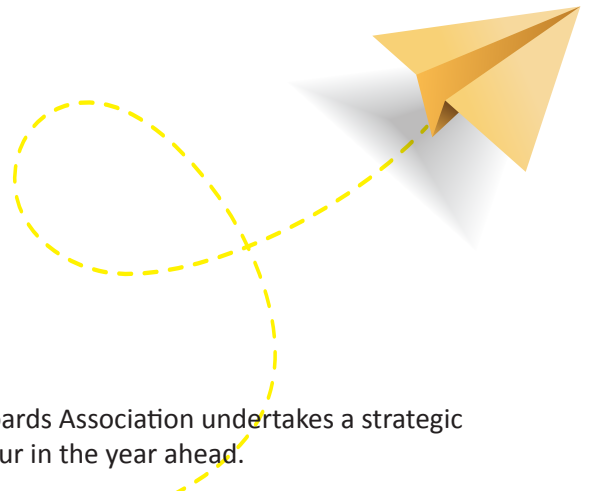


BEYOND 2020

Renewing Direction for our Future



A report to our membership from the June, 2022
MSBA Executive Strategic Planning Retreat



Introduction

Every spring, the Provincial Executive of the Manitoba School Boards Association undertakes a strategic planning retreat to set direction for major priorities that will occur in the year ahead.

This year was of signature importance for the Association following the significant investment of time and energy in addressing both ongoing pandemic response and also proposed and implemented structural amendments to the public education system (Bill 45, Bill 64, Bill 71, K-12 Review Commission Final Report) between 2020 and 2021.

While many strategic priorities were placed on hold during this period, your Association continued to serve its membership as it always has: with innovative ideas, continued services, bold responses and strengthened advocacy on behalf of Manitoba's public school boards.

It was therefore with renewed vision and purpose that members of Provincial Executive convened to look at where we have come from and where we are headed, as we seize hold of new opportunities in the years ahead.

Particular thanks goes to MSBA President Alan Campbell, Vice-President (>6,000 enrolment) Sandy Lethbridge, Vice-President (<6,000 enrolment) Floyd Martens, Region 1 Director Charlene Gulak, Region 2 Director Leah Klassen, Region 3 Director Paul Magnan, Region 4 Director Murray Skeavington, Region 5 Directors Sandy Nemeth and Julie Fisher and Region 6 Director Jamie Dumont, for dedicating their time and efforts to crafting this year's strategic plan.

Members of Provincial Executive were also joined by Executive Director Josh Watt, Director of Education and Professional Development Services Janis Arnold, Director of Labour Relations Morgan Whiteway, Director of Provincial Bargaining and Human Resource Services Justin Rempel, Chief Financial Officer Robyn Winters, Risk Manager Darren Thomas and Executive Assistant Andrea Kehler— the first such strategic planning session involving all members of the Association's senior administration team.

Together, we reflected on our strengths, took stock of areas for improvement, discussed the legion of opportunities before the Association and calculated the biggest challenges on our near horizon. The report that follows outlines the broad contours of our planning session.

Taking Stock of Our Strengths

As part of the strategic planning sessions, Provincial Executive specifically looked at what is working well when it comes to our Association and achieving its mandate.

Public and Community Engagement

- Given the pandemic and modernization proposals, the Association demonstrated its ability and capacity to engage the public on the vital work of our association and its core work via its social media channels and also through increased mainstream media and community events participation profile. Over the previous two years, hundreds of thousands of engagements took place between the Association and members of the public through Facebook and Twitter. Manitoba School Boards Association can proudly boast of enjoying the highest per capita level of engagement with its citizens over any other provincial, national or state school board association in North America. President Alan Campbell and Executive Director Josh Watt were invited to participate in countless community town halls and planning sessions hosted by citizens, community groups and education partners and the Association received gratis media coverage throughout the pandemic and education modernization period to the tune of numerous articles, op-eds, live interviews (television and radio) and also through spin-off features involving local opinion leaders on topics covering a wide range of educational interests.

During the Local Voices, Local Choices campaign, through the “Getting Your Message Out” series of webinars, and the production of its revised Municipal Engagement Guide (to name a few examples), the Association also remains ready and available to its member boards to help create engagement strategies and provide meaningful support and assistance where needed and required. This is a definite strength that our association must continue build and capitalize going forward.

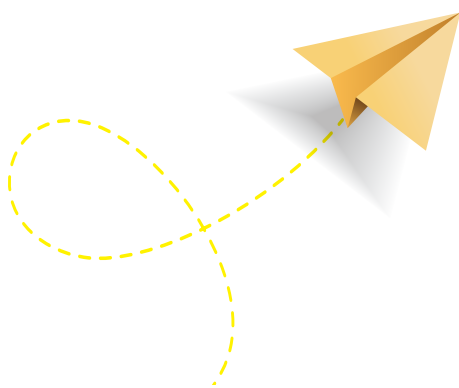


Recognition of the Association and its mandate by the provincial government

- There was and continues to be, recognition by Government of the role of MSBA and its mandate relative to labour relations and risk management in particular, and to voluntarily delegate tasks and assignments to MSBA when the situation or context so calls. Following the close of immediate pandemic response planning efforts, MSBA continues to be an active contributor to workforce planning, school safety, and governance/policy conversations on everything from operationalization of post-election protocols and procedures to staff-pupil interactions and anti-trafficking and exploitation, through to Francophone teacher and staffing recruitment and retention and renewal of the French Immersion program in Manitoba.

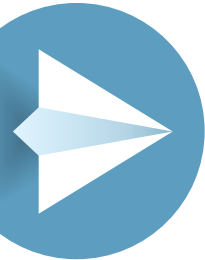
MSBA is able to distinguish between items where it must remain in position to advocate for the best interests of its membership by remaining “on the sidelines” during provincial discussions, while on other files, it can make active and meaningful contributions to advancing progress by producing resource manuals, guiding and leading vital task forces, and lending voice to inform consultations and other initiatives undertaken by the provincial government— at the 36,000 foot level on behalf of all members.

Executive also noted that since the withdrawal of Bill 64 in August, 2021, the Association’s work has resulted in greater appreciation of the nexus between provincial and local authority in matters pertaining to education. With school boards “here to stay”, recognizing where local autonomy begins and provincial jurisdiction ends (and vice-versa) is important for defining the future of our relationship with the provincial government. The Association’s advocacy for the establishment of a co-governance framework for future cooperation will be an important further contribution to ensuring that roles and responsibilities are articulated and understood moving into the future.



Stakeholder Relations

- In Manitoba, in juxtaposition to most other Canadian jurisdictions, relationships between our Association and education partners remains positive and productive, even while the Association continues to build increased profile with variety of stakeholders outside of, or ancillary to the formal public education sector. From Indigenous organizations to industry and commerce representatives, through to agricultural producers and even the non-profit sector, our linkages and liaison with formal advocates for each sector remain strong. MSBA is careful to distinguish between its role as an advocate and service organization at the provincial level and specific agendas or items that may speak to particular roles and interests of select member boards.

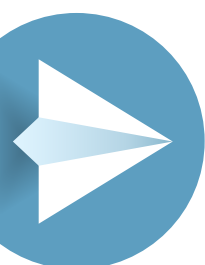


On the national and international scene, the work of your local association and its presence at events of the Canadian and National School Boards Associations promotes critical sharing of information between provincial, territorial and state school board associations, while better leveraging our own local capacity to identify best and promising practices for further consideration here in Manitoba. Our ability to work with our partners here and abroad serves to build a strong network of relationships that serves to underpin the key work of school boards continent-wide. Manitoba punches well above its weight, recently serving as Chair on several national committees even while the expertise of our staff has been solicited by counterparts with consistency and frequency. That we have built a reputation for “delivering on promises” and “getting things done” are hallmarks of our service on the national and international stage. Manitoba helped to create the successful partnership between CSBA and the Canadian Association of School System Administrators around pandemic response planning and briefings, Manitoba led the way on CSBA’s work in Indigenous Education and School Health and Wellness mandates and also benefited from the experiences of our partners when organizing the Local Voices, Local Choices campaign and all of the advocacy that book-ended the K-12 Education Review and Bill 64 challenges. Executive recognizes that we are better when we are “connected”!



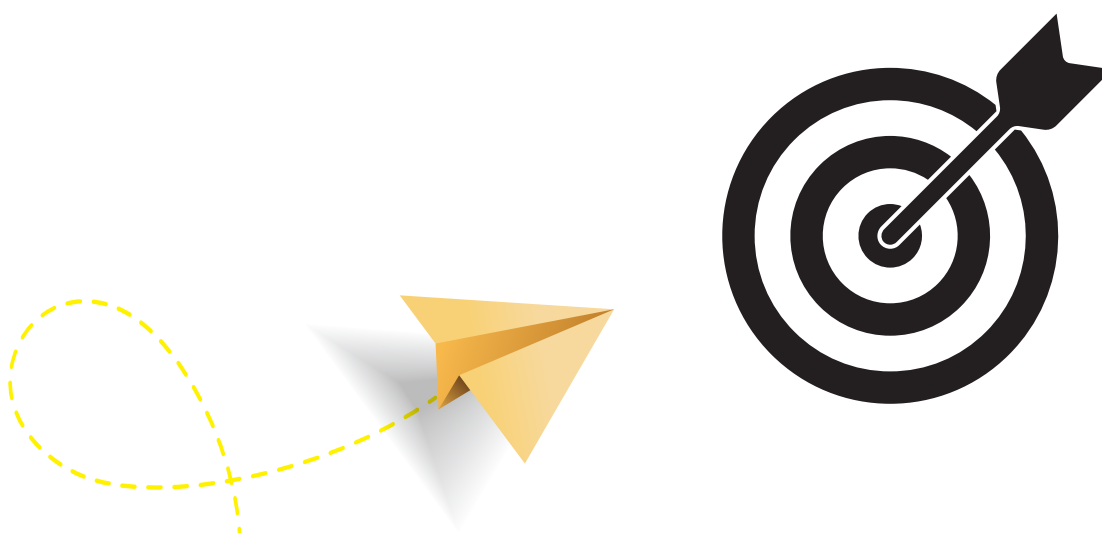
Clarity on roles and responsibilities

- With its clearly defined legal mandate under the *MSBA Act*, the Association benefits from a solid mandate that speaks to how it relates to its members, the Department of Education and external entities that have vested interests in the cause of public education. During the Bill 64 package of reforms, Executive took special account of the role of the *Act* and is planning for a formal review of the *Act* and whether amendments are required in future to promote the best interests of the Association and its members. This is a long-term horizon initiative but one that will nonetheless prove vital to ensuring that the legal “person” and independence of the association are assured in future years. This said, that our mandate remains clear under the *Act* and that the Association regularly polls its members to determine delivery of sustainable programming and services to meet the needs of its member boards, remains crucial to promoting alignment between member satisfaction and the overall mandate of the Association.



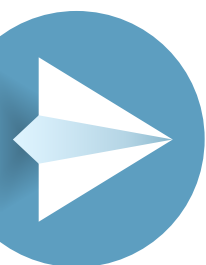
In the past, the Association has been able to address potential mission creep and avoid diffusion of efforts by ensuring that programming and services remain sustainable and subject to available funding. Provincial Executive remains committed to these principles. During the course of this year’s strategic planning session, we asked ourselves whether there was a place for external funding to support enhancement to the Association’s mandate. In prior years, most notable under the recent \$5.4M investment by the Federal Government in school boards through the Climate Action Incentive Fund, the Association served to meet needs by facilitating the negotiation and brokerage of these funds on behalf of its member boards. On the near horizon, the Association will continue to look for such opportunities as a value-added feature of the services it is able to provide. In terms of receiving funding to establish specific programs or services however, the Association remains wedded to its longstanding independence.

In April, 2022, the launch by the provincial government of a new K-12 Education Action Plan, which contains a roadmap for future initiatives designed to modernize education, provides greater clarity on what will be undertaken by government, when, and by whom. Executive agreed that being able to identify where the association stands on each item will be important for achieving synergy or divergence through to the end of 2023, when the next provincial general election is scheduled to occur. One of the specific items proposed under the Action Plan speaks to the establishment of a new framework for building capacity of the trusteeship in essentials and foundations towards enhanced governance. The Association’s staff are already undertaking work to define what this framework might involve and to promote non-duplication between the Association’s own efforts to enhance professional development for its members while also building greater capacity in this area.



Organizational capital and capacity

- To say that the Association succeeds because of the broad range and representativeness of the Provincial Executive itself, as well as the technical expertise of our staff, goes without saying. That member boards continue to nominate the best voices to contribute to our provincial table is evident in the cohesion, capacity, and expertise that serves us well. Under the auspices of the association, the regional network is essential and productive. Throughout the pandemic and Local Voices, Local Choices advocacy campaign, the ability of the Association to foster greater interaction with member boards led to heightened awareness not only of the issues and challenges that required solution locally, but also promoted greater awareness among our members of their association's mandates and responsibilities. On both the near and longer term horizons, Provincial Executive intends to build upon this raised profile of the association – among government, among the public, and also among member boards, in highlighting what we can do and achieve on behalf of public education.



The Association's ability to meet more frequently with board chairs helped enhance relationship and connectedness, increased frequency of contact and communication and helped orient us much better to the needs of those seeking association counsel and advisement according to our programming and services mandates.

It was particularly noted by Provincial Executive that the Association as a conduit for provincial perspective helps connect urban and rural/northern communities and member boards operating in those contexts, promoting diversity but also recognizing important differences under the common umbrella of what are collectively known as "school boards". By retaining structures and platforms for regular sharing coming out of the pandemic, such as the monthly Board Chairs meetings, the Association can help build opportunities and integration between boards for common cause— without waiting for annual general meetings, regional meetings and convention to do so.

In terms of capital and capacity, recent work undertaken by the Association to augment its longstanding candidate information sessions by bolstering citizen participation as candidates and promoting representativeness of boards (Building Capacity For the Future or BCF2) and to promote and build awareness among incumbent trustees to refocus on their role and mandate, with opportunities to strengthen community collaboration and partnership.

Finally, Provincial Executive certainly recognized and appreciated strengths emerging from the virtual environment and context that has dominated much of the last two years. The ability to convene meetings and liaise with members, partners and stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally has opened all new vistas for delivering on our programming and services in what is now a fully connected environment. We feel that this has been pivotal for building presence and increasing the Association's reach and scope. Executive is therefore keen to continue to capitalize upon our virtual connectedness with each other, our members, partners, stakeholders and communities.

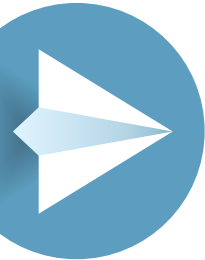


Reviewing Areas for Future Improvement

Provincial Executive also examined what can be improved towards better achieving our mandate.

Promoting our services

- It is a time honoured principle of any service-driven and membership focused association that resting on laurels is never the final status quo! To that end, Executive observed that there always remains room for continuous improvement and engagement with our members. Executive asked itself “why MSBA matters” to the individual school division, and how MSBA “works for you” our members?



The answers that we produced were particularly valid when it comes to raising the association’s profile among its own membership, and promoting member awareness of the many benefits and programs the association offers to its members. It is a little known fact, for instance, that members receive net benefits amounting to nearly half of the fees they pay in to MSBA programs and services. In years where special initiatives such as the \$5.4 million Federal CAIF investment is coordinated on behalf of our members, this ratio of net benefit to total cost exceeds the total fees our members pay significantly. It is also very important for members to be aware of the bulk purchase rates obtained on their behalf through our insurance services, which are much more affordable than what members could purchase on their own from the open market. If ever that insurance is required to replace a loss, school divisions that have experienced the same can readily testify that the amount that is paid year over year does not come close to the benefit received, if and when replacement is required. While investments under the Manitoba Universal Standards Trust (MUST) fund are growing each year, that the MUST Fund obtains relevant legal counsel on labour relations and human resource matters affecting all school divisions, means that this counsel is obtained literally “once and for all” rather than 38 separate times– for every single division. This saves our members thousands of dollars every year on legal expenses, beyond the bulletins and circulars that our staff distribute to help inform policy and provide direction throughout the year on developments of consequential legal impact. The Association has often provided such facts and figures to individual members upon request but concedes that promoting a better understanding of the net benefits that all members receive is a worthy objective.

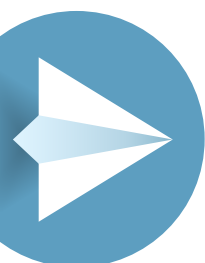
Beyond questions of return on investment and value-added from the Association’s programs and services, Executive realizes the importance of ensuring that new trustees and administrators are made aware of the plethora of services that are available to them. While we know that some boards pay thousands of dollars for strategic planning facilitation, are these boards aware that they can obtain these services through their association? Do they know that they can seek advisement from the association on communiqués and other public relations materials designed to inform their public and communities as a helpful set of “second eyes” that comes with recommendations based on best practices used locally, nationally and even internationally? These are some of the services that have always remained available to members, that the Association must better promote into the future.



Strengthening our base

- With projected estimates for high turnover among the trusteeship coming out of the October 2022 school board elections, Executive recognizes that there are important requirements for promoting cohesiveness of boards into the near future, while fostering unity of cause and purpose. Promoting critical and key understanding of the role of the individual trustee in context of how each board functions as a team must occur the day after the election. The Association has the expertise and capacity to help newly elected trustees understand their mandate while working with incumbents to strengthen their governance capacity.

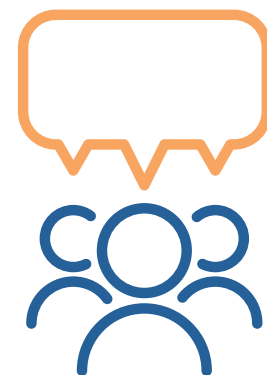
We know that into the future, there will be occasions where conflicts emerge. To that end, the Association must perfect how it works with boards to strengthen the way trustees collaborate and function as a team, to achieve student and community-focused goals under the current governance structure. To this end, the Association can enhance and formalize its “mediation” role relative to members when requested to do so by member boards. The Association must remain ever ready to respond to conflict situations that occur within boards with highest sensitivity to internal and external dynamics around those circumstances. In the past, MSBA has used a “good offices” approach to convene parties in constructive dialogue and solutions-oriented outcomes. Ensuring that all members know that they have dedicated capacity at their association for neutral, fair and objective intervention, when needed, is so vital to ensuring that external responses to such situations does not become necessary.



Redefining the Association’s presence

- As with any association, member engagement is fundamental to what our organization is all about. Sustaining interest in serving on committees, as part of Provincial Executive and even the Presidency of the association, must continue to be one of our main objectives. To this end, the Association must continue to be aware of urban, rural and northern relationships and respond to needs across the province to help promote both individual trustee as well as school board participation and involvement. It is so equally important that the association not expect too much or too little from its volunteers. Supporting appropriate work-life-volunteer balance is important for fostering the next generation of association representatives and leaders. The Association must recognize those who serve its cause and identify those who have a willingness to serve. Shoulder tapping those who might be interested in serving is a sure fire strategy that the Association should and can use going forward to help sustain its network of committees and bolster its external representation.

Many regional directors observed that there remains disconnect between the membership and the regional directors’ own important role and responsibilities as liaison between boards in their region and the Provincial Executive. To that end, the Association will strive to better define meaningful activities for the directors and will promote awareness of the same among members. In past, regional directors have received funding from the Association to convene regional networking opportunities as well as to meet with each member board in their region at least once per election cycle. Some have maintained effective communication by regional listserv to engage with board chairs on a frequent basis. Strengthening these outreach models– subject to available time on the part of directors themselves and our member boards– will help redefine the association’s presence province-wide.



For every challenge, an opportunity

The strategic planning session also looked at the manifold opportunities that have presented themselves to the Association coming out of recent trends, structural changes and the Bill 64 experience itself. Building upon our earlier focus on strengths and areas for improvement, many of the same themes emerged but many additional opportunities were also identified.

Within the association's formal structures

- While one of the most significant opportunities was vested in redefining and strengthening the role of the regional directors (as described above under “redefining the association’s presence”), clarifying who does what and individual roles and responsibilities at MSBA (Provincial Executive and staff) would certainly support more ready identification across membership of who they should contact under what context.

Much thought was also extended to the successful board chairs engagement model, with monthly meetings convened between the Provincial Executive and staff of the Association and Board Chairs. Going forward, the Association will formalize monthly board chairs meetings as part of its formal structure even while Executive considered promoting the establishment of similar networks for e.g. board finance committee chairs, to help foster the same connectedness and networking opportunities beyond the senior-most level of school board governance.

Raising awareness of how and why MSBA provides support to senior administration teams so that boards better understand the full array of services delivered by the association, was viewed as essential to the overall work of the association and recognition by boards of the value of their association.



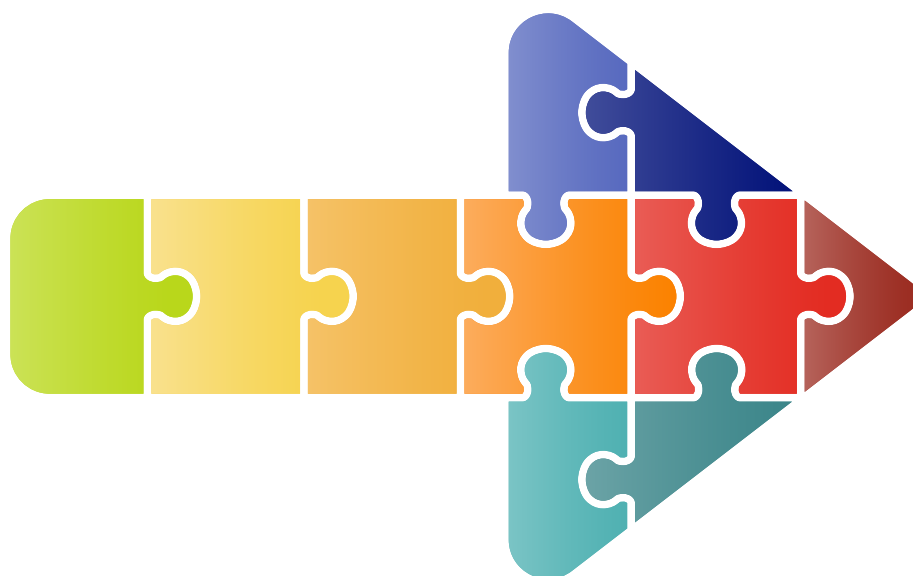
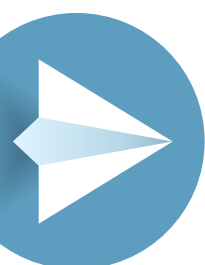
Post-2022 school board elections

- Provincial Executive recommended that MSBA can and should engage with candidates once the nomination period closes, to provide all candidates with information leading in to the election phase (such information may include an “Introduction to MSBA” refreshed school board member handbook, link to board policies, and an overview of the *Public Schools Act* and *Education Administration Act*). Perhaps a brief on differences between boards in terms of practices and processes would also prove useful.

Promoting greater or even universal participation of new trustees and including board chairs in the new trustee orientation sessions in December 2022 was deemed the best way forward for ensuring that each board starts their new mandate on the right foot. The information and content presented during the orientation sessions should be made accessible to those unable to attend or participate and following from the first year after the election, the Association might revert back to stand-alone new trustees orientation sessions in future years to help build two separate streams for novice and incumbent trustees to perfect the craft of governance. We observed in this respect that appealing to trustees who are acclaimed as well as elected by contest might also take specialized strategies, in order to ensure that tools and skills are made available across all contexts of the trusteeship.

Building upon one-on-one sessions in the post-election period, or even establishing an “ambassador program” (involving staff or regional directors) with individual members was suggested as one way to help promote continuity across boards and to build “institutional capacity and memory” while helping boards navigate through any transition period that might occur following elections where boards with majority of new trustees might have need for such support. We also observed that establishing a mentorship or outreach program where new trustees can be partnered with other trustees post-election could yield benefits, by way of building a resource network for trustees to reach out with questions or seek information.

Provincial Executive also felt that developing a session involving a strategic division of board members into different discussion tables, focused on building greater awareness of regional differences and with focus on provincial perspective, would be helpful.



Enhancing and expanding services

- As highlighted under “promoting our services”, much opportunity lies in raising awareness among members of the programs and supports that they can draw from in their daily operations. Starting in January, 2022, a new MSBA operational structure was defined to help promote programs and services according to our internal capacity and strengths. With the creation of a new Provincial Bargaining and Human Resources Services Unit, it is recommended that there is a prime opportunity to provide more HR services to member boards. By doing so, we will further enhance the scope of services provided to them, while also raising greater member awareness of MSBA at large.

Provincial Executive also saw the K-12 Education Action Plan roadmap, and in particular, the focus on school board professional development, as an important opportunity for addressing dedicated PD resources for disadvantaged and under-served boards. In the short term, association staff will review options around supporting boards in keeping with the essentials and foundations highlighted under the Action Plan itself.



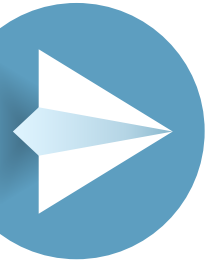
Strengthening internal relationships

- Finally, in terms of communications, building relationships with new senior administrators and staff/trustees following from the pandemic and Bill 64 experience could help bolster MASS and MASBO’s status as affiliate members of our association, while rejuvenating perspectives and presence among these important partners. Among boards themselves, issuing a reminder to all boards that, if they have not already done so, building a standing agenda item at each board meeting to discuss MSBA communiqués and circulars would also help to ensure that important information is received in a timely manner. It would also help to promote awareness among new and incumbent trustees of the work and services of their association. Lastly, Provincial Executive opined that when we meet together as members, every opportunity should be looked at to promote the concept of “local voices, local choices”, beyond the immediate context for which that motto was developed. The more boards appreciate their role in service to communities and schools from the perspective of “voice” and “choice”, the more this will strengthen the role of boards province-wide.



Public communications

- In keeping with the above focus on internal communications, externally focused promotions were deemed by Provincial Executive to be just as essential to consolidating public and community engagement in a post-Bill 64 world. Renewing the “Perspectives from the President” campaign, targeted at the broader community, comes with promise and potential for emphasis on school board issues in the post-64 context, post-pandemic messaging and general communications. Such frequent and regular communications remain paramount to fulfilling our legal mandate to promote the cause of public education and raise public interest in educational affairs. Executive noted that in few other circumstances might this be more applicable and relevant than the final outcomes of the K-12 education funding review. Ensuring that the public, which traditionally supports funding for schools, is abreast of the impacts of the review on their local communities, is an extension of the work boards themselves undertake in this respect.



Implementation of the K-12 Action Plan roadmap recommendations and our association’s perspectives (informed by membership) around these recommendations must be communicated effectively to promote public awareness. Showcasing why and how inter-board collaboration and cooperation does not give rise to a context for amalgamation was also suggested as a key strategic priority amidst a future provincial election cycle. It was equally noted that progress on provincial teacher bargaining may raise the profile of the association further, and we should capitalize upon our ‘agent’ role to successfully engage with the communities and members around what this transition means and why it matters for the success of local schools. Each of these three themes represented strong content focus for potential communications by the association into the future.

Strengthening external relationships

- The external world is evolving and so too, must school boards and their association. Empowering boards to grow and develop partnerships in new areas and across new sectors that have never before been bridged, is a service that the Association can support by, among other initiatives, producing community assets identification and system maps on behalf of our members. With the addition of Early Learning and Child Care under the K-12 portfolio in government, there are many opportunities to connect with this sector to promote seamlessness and continuum between early, middle and senior years of education. Other sectors of considerable relevance identified by Provincial Executive include: post-secondary institutions and providers, industries, agriculture, other economic sectors of activity, crime prevention and social services, health services, poverty advocates, and support providers focused on responding to the needs of vulnerable persons. As part and parcel of this work on identifying and cultivating new relationships, the association can also identify silos and work towards breaking down those silos for greater capitalization.

If there is one daunting challenge in a post-pandemic environment, it is the social divisions that continue to surface repeatedly across communities. Implementing specialized Professional Development for trustees on “how to bridge communities’ divides” (through, among other initiatives, an “adaptive leadership toolkit” for instance) would help boards to navigate through many of the current challenges that endanger opportunity for community collaboration and promotion.

For every opportunity, a challenge

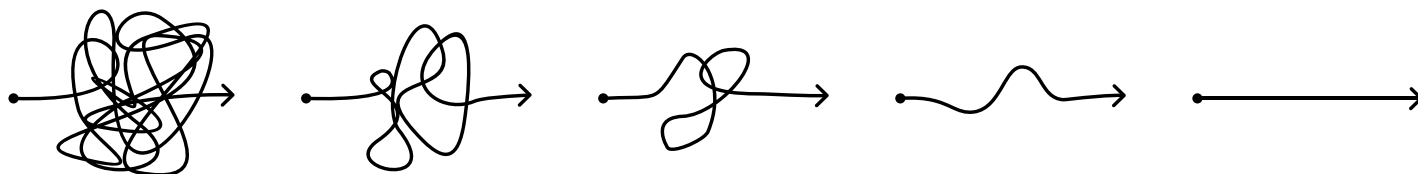
Grounded in a real appreciation of the pragmatic context in which school divisions operate and boards govern, Provincial Executive also reviewed and identified some of the major risks that, as an association, MSBA can help to address. In this respect, while perhaps the most significant challenge was represented by Bill 64 and initiatives that run counterintuitive to meaningful education reform as presented during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school year, MSBA understands that there is no room for complacency following from that experience. Taxation reform; a shift to provincial as opposed to local bargaining with teachers; the mandated reduction of senior administration by 15 percent along with need for special permissions from the provincial government to replace vacant positions; and a comprehensive funding review focused on rearranging existing funding while sidestepping the larger question of inflationary impacts, sufficiency and adequacy; are each in turn specific challenges that deserve measured responses on the part of our association.

Within this larger and broader context, Provincial Executive observed some ongoing key relationships and communications that are necessary to seize hold of opportunities amidst such significant challenges.

Internal

- If the 2022 elections result in significant turnover in the trusteeship, this points to need for strengthened orientation for new and novice trustees and for special steps to promote unity and consolidate progress made by boards locally and provincially based on the recent past. Further, being positioned and readied as an association to address and respond to intra-board conflicts will help ensure that the broad public support gained during the “Local Voices, Local Choices” campaign remains viable into the future.

There is equivocal need to renew and refocus the education partners on meaningful cooperation and collaboration to promote unity of focus and effort. Manitoba has long remained the envy of the nation when it comes to the degree of relationship and respect between and among these partners for one another. We cannot allow any frictions arising from the pandemic and Bill 64 experience to detract from such a strong foundation. We must also strive to recognize and appreciate each other’s specific roles and responsibilities, internally and externally. One of the major and most significant challenges we must therefore confront is the creation of silos along with potential deterioration of relationships as we move forward in the world beyond the year 2020.



External

- As referenced under “strengthening external relationships” above, we must remain ever cognizant that there are very real community divides and cleavages that challenge unity and mutual cooperation. By practicing adaptive leadership, boards can work towards areas for agreement and even consensus, without losing the important distinctions that may surface from time to time based on community and individual identities, structures, values, beliefs and systems. The limits of social cohesion are important for all boards to recognize, knowing how to promote dialogue and remain focused on the important work at the centre of their mandate will be critical to the future of school board success.

By the same token that demonstrating collaboration and cooperation between boards must be an opportunity to address why amalgamation is not appropriate for the future, Provincial Executive also recognizes that among some external parties, this collaboration and cooperation can also give rise to an exact perception of a context ripe for amalgamation. This may be a significant challenge moving forward and must be one that is continuously reoriented by MSBA under the opportunity to showcase collaboration as an ingredient for the advancement of local autonomy and democracy, not a detriment to the same.

Finally, one of the major challenges in any context following breakdown of relationships and communication focuses on trust. Provincial Executive identified that this is a major challenge in the post-Bill 64 context when it comes to relationship and communication between boards and the Government of Manitoba, as well as between our members and Departments of government mandated with portfolios of intersection with the work. As an association, MSBA must continue to overcome these dynamics in order to work in synergy with government entities without fear of threats to the future integrity of boards. In this respect, one of the most palpable challenges identified by the Executive was the need on the part of the association to reinforce the relationship between our association and member’s senior administration and government administration, and between elected boards and elected Members of the Legislative Assembly and Cabinet. By defining clarity in reporting and relationships, this can restore appropriate relationship-building and trust-building going forward. Another major challenge centres on communications. By implementing many of the externally focused communications strategies identified in this report, it is intended that many if not most of these challenges can be properly addressed.



Getting our message out

The final portion of this year's strategic planning retreat then focused on the very last question identified above. If we know what tools and strategies we want to use to both communicate internally and externally with partners and stakeholders, then what should the content of those messages involve? To this end, we asked three "big picture" questions. The bullet-points that follow represent important "scatterplot style" ideas that Provincial Executive and staff used to answer each in kind:

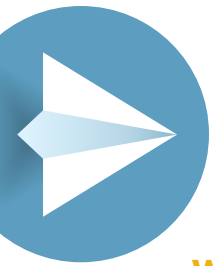
What do we want the public to know about school boards and public education?

- Poverty as correlation factor of influence on student performance and achievement
- Proportion of children in care and trauma-informed practice
- Responsibility of boards in providing vital and critical services in support of impoverished and trauma-impacted communities and students
- Clinical service delivery to support students as a fundamental support provided by boards
- Refocus on how well Manitoba students perform based on our situated and lived context
- Define what boards can and cannot do and the overall accountability and shared responsibility of school boards for system governance and direction
- Refer to need to define trustees roles and responsibilities for candidates and incumbents through PD
- Emphasis on the post-64, post-pandemic messaging and communications
- Memory and remembrance of what was overcome in Bill 64, what was at stake. Need to work with public and across political parties to maintain public awareness to promote community ownership and to underscore the importance of democratically elected local voice and local choice
- Help boards celebrate accomplishments and achievements province-wide
- Make certain the role of boards as employers is understood among relevant audiences; it's not just about education in the classroom but the human resources that make classroom education a success
- Explain class sizes
- What is at stake once local revenues and funding are entirely repealed? Why should school boards retain a share of autonomous funding? It is important for the public to understand what happens under single source revenues
- Communicate what boards do with local revenues: the services and supports, programs provided for the benefit of local communities
- Education revenues are "community" revenues, with real impacts on everyday Manitobans, including property owners that do not have school-aged children
- Population and demographic realities (graduation outcomes, school populations tied to collapse of rural Manitoba and urbanization, aging provincial population)
- Showcase local economic development opportunities achieved because of or through school divisions



What do we want the Province to know about school boards and public education?

- Explain class sizes
- Population and demographic shift, need funding in acknowledgment of existing capacity and constraints
- Need stable, multi-year funding, to support forecasting and accommodation of community needs
- Build a co-governance partnership model emphasizing shared accountability and responsibility built on trust
- Build understanding of the full spectrum of ancillary services, supports and programs provided by school boards, beyond the basic educational mandate?
- What does spending “per-pupil” really mean? Locally and in a national context (when local realities such as lunch and meal programs, clinician services, health services, social services, summer programming, continuous learning, Kindergarten programming are all factored).
- Debunk the false relationship between expenditure and outcome
- Communicate the full extent of what recovery learning must involve, resourcing, student population needs, how to communicate it in a “one stop” dataset that brings the full provincial perspective
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – what it means in practice
- Indigenous inclusion and fostering Aboriginal and Indigenous student success and achievement. We need greater resources in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action, and for their adoption and implementation



What do we want our educational partners to know about school boards and public education?

- We seek to work with partners in openness and transparency
- We’re all here for the same purpose
- We’re all on the same team
- You can’t spell “team” without authentic partnership, collaboration and building on one another’s strength and mandates
- Can we move forward to establish a Charter of Shared Principles and Values?



Operational Workplan for 2022/23

Every strategic planning retreat at the Manitoba School Boards Association concludes with a validation exercise. While Provincial Executive identify many initiatives and actions that require operationalization by staff in the year ahead, staff also propose items that they feel warrant consideration by Executive towards providing a robust menu of programs and services in support of our member school boards. To that end, Provincial Executive reviewed the 2022 Operational Plan proposed by staff for 2022/23.



Featuring more than one hundred separate actions and initiatives, this year's workplan goes well beyond that proposed by staff in any other year. With the recent operational restructuring undertaken by the association in early 2022, and recognizing that there are many opportunities and strengths that can be played to our members' advantage and benefit on the near horizon, Provincial Executive continues to monitor progress achieved by staff on implementation of the 2022 workplan to ensure that the Association is able to meet all interests on time and on budget!

As the workplan contains several items that are strictly confidential and/or sensitive in nature, we would encourage any board that, if they wish to see the workplan for themselves, to reach out to Association Executive Director Josh Watt at jwatt@mbschoolboards.ca to arrange for a private meeting to review the plan.



Conclusion

In 2019, as part of our association's submission to the K-12 Education Review Commission, we posited two guiding questions to inform our work at that time. What is education for? Are we worthy of our students? These two stars must be the constellation we use to maintain compass and direction for the future. We encourage all trustees and all boards to ask themselves those questions on a frequent basis over the next four years. While the answers you conceive together as a full board may be very different depending upon your experience, community context and resources, that they will provide for meaningful engagement and dialogue towards the end of creating a shared vision for the future can certainly emerge. One based on the utmost strategic focus!

We hope that our members found this year's strategic planning report to be of interest. If you have any questions or wish to seek clarity on any item that has been presented, please do not hesitate to reach out to MSBA's President president@mbschoolboards.ca or Executive Director jwatt@mbschoolboards.ca for further information.

2022 is an exciting year for our member boards. With many new faces at boardroom tables province-wide, along with the institutional memory and capacity returned to those tables by re-elected incumbents, we hope that your experience serving on school boards or in service to school boards is fulfilling and meaningful. In partnership with your communities and external partners, senior administration teams, and the schools and school staff who depend upon your leadership and dedication, there is a great promise that each board must fulfil on behalf of the present and future of our great province. Seize hold of that promise and know that you have the power and the authority to make a big difference. Let's make it a positive difference for the future. If there is anything that the Association can do to help, please do not hesitate to reach out to the above contacts!

