

Mr. Ray Morrison
Chair
Consultation Panel on Educational Governance Review Report
C/ O – Saskatchewan Ministry of Education
2220 College Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 4V9

January 25/2017

Dear Mr. Morrison:

First I thank you and your fellow panel members for the opportunity to present the perspective of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce on your current task. To put our position in context I offer the following:

- We have been active on the education file since 2005 and our efforts on education have been recognized by our chamber colleagues through our recognition as one of the “Top Three State and Provincial Chambers” across Canada and the United States.
- We have adopted very clear “Principles of Engagement in the K-12 System” to guide our efforts and ensure we remained focused, but to also recognize the areas where we have strengths and where we do not.
- The Saskatchewan Chamber convened a Curriculum Renewal Partnership comprised of the SSBA, STF, Ministry of Education and LEADS whose mandate it is to do two things. First gain a shared current understanding of how and what students need to learn and second, to use that knowledge to confirm a process to get full scale curriculum renewal started and sustained.
- Since we began on the education file, we have had many policies ratified by our members and have then advocated them to the provincial and federal governments.
- With a strong belief in the many benefits of enhanced entrepreneurship and financial literacy we have contributed time, resources, and advocacy toward these areas. We have created the Saskatchewan Financial Literacy Network to promote quality financial literacy programs across all sectors and all ages of the community.
- Each year we sponsor and participate in student activities and host as many as 75 students annually at our events.

While we clearly respect the education sector professionals and acknowledge their leadership, we also have a vested interest in the enhancement of our education system because of our mandate to make Saskatchewan a better place to *Live, Work, and Invest*.

With a sincere shared commitment to student success, we believe the Educational Governance Review Report has simply asked the wrong questions.

There are clearly some changes needed in our current school divisions, just like in any organization, that could enhance the outcomes, but none of these changes require government involvement to change borders or legislation. The only move required by government toward school divisions is some sign of leadership on key issues – the ones we should be asking questions on. For example:

- Our Aboriginal student success rates are dismal- Why is there no province-wide discussion on that?
- Funding levels for on-reserve schools are less than in the provincial system- Why is there no province-wide discussion on finding a solution?
- The most recent PISA report showed us going backward not improving- Where is the province-wide conversation on that report's findings?
- The face of our province is changing with immigration and most recently a large influx of Syrian people whose English language skills are often weak- Where is the province-wide discussion on how we embrace all new students and their families?
- There is no consistent standard of achievement across schools and as such the educational outcomes are very diverse- Where is the province-wide discussion on that long-standing issue?
- Mental health, crime in schools, and truancy are big issues in some schools, but affect us all- Where is the province-wide discussion on those?

Other issues like overall funding levels, ensuring a smooth transition into kindergarten and Grade 1 and from Grade 12 to university or college, affordability of post-secondary education and many more items need discussion. An impromptu review of the school divisions does not.

As an organization that is very focused on the effectiveness and transparent use of our tax dollars, we understand that constant diligence is required by the provincial government. While not all the different options were costed, we see the benefits of any stated reduction not being greater than the cost of the confusion, lack of resources available by Trustees toward the real issues, and the reduced productivity across the system caused by any of the options being implemented.

I must give credit to the depth of the work completed by Mr. Perrins and as he was a long-time public servant we know of his commitment to the province. Some of the ideas he raised around "Shift in Governance" for example, have value and should be considered, but in the right

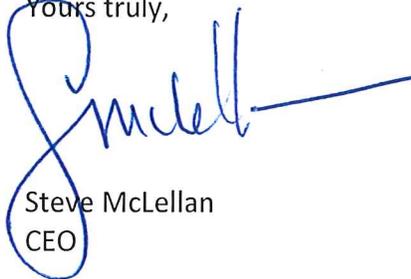
context. While governments can use the big stick of legislation, they are much more effective when they lead the discussion and use available and willing expertise to enhance, not break down, or as in this case distract, the system. Consider the dedicated effort of the Directors and the Ministry in the development of the ESSP.

Consider the reference Mr. Perrins made to past voluntary changes that were implemented to enhance the system and how well that process worked.

Saskatchewan's education system is not perfect but does provide a very good level of education to all students who can embrace the opportunity. By focusing our collective efforts on the right questions and using the collective expertise and passion for our children's education, we believe Saskatchewan can one day soon have the best education system in the world. That should be our goal and we will not get there by piecemeal actions that distract attention and force other more important questions to wait for answers.

Again, I thank you and your fellow Panel members for your good work in leading this review. And just in case I have not been explicitly clear, we ask the Ministry of Education to leave the school board structure in place and move the focus to the issues that really matter.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Smclellan", with a long horizontal line extending to the right. The signature is written over the printed name and title.

Steve McLellan
CEO

Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Principles for Interaction with the Education Sector

To guide the SCC actions in this area, the “8 Principles of Engagement” as created by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE). They are a concise summary of the years of experience in this area by hundreds of Chambers of Commerce.

1. **Prioritize & Commit** - Education transformation is often measured in decades, not quarters. Progress will feel glacial and setbacks are inevitable. If you choose to engage in this tough issue, make sure it is a top priority for your organization and that your leaders are committed for the long haul
2. **Maintain Focus, Avoid Distractions** – There is always a new initiative in the education realm looking for a champion, and your chamber can easily fall victim to “flavor of the month” syndrome. Set ambitious, measurable outcomes that fit your organization and then stick with them. Resist the temptation to chase the latest education fad. However, your sharp focus will also help you spot innovative approaches and projects which can help you leapfrog ahead on the issues you previously identified.
3. **Be the Truth Teller** - Someone has to send a clear signal to parents, teachers and students about the skills employers will need and about the shortfalls in performance. A trusted source has to publicly acknowledge victory and failure. Someone must be willing to say when outcomes are unacceptable and celebrate success as we would any grand endeavor. The business community is the credible voice to articulate whether graduates are ready to work! Get agreement on the facts and create a shared view of reality before everyone launches into policy or program debate. Be careful of introducing new sets of facts which cloud the clarity of knowing your numbers. Understand where your community stands on key education indicators and communicate hard facts to members and the larger community. Push for data-driven decisions.
4. **Build Awareness but Focus on Results** - Businesses leaders understand that the education system is a problem we can't afford *not* to solve. Continue to beat the drum, but remember that awareness alone is not enough. You must move quickly to action that produces outcomes. Shared accountability across all stakeholders, including the business community, is critical so that we don't get lost in activity rather than achieving results.
5. **Know and Respect Roles and Responsibilities** - We don't want to do to educators what government sometimes does to us: "Hi, we're from the business community and we're here to help you teach." The educators are on the scene. They are the experts. Business leaders know how to ask tough but thoughtful questions and we know how to focus on outcomes. The combination of roles can be powerful. We can help educators get clarity, cut across silos, think

differently. They can help us understand the real facts, the best practices and the daunting challenges facing kids and parents today.

6. Be the Convener - The chamber is uniquely positioned to bring diverse interests together. You have the asking rights to invite administrators, parents, union bosses, community foundations, charter school principals, clergy, elected officials and business leaders to the same table. Partner with other credible, change-oriented groups. The business community's power to convene is limited though. We are not elected or authorized to drive education change. For successful change, there will be many "tables" in the community discussion, so we need be good hosts and good guests.
7. Public Policy is Fundamental - It's fine to begin your education-related initiative with programs and awareness, but if you aspire to real transformation, you'll have to shape public policy, probably at the state level. You don't have to tackle the toughest legislation first, but dive into the policy questions that matter.
8. Courage is Needed - Whether it's voting out an obstructionist school board member or giving cover to a bold superintendent, at some point your work in education will become controversial and, unfortunately, personal. Timidity doesn't work any better in education politics than it does in municipal politics.

September 2016