

Op-Ed: Convince Manitobans on Bill 64

Submitted by

Rural Voices United

A response to the letter regarding Bill 64, submitted by many MLAs, that recently appeared in newspapers around the province:

Recently, many MLAs published a letter to their constituents assuring us all that they are “committed to rural education.” They also stated that critics of the Bill “want to mislead” Manitobans, including:

- MB School Boards Association
- Manitoba Teachers’ Society
- Manitoba Association of Parent Councils
- Multiple Manitoba municipalities
- Professors of Education in Manitoba universities
- Opposition MLAs
- Individual teachers and superintendents
- Parents, students and other constituents.

Most people would agree that these groups make up a large cross-section of education stakeholders, and Manitobans in general. In their letter, the PC MLAs state that the “real facts of what [their] government is doing is laid out at BetterEducationMB.ca.”

But that website will not become the law of Manitoba that dictates the con-

Education website. Manitobans aren’t being misled; we are reading and understanding the impact of Bill 64 as it is written.

Neither Minister Cullen, nor any other PC MLA, has been able to defend Bill 64 beyond quick meaningless sound bites. Despite Minister Clarke’s recent admission at a public school board meeting that she has not read Bill 64 and is not familiar with what is included in the legislation, she has now signed her name to a letter speaking in favour of changes she admittedly does not understand well enough to justify her position in public discussion. If it is a good bill, MLAs who support it should be able to defend it in debate with education experts, and actually answer the valid questions being asked by the public at large.

Why remove local authority? Why remove elected trustees? Why rely on volunteer parent councils? What are the pros and cons of these decisions? What is the balance that they want to achieve? Why remove the one hour bus limit? Why centralize all procurement? Why create larger bureaucracies through huge geographic divisions? Why give 100,000 students

Convince Manitobans that the bill is good. We do not “want” to spend our summer fighting against this bill; we have enough to do. Manitobans can read and think, and nothing we have heard from Minister Cullen thus far has done anything to persuade the so-called ‘vocal minority’ that Bill 64 will ultimately be good for Manitobans, whether rural, northern or urban.