



P.O. BOX 89 ILE-A-LA CROSSE, SASKATCHEWAN S0M 1C0 PHONE (306) 833-2141 FAX (306) 833-2104

**Submission to the Governance Review Panel  
Wednesday, January 18, 2017  
Meadow Lake**

The purpose of this submission is to:

1. Present the views of the Board of Education of the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division #112 (herein after referred to as the "Board") in regard to the governance options presented in the Educational Governance Review Report (herein after referred to as the "Report").
2. Present the Board's views on the key challenges presented in the Report.
3. Present the views of the Board on the shifts in governance presented in the Report.
4. Present the position of the Board concerning educational governance in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

In doing so, the Board wishes to:

1. Present information describing the history of the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division #112.
2. Present some comments about the assumptions made in the Report.
3. Address each of the key challenges.
4. Address each of the considerations for developing and analyzing options.
5. Discuss each piece of the options and analysis presented in the Report.

History of the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division

Ile-a-la-Crosse is a Northern Village located on the shores of Ile-a-la-Crosse Lake; which is part of the Churchill River System. That river system played an integral part in the fur trade industry resulting in fur-trading posts being established there by the major players in that industry. Over time, the descendants of the original Cree inhabitants of that area and those traders established the permanent community. As was the case in aboriginal communities throughout the north, European clerics entered the picture to evangelize and educate the population. In this community it was primarily the Roman Catholic Church that was involved. Children were removed from their families to become students in church-run facilities in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Those facilities – for both boys and girls – have been referred to as boarding schools and residential schools and contained both Status Indian and Metis children. No distinctions were

made in that regard. The legacy of those schools prompted community members to take control of educating their own in 1974. Several of our present staff and Board (and even more of their parents) experienced those residential schools.

#### General Comments

1. In his Letter of Transmittal, Mr. Perrins indicates that he was charged to develop a report in response to the question “What system of governance and administration is needed in Saskatchewan’s K-12 education sector to achieve the outcomes established by the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)?” The remainder of the Report is loosely associated with that task. There are several statements made by Mr. Perrins that require further explanation and/or need to be questioned or substantiated. First, governance and administration are quite separate functions and to group them creates confusion. Changes in governance structure may change the number of people governing and may change the titles of those administering the structure. However, it is the Board’s contention that the total number of those administering the structure will not change. Where they work, what they are called and who they report to is all that will change.
2. The Board agrees with the comments that Mr. Perrins received from those that he consulted with in the preparation of this Report including:
  - Unanimous support for elected boards as the only way to represent the local voice.
  - Unanimous support for no more amalgamation.
  - Unanimous support for the ESSP.
  - Agreement that further progress on the sector plan would be lost due to the transfer of energy required to reorganize.

How Mr. Perrins developed his options and the possibility of appointed boards after hearing those concerns is quite disconcerting.

3. The Board agrees with Mr. Perrin’s assessment of what is needed to meet current challenges and to prepare for the future (page 3). We do need a K-12 system with a governance system structured to accomplish the 6 points listed. In particular, we wish to point to the need to:
  - Maintain and improve the quality of instruction for all students, wherever they live; and,
  - Preserve and strengthen parent and community voice.

It is the Board’s contention that the options presented will do little in that regard.

4. The Report cites seven trends that have occurred over the past 20 years in the governance of education in Canada. It is the Board’s belief that six of those seven

trends have occurred in Saskatchewan as well. The disestablishment of denominationally-based school boards is the only trend that remains unfulfilled in Saskatchewan. It is the Board's contention that Indigenous education and more recently, the ramifications of the Daniels decision with respect to Metis rights, need to be considered as well. These issues are not addressed in the Report.

5. The Report clearly indicates that Saskatchewan has the lowest number of school boards and board members of the four western provinces (page 7). Although our land mass is similar to those other provinces, we have managed to address that sparsity with less than half the boards of those other provinces. How reducing the number of boards further as the report suggests, will increase that efficiency, remains unsubstantiated.
6. The Board agrees with the Report's description of the duties and powers of Boards (page 8). Boards in Saskatchewan, do perform those duties and exercise those powers regardless of their size and location.
7. The Report addresses a number of Key Challenges (pages 12 to 17). Although this submission will speak to each separately, the Board wishes to question the main assumption that those challenges "bring to light the need to consider the legislation, structure and governance of Saskatchewan's K-12 education system". The Board agrees that challenges do exist but believes that they can be addressed in ways other than making changes to the structure and governance of the school system. Many of those suggestions for change were identified by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) and by the Director of Education Group in previous submissions to the Ministry and this panel.

#### KEY CHALLENGES:

1. Achieving Broad-based Improvement in Student Achievement:

This is a huge challenge and one that will not be met overnight. As referenced by many parties involved in Saskatchewan education, a concerned, coordinated effort has been underway since 2014 with its goals to be accomplished by 2020; that being the ESSP. This is the first initiative of this type and magnitude undertaken in the last 40 years – even though it has not been mandated. The Report cites, "some boards and their administrators struggle with what they see as competing accountabilities." The implication here is that you can't have 28 boards work collectively on a strategy and still allow them the autonomy to set goals of their own; which is totally unsubstantiated. The Board's contention is quite the reverse – the alignment of Provincial goals (ESSP), Division goals and school goals has never been closer. Having said that, there is still the ability for individual school divisions to add their own goals, identified at the local level, as they see fit. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, the Board participates fully in the ESSP, and the Division goals are aligned with ESSP goals as are school goals. Data collected over the

past few years shows Ile-a-la-Crosse students consistently outperforming the rest of the First Nation, Metis and Inuit cohort as well as performing at or near the provincial “All” cohort in numerous areas. At the same time the Board ensures that the local Metis culture and the Michif language are being preserved in its schools. The local School Community Council ensures that smaller, yet important school specific initiatives are worked on at the school level. The changes in governance structure being proposed in the Report may adversely affect that ability. In any case, there is no evidence to show that changes in governance will alleviate the perceived challenge.

## 2. Allocation of Resources:

The Report cites “Twenty-eight boards of education apply their judgement to the above categories with minimal provincial direction. As a result, decisions made by a board can result in students in one school division having a different educational experience from the students in the next school division depending upon the staffing decisions, the programs offered and the supports provided.” It is the Board’s contention that this should be the case. Local boards know the issues and hear from their public what it is that is important to them. They then have the ability to tailor their system to those needs within the parameters set by the Ministry and the Provincial Auditor. To change governance so that the judgement of boards cannot be applied in those ways, or to ensure that all educational experiences are equal across the province is taking a step backward.

## 3. Achieving Broad-Based Efficiencies:

Certainly, the Board agrees with the Report in that we all need to do our part to deliver “programs and services as efficiently and effectively as possible.” Since the inception of the PLT and the ESSP, there has been a concerted effort to plan sector-wide efficiencies and share information among school divisions. Much work has been done at the Division level and considerable savings have been realized. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, we may not be able to arrange large purchase discounts as implied in the newly proposed Option 1. However, the Board is close enough to the action to realize savings in other ways. They utilize suppliers who provide them with unique saving opportunities such as free shipping, which due to location, results in significant savings. Often, supplies are picked up and delivered by community members or staff saving both time and shipping costs. At times, the Board has partnered with other school divisions for large tendered purchases such as school buses; with large savings being realized. Further, the Board wonders how a central purchasing authority (as suggested) might distribute orders to remote locations such as Ile-a-la-Crosse?

A missing piece in this discussion is a similar contribution from Government Ministries. Huge Ministry staffs do not seem to have the ability to work together or to put plans

into action in a timely fashion. The on-going saga of the USIS and P-cards are examples of this. The combined efforts of Ministry staffs took over 5 years to develop a new Funding Formula after the ability to tax at the local level was removed; requiring school divisions to manage their affairs and budgets without full knowledge of the financial support they would be receiving. After 7 years, we haven't run through one complete cycle using that Formula and yet the Report suggests we need to examine the possibility of further changes to governance? Ile-a-la-Crosse was still negotiating the Supports for Learning (SFL) portion of the Funding Formula on December 20, 2016 and is still awaiting a final answer. The implication that the creation of something similar to 3SHealth will somehow increase efficiency in the new options is totally unfounded. In Health, the intermediary role played by 3SHealth complicates planning, prioritizing and purchasing, and slows progress. That organization is not viewed positively by those employed in the Health sector. The Board's contention here is that making things larger or adding more layers of government bureaucracy will do little to address this challenge. It certainly has not been board governance or administration that has been holding up efficiencies.

#### 4. Costs of Board Governance Are Determined Locally:

Governance costs in education account for 0.6% of total operational funding. The Report seems to be viewing this as being a negative as all of the options presented involve the reduction in the number of Boards which would reduce governance costs. It is true that governance costs would be reduced in all of the Options presented. However, there is much to be said for the fact that 0.6% for governance is an extremely low amount of the total budget. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, governance costs total \$206,000, of which over half (\$121,000) is attributed to travel and professional development. The Provincial Auditor has recommended that boards have a requisite skill set and knowledge base. Professional development is one way of meeting that recommendation. Having Boards locally determine their needs such as board member training, board professional development, and SSBA attendance makes more sense than not presenting an alternative. The Report also shows that Saskatchewan school board remuneration rates are very much in line with other agencies and pale in comparison to those of the Crowns.

Considering that governance and administration are separate factors, the Board contends that simply reducing the number of boards will not produce enough savings to make the turmoil it will cause worth the effort. Governance costs could be lowered in other ways, some of which might be set at the provincial level. Hopefully, numbers will be crunched before any province-wide initiatives are launched.

#### 5. The Role and Capacity of Boards is Not Consistent:

Here the Board wishes to separate “role” from “capacity”. The assumption being presented here is again unsubstantiated. Roles of Boards are set in the Education Act and further elaborated upon in Board Policy and Procedures. There is a wide continuum of how a board governs ranging from the Traditional/Hands-on board on one end to Total Policy Governance boards on the other. Although all of Saskatchewan’s boards are considered Policy Governance boards they move back and forth along the continuum as needed. The relationship between the Director/CEO and the board and the resulting division of authority is decided jointly by those parties. The capacity of the board is reflected in that relationship. To state that there is a need for all boards to have the same capacity negates the value of local representation and the options presented in this report. At present, appointed Health Boards (which were to have a consistent set of provincially mandated skills) have little or no contact with, or knowledge of what happens on the front lines. Most have demonstrated an inability to develop and honor contracts with their staff (even those negotiated provincially) and to develop a realistic budget (hence the huge budget deficits). That does not happen in education under the present model of governance; even though contracts are negotiated at two different levels.

6. Relationships Between Boards of Education and School Community Councils Differ:

This is challenge for a number of reasons. During the last round of forced amalgamations, as many as 9 or more distinct School Divisions were amalgamated into one Division with one fiscal board which created huge disconnects between the communities and the board. Complicating the matter was the fact that local boards of education ceased to exist, further exasperating that disconnect. The size of the new entities and the length of time required to create a new culture resulted in a need to do something at the local level to involve (appease) the electorate. SCC’s were developed to fill that void. However, they have no real powers and exist in isolation to a fair degree. Is it reasonable to assume that all 60 or more SCC’s in a school division will view the relationship with their new board in the same way? Extrapolating - is it reasonable to assume that all of the 28 existing boards will treat their SCC’s the same as the other boards? The Board’s contention is, that the relationship should be unique; but all should be working within their legislated mandate to serve the needs of the school community and the school division as set out in the school’s continuous improvement plan. The options presented in this Report will do little to alleviate this challenge.

Considerations for Developing and Analyzing Options (pages 17 to 20)

The Board agrees that consideration must be given to the following variables presented in the Report when developing and analyzing options for governance and wishes to comment on each as follows:

1. Constitutional and Legal Considerations:

The Report states that it is based upon information “which should be applicable to education in Saskatchewan in general;” yet 9 school divisions are excluded as separate school divisions (religious minorities) and a 10<sup>th</sup> is excluded via the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This leaves just the 18 public school divisions to consider in the options presented (assuming the Lloydminster Charter will be ignored). It is the contention of the Board that the cultural make-up and linguistic singularity of Ile-a-la-Crosse needs to be considered to the same degree as the uniqueness of the 10 Divisions that are being excluded. Further, the Board questions whether the implications contained in the Daniels decision (April 14, 2016) have been taken into consideration.

2. Elements of Governance:

The discussion of what constitutes good governance (page 18) shows definitively that “how other players make their voices heard”, “transparency” and “participation” are key factors. Further, it clearly separates the function of governance from that of management or administration – an argument we made on page 2 of this submission. The principles of good governance that were to be used for assessing the options given on pages 18 and 19 have little connection with the options that were created. The Board finds a huge disconnect in this area and wonders why the conclusions (Options) did not incorporate those principles.

- Strategic Direction:

The Board contends that a clear vision as to what we are trying to accomplish in education in this province does exist; as evidenced by the alignment of goals between the Ministry, the ESSP, Boards and schools. This is exactly what is needed when talking about strategic direction and the work of the ESSP. What the Board finds unclear in this Report is the connection between the problem(s) and the solutions presented.

- Effectiveness and Efficiency:

The Board contends that it is efficient in that it uses its resources wisely. It was very apparent last Tuesday in Warman during the 2017-2018 budget scenario discussions as to just how efficient the Board is. The Board was the least affected of any of the 28 existing boards by any of the scenarios presented. Even

with the December 20<sup>th</sup> SFL cuts factored into those scenarios there is no need for budget reductions to be made.

Much of the Board's efficiency is staff related. The administrative staff of the Division consists of one Director/CEO and one CFO supported by an Assistant Secretary-Treasurer. All other services except teachers and school support staff are contracted on an as-needed basis from year to year, allowing for changes to be made quickly. This includes professional staff such as the Speech Language Pathologist, Educational Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, and Social Worker; as well as support services such as Driver Training, Facility Planning, and a Computer Technician. Ancillary services are often funded through partnerships with other agencies including the services of Elders, Recreation Director, Home-School Liaison Officer, Nutritionist, Adult 12 Teacher and School Counselors. The other small Divisions showed similar data for similar reasons, although not quite to the same degree. The conclusion that could be drawn is that the smaller the school division, the more efficient it is and conversely the larger the division, the less efficient it is. This runs contrary to the assumptions presented in the Report and the reasons for the options presented.

- **Accountability:**  
The Board contends that there is "a clear understanding of the decision-making authority and who is accountable to whom for what" in Ile-a-la-Crosse. In fact, the size of the Board and the size of the Division makes communicating that authority extremely easy; far easier than in larger Divisions. For instance, that same degree of understanding was also present in St. George R.C.S.S.D. (1976-1996) and Creighton S.D. (1997-1999) both single school divisions. That understanding was present in Broadview S.D. with its five schools (1999-2002) and decreased in Aspen Grove School Division with its 19 schools (2003-2006) and decreased yet further in Chinook S.D. with its 60 schools (2006-2009). It took at least four years for that understanding to develop in Chinook. It is the Board's contention that further amalgamation will result in at least a four-year time-lag in getting back to where we are today. Fullan describes the effect of further amalgamation as resulting in a "10-year distraction".
- **Transparency:**  
The Board contends that the size of the division once again means that the decision making processes and the rationale for those decisions are easily accessible to those concerned with the decisions. For instance, the Board Chair and Director (together) can address the entire community on the local radio station, at any time, for no cost when there is a need to discuss, plan or



rationalize a Board decision. Further, that message can be delivered in both English and Michif.

- Participation:

Again, the Board contends that participation by those who are impacted by Board decisions could not be any greater than it is in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Community members have a multitude of opportunities to give their input directly to their Board and administration. The Board is a seven-member Board, elected at large from a homogenous community of 1,300 Metis people. In the past two elections, no fewer than 15 people have run for membership on the Board. The present Board consists of two women and five men; all of whom were born and raised in the community. All present Board members are Metis and all speak the local language. Further, the educational governance structure in Ile-a-la-Crosse supports the:

- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statement that “it is the socio-economic conditions and family life that impacts learning significantly while boards create or contribute to the conditions in which teaching and learning occur”;
- The Joint Task Force on Aboriginal Education and Employment views on building a better quality of life, cultural affirmation and sense of belonging; which includes the following statements:
  - “One of the measures to increase student achievement involves increasing parent engagement in schools.”
  - “Development of a positive cultural identity is essential to Aboriginal student success.”
  - “Indigenous knowledge is now seen as an educational remedy that will empower Aboriginal students if application of their Indigenous knowledge, heritage and languages are integrated into the Canadian educational system.”
- The Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report Call to Action #10 that calls on the federal government to create new legislation that:
  - iv. “protects the right of Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses;”
  - v. “enables parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems;”
  - and,
  - vi. “enables parents to fully participate in the education of their children.”

Changes in that governance structure would run contrary to these most recently published views on Indigenous education.

- **Equity:**  
This is described in the Report as “All having equitable access to services and derive equitable benefit from the expenditure of public funds on education”. Within the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division this is certainly true. However, if we compare equitable access to services between Ile-a-la-Crosse and the large urban school divisions, there would be less access to some services and greater access to others. The same would be true if you were to compare large, dispersed, rural school divisions to large urban divisions.

#### Complexity and Cost of Achieving Change:

The Board concurs with the statements in this section of the Report. However, it should be noted that changes in governance to date are only partially responsible for bringing about equity in terms of taxation and services and programs. It is the Board’s contention that to proceed any further, will ruin that equity in an attempt to achieve equality. Certainly, any change needs to be costed prior to implementation. This report does no cost analysis for any of the options presented or any of the newly proposed entities that might be created within those options.

#### Geographic Size and Sparsity:

This section of the Report makes one statement, “Both geographic size and student enrolment must be considered when considering options for structures and boundaries.” That rather open-ended statement is meaningless given the ambiguity in the 4 options presented. It is the Board’s contention, that most school divisions are already too large to function effectively and efficiently. Even Option 3B, which seems to be aimed at Ile-a-la-Crosse makes little sense when you consider the geography of the larger Division that would most likely consume it. What purpose would be served by making Ile-a-la-Crosse part of the school division that it has functioned within, as a stand-alone school division, since its inception in 1974?

#### Means of Selecting Board Members (Elected or Appointed?):

This is probably the most contentious part of the Report. There has been an overwhelming number of contributors to this discussion, resulting in unanimous support for elected boards. The debate needs to decide whether governmental control through appointed boards is better than local control through elected boards. Further, what problem can appointed boards fix that elected boards cannot? The second part of the debate is “What is meant by elected boards?”. It is the Board’s contention that an elected super board serving one division or perhaps four or five elected boards serving the entire province, is in effect, the same as an appointed board. In

both scenarios, the chance for direct input is greatly diminished. Somehow that seems to fly in the face of democracy.

## OPTIONS and ANALYSIS

### Shifts in Governance:

This section of the Report starts with the statement, “To address the key challenges articulated earlier, and regardless of the structural option selected from those described below, the following shifts in governance should occur for the system as a whole (public, separate and francophone) to address the key challenges”. It is the Board’s contention that there is quite a disconnect between that statement and what preceded it as well as what follows it. Why would all of the options presented in this Report involve amalgamation of as few as 2 or as many as 18 school divisions and leave out 10 or 11 school divisions if we are talking about “the system as a whole”? Are we to assume that all is well in those left out of the amalgamation proposals or that we can solve the unidentified issues by amalgamating those that are left? There are several statements in this portion of the Report that need much more elaboration and there is a need for research or supporting data prior to those statements being accepted as fact. Those statements include:

- Standardizing expectations of boards in relation to required competencies of board members: require mandatory board training.
- Consideration of an Education Equity Council with responsibility for monitoring system performance.
- Centralizing business functions such as central IT, financial, HR, payroll, procurement and purchasing.
- Standardizing administrative costs, including consideration of a provincial pay grid for out-of-scope positions and standards for the number of central office staff in relation to school-based staff.
- Additional standardization of locally-bargained terms and conditions.
- Enabling First Nation representation on boards.

Two of the above points are particularly troubling. Centralizing business functions sounds good upon first inspection. No studies to support that contention have been made in education to date. However, some references to Health are made and are presented as being desirable. Centralization has created some large issues in Health that do not exist in Education. First, centralized procurement through Materials Management (Mat Man) works for the

procurement of medical supplies such as wound dressings, cleaning solutions, absorbent clothing etc. but is very slow and inefficient in most other instances. For instance, it takes weeks to months to order things like dishes, furniture, cleaning equipment etc. The procurement of items from a list of standardized items is not viewed very positively by those using them, creating yet another issue. Requests for IT services of any type are allowed to take up to 5 days from the time of request and sometimes do. That would not be acceptable in education. It is a way of life in Health.

The second point involves the statement, “enable First Nation representation on boards”. Exactly what is meant by First Nation is not explained. In any case, if that can’t be done with any regularity today with 28 boards, how might reducing the number of boards make it more doable. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, we have the perfect scenario for ensuring community representation as mentioned earlier. Losing that would be taking a huge step backward.

## OPTIONS

The Board agrees with the Report in that “all of the options presented will have the effect of shifting the balance of government direction and community input.” It is the Board’s contention that the shift has been occurring for a number of years with more and more control being given to the Minister (setting of the school year start date for instance), Ministry (constant requests for data and reports, unilateral setting of meeting dates etc.) and the Provincial Auditor (who now audits both financial matters and school division programming). The options presented tip the scale yet further in that direction.

There are several new entities being proposed in the options presented to replace the boards that will be displaced. Those entities include:

- A provincial advisory body to the Minister. This is the only place that any consideration is given to First Nations and Metis representation. The north was given cursory recognition in parenthesis. Protestant separate representation was totally absent. Numbers of each group are not mentioned, but this body would contain 6 members at minimum assuming each group has one representative.
- An Education Quality Council reporting to the Deputy Minister. This group is to monitor the progress of the ESSP. How will that differ from the PLT?
- An “entity” to drive efficiency similar to 3SHealth. After several years of existence, nobody really knows what 3SHealth is as an entity – a poor choice of comparison. Education cannot afford to be slowed down to the pace set by an entity such as 3SHealth.
- Involving the Provincial Auditor in the selection of board members or their competencies and expertise.

- The composition of the new board or boards remains very much a mystery. If elected, how might the wards look; or would wards be utilized?

Comparing just Option 1 to the present state without the use of data and with unsubstantiated statements and then comparing the other options to Option 1 does not seem to be very scientific. It makes the credibility of all of the options presented, suspect at best.

By now it should be clear that the Board of Education of the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division is not amenable to any of the options presented. The Board will continue to govern as it is presently; democratically governing the educational affairs of the people of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dornstauber', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Dave Dornstauber  
Director of Education  
Ile-a-la-Crosse School division #112