changes proposed by Bill 64 are changes that will benefit our children or communities. On behalf of all the children and parents and grandparents in Manitoba, I implore our Minister of Education to do as he said he would do: "Listen to the people in Manitoba." They are speaking loud and clear. Don't take away our democratic right to have input into our children's education and their lives.

Rethink Bill 64.

Do Right By Our Children.

Sincerely,  
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