



12 December 2024

Honourable Tracy Schmidt
A/Minister, Education & Early Childhood Learning
Room 162, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Honourable Lisa Naylor
Minister, Transportation & Infrastructure
Room, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

[via e-mail only: mineecl@manitoba.ca ; minmti@manitoba.ca]

Dear Ministers Schmidt and Naylor:

In 2022, upon formal repealment of enabling authorities for the Public Schools Finance Board (PSFB) by the former Government, public education partners were informed by virtual meeting that this significant departmental restructuring was being undertaken in order to achieve greater efficiencies by consolidating major capital infrastructure procurement and planning into the then Department of Central/Government Services.

It was indicated to education partners that, aligned with the then Government's strategy to undertake a Public Private Partnership framework for construction of 20 new schools, centralization of all public capital infrastructure planning within government was necessary to achieve this objective. It was also indicated that centralization would serve to address our system's long-standing maintenance and repair priorities, given synergies in tendering and contracting.

Further, we were assured by Departmental representatives that this restructuring would not involve the loss of specific capital planning for school buildings and that we would have clearly identified contacts at the new centralized Capital Branch who would be responsible for school infrastructure and for maintaining relationship and communications with our system.

Regrettably, the guarantees and commitments that were made prior to the dissolution of PSFB have come with the loss of what we feel is a continued focus on school capital. While annual capital plans continue to be submitted by each school division to the Manitoba Government as in previous years, the opportunity for our respective members to receive services has diminished. We are of the shared experience that this arises not from the competence or capacity of the staff who are currently assigned to school capital files but rather, because these staff are not dedicated exclusively to school capital, as was previously valid for PSFB.

As a collective voice for public education in Manitoba, we as the principal partners of the system therefore request that efforts be undertaken in the near future to restore school capital planning

staff under an entity with the same mandate and standing as was previously exercised by the PSFB. We feel that this would enhance relationship and communication between our members and the unit responsible for one of our system's most critical priorities. The opportunity to consult with experts in school capital and to inform decision and planning is important to us. We would also observe that, in keeping with Part 4, section 2(3)(a)-(b) of The Provincial Planning Regulation (M.R. 81/2011) and, as confirmed during a recent presentation before the Association of Manitoba Municipalities by Land Use and Development of Municipal and Northern Relations on 26 November 2024, the continuing duty to consult with PSFB for school site planning purposes is also maintained under The Planning Act Handbook.

Our advocacy for restoration of the PSFB arises from many factors. As you may be aware, the current valuation of the school capital footprint in Manitoba exceeds \$12.6 billion, including property and contents. The average age of that footprint is nearing 60 years of usage. Over successive years of school funding announcements, the investments that have been allocated for capital have not kept pace with the needs and requirements of such a significant footprint.

Under the previous Government's mandate, Provincial Capital Grant Funding increased by \$46.2M or 43.8 per cent. Actual growth in inflation of 21.5 per cent according to Manitoba annual average CPI over this 2017-2023 timeframe fairly situates growth into a much needed perspective, insofar as inflation effectively neutralized half of the annual capital increase.

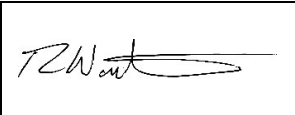

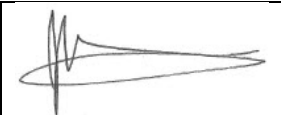
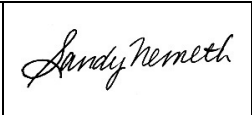
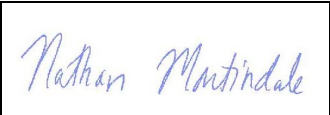
As per FRAME Budget 2023/24 estimates, a substantial portion (11.2 per cent) of divisional operating revenues are already dedicated to "Operations & Maintenance". As you are aware, any remaining difference required to address capital deficiencies is borne of surplus revenues or reserve as maintained by school divisions for this purpose, at a time when manifold additional pressures are facing public education investment, among which one of our highest priorities is our growing capital backlog.

We certainly understand the explanation that has been provided by the Government for discontinuance of future school construction under the 20 new schools guarantee, as we ourselves are not authorized to undertake deficit budgeting. We equally understand the intention and vision motivating the Government's recent efforts to conduct physical space audits in an effort to maximize classroom and teaching spaces, given the pressures faced by the public education system province-wide. Across our front-lines and across schools facing the most pressures, existing physical space cannot accommodate current requirements. According to objective functional space standards as established under the May 2022 School Building Space Standards published by PSFB prior to its dissolution, occupancy and spatial utilization rates have exceeded the maximum recommended thresholds identified under these standards, in select school spaces.

To conclude, Honourable Ministers, It therefore our perspective that, by working with dedicated school capital planning staff in Government under a renewed PSFB structure, we can identify solutions in an expedient and urgent manner to address these chronic capital needs. This shall not serve as a substitute for the requirement to proceed with construction of new schools at the Government's earliest possible convenience and opportunity but it will represent a significant step forward in our ability to manage school capital files on a daily basis, for the advantage of our members.

We thank you for your attention to this request. Should you wish to arrange a meeting with us to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact us as you are available.

Sincerely,

				
Robert Warkentin President MASBO	Jeness Moffatt Co-President MASS	Jason Young Co-President MASS	Sandy Nemeth President MSBA	Nathan Martindale President MTS

Cc. Deputy Minister Brian O'Leary, Manitoba Education & Early Childhood Learning
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