

## **Governance Review Panel Feedback**

### **Light of Christ Catholic Schools**

This submission was prepared after our Governance Panel feedback session. In an effort to capture the essence of the conversation, this document was created using our initial speaking notes as well as notes taken during the session.

#### **1. Transformational Change in Education – A Sector Ahead of the Curve**

- The sector has been engaged in transformational change with the Education Sector Strategic Plan and we have been doing this successfully since 2013.
  - Boards of Education have been doing comprehensive work in increasing effectiveness of education (measured in student outcomes) without increasing costs. These increases have profound long-term financial benefits for Saskatchewan.
  - The ESSP was the educational sector's response to the goals set for education in the "Growth 2020" document released by the government in 2013. The education sector has been engaging in transformational change since then and will continue to do so moving forward.
  - Like the Vision 2020 Promise document, the ESSP was given an original timeline of 2020. Now the government has cut the timeline and proposed wide-scale structural changes now. What is the compelling "why" for this notion of change? The ESSP is not failing, on the contrary, it's actually showing great improvement and growth even though the plan is in the early stages.
- Boards of Education believe that transformational change is absolutely necessary to continue to ensure Saskatchewan students are high performing global citizens.
  - Because of this, Boards of Education are committed to continuing the work of balancing professional and paraprofessional staff to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth and responsible fiscal stewardship. This can only be done through a local lens.
- We need to stay focused on student outcomes and keep the momentum of the Education Sector Strategic Plan. Transformational changes that need to be made can be made within the current system/structure. Any other structural changes will directly affect students and front line staff.
- There is no structure in place currently to address curriculum, a universal student database system, most promising practices in assessment, etc.
- There is a great deal of faith being put into one person's opinion of what needs to be done. Especially since the report was completed in such a short timeframe, and not based on research.
- It is interesting to note that both Murray Scharf and Herve Langlois do not agree with the options presented in the Perrins report regarding structural changes to school divisions and they "strongly disagree" with any notion of school boards being appointed. (See article in The Star Phoenix on January 11, 2016 titled, "Op-Ed: School Governance by a Provincial Board Appointed on a Partisan Basis")
- A report of this type should have been only been completed if there was a failure within the system; this is not the case. As mentioned earlier, the ESSP is not not failing. The structure of the PLT ensures that the ESSP is monitored, via the data collected, and adjustments made to the plan if the data indicates the need. The ESSP is a good plan showing good results.

- This report primarily is about Saskatchewan's plan for growth (see the purpose of the report on page 3). The report does not reference the importance to student achievement and well-being, instead, the focus seems to be increased government control of education.
- The options presented in the report will guarantee ESSP disruption, up to and including failure. In Saskatchewan, unlike other provinces, the school divisions have come together collaboratively to work on the ESSP, any structural change will negatively affect the work done to date and could potentially hinder any future success.
- Leadership by the boards and administration has supported student learning – if you take these items away – where will the leadership, coordination and focus come from? In the absence of these individuals, the work needed to be done will have to either go up (to government ministry), down (to school based staff) or stop. Who will complete the work necessary in these areas?
- The Ministry of Education does not have the capacity or expertise to complete this work. Therefore, the work will end up on the shoulders of the principals and teachers. Furthermore, the work on the ESSP could be adversely affected as divisions will be forced to turn their efforts inward as they will only be able to handle what is taking place within their own school divisions.
- Transformational change requires the pressure and support provided by school division leadership and the role of locally elected boards of education needs to be respected.
- Cultural/Structural changes vs. Structural changes. We believe that transformational changes can occur without making cultural/structural changes to the entire sector.
  - Proposed efficiencies and any other changes should be viewed through the lens of research for effective learning first and foremost.

## **2. Education Governance Options**

- The letter of transmittal clearly identifies the wishes of the sector regarding elected vs appointed boards and amalgamation (see bullet points on page 2 of the report).
- Our Board believes that our education system will be disrupted with further amalgamations. What purpose would further amalgamation serve?
- Our students need consistency and continuity.
  - Relationships between school division's teachers, other employees and parents will be strained and diminished. Less local autonomy not only for school divisions but for schools and communities as well.
  - Further amalgamations would lead to a loss of the personalized touch/service educational stakeholders have come to expect from school boards and their staff.
  - Cultures in both schools and school divisions will be detrimentally affected. School division services will be further removed from the schools and the students who need them the most.
- Students will not benefit from moving decisions further away from the school community.
  - The last round of amalgamations were grounded in research that outlined an optimal size for school divisions to provide the best service for students. Those recommendations were used to create the 28 school divisions we have today.
  - To date, there has been no further research to challenge this notion, meaning we currently have the optimal size and number of school divisions. Based on this research,

one can argue that larger school divisions in a large, yet sparsely populated area would become less efficient.

- The principle of optimization can be applied to this argument as well. Organizations can gain efficiencies as they get larger, but only to a particular point. Once that point has been reached, inefficiencies begin to occur. The Scharf/Langlois research spoke directly to this notion for education in Saskatchewan; that is why we have the school division structure we have today. The current configuration allows us to be nimble; that is, to respond quickly to change and challenges. School divisions do not want to lose that ability.
- The Ministry has recently completed a review of efficiency and school size related to Base Instruction Funding. The same logic can be applied to the size of school divisions as well. Improved services for students and efficiencies have already been realized through previous amalgamations. Further amalgamation has no additional benefits in terms of economies of scale.
- If amalgamation would lead to improved and “transformational” services for children and families, there should be data that would demonstrate this. This is not the case.
- We have no data that shows that further amalgamation would be good for students or families. This was confirmed by Don Morgan at our SSBA meeting on September 21 in Saskatoon.
- Interesting to note (see page 7 of the Perrins Report and the chart included as Appendix B) ...
  - “Overall, Saskatchewan has the lowest number of public boards, and the fewest number of board members.”
  - “Saskatchewan’s land mass per school division is approximately twice that of those in Alberta and Manitoba.”
  - Referencing Appendix B of the Perrins Report, using this same logic, and knowing the comparative provinces in western Canada all have elected boards, better curriculum and assessment practices and score better on the PISA assessment, one could argue for the following:
    - Increase the number of school divisions should be included as an option for government consideration.
    - develop (or purchase), support and implement new 21st century curriculum and assessment practices
    - continue with elected boards of education.
- Boards of education in Saskatchewan know that the fiscal challenges in the province are shared by all of us. We are committed to continuing to find efficiencies.
  - We are, just like all school divisions, committed to finding efficiencies and to being accountable to the ratepayer; we are good stewards of our limited resources.
  - Financial savings associated with amalgamation are extremely limited. This was realized after the last round of amalgamations in 2006.
- Boards of education are part of the solution and believe that current fiscal challenges cannot be solved by amalgamations.

- We are committed to working with the government to ensure the best outcomes for students, and boards want to ensure that the focus in education stays steadfast on continuing the progress we are seeing with Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP).
  - Commitment to the ESSP. The ESSP was driven by the government through then DM Dan Florizone. The education sector quickly realized the power and impact of such an initiative and quickly committed to the plan. We are the first and only jurisdiction in Canada who has done this; and it is working. Marked increases in reading levels and grad rates (Ministry realizes this and is aware of it). Structural changes will undermine this work (we've been doing it since 2013) and essentially end the ESSP.
  - Amalgamation would result in a loss of inertia in the ESSP and a corresponding loss of services for Saskatchewan students.
  - Amalgamation would result in a loss of inertia in the ESSP and lead to the breaking of the government's Vision 2020 promise.
- It has been 10 years since forced amalgamations and only recently have we been able to realize optimal and full services in our school divisions.
  - Some school divisions still haven't recovered from the last round of amalgamations; LINC agreements, other employee agreements will have to be re-negotiated and this takes time (in some case years).

#### **Appendix B - Education Governance in Canadian Provinces:**

- Alberta and BC is doing better with academic, curriculum standings. In this document there is a comparison being done. There should be a 5th column comparing how well the provinces are doing. BC and Alberta and Ontario have the successful curriculum, instruction and assessment.

#### **3S Health-type system suggestion:**

- Our division has been proactive in this area - we have made many cost saving decisions. The introduction of a 3SHealth-type process in education will also slow us down - It will limit school division's ability to make changes quickly instead of going through the red - tape of centralized purchasing. Once again, it would take away our nimbleness.

#### **Possibility of forming Education Quality Councils:**

- Concern with recommending Education Quality Councils. What are they? Who will sit on this council? Would it create another level of bureaucracy? Such an entity will require leadership, administration, staff, mandate, etc. Have the standards been established? Who will establish these standards? Who will have input in the development of these standards? This would be a huge undertaking, and for what gain? We have positive results from the ESSP, why are we questioning these gains when we all know what needs to be done (curriculum renewal, USIS, sharing of services (whenever possible), group purchasing (whenever feasible), etc.)
- We believe that the electorate serves as an Education Quality Council, as it is their role to keep the elected accountable.

### 3. Importance of Locally Elected School Boards

- Given the history and geography of this province, boards of education believe that local democratic processes are the foundation of high-quality education.
  - Each SD has a local “flavor” and locally elected school boards allow for the local flavor to be acknowledged and accommodated within each school with each child.
- Loss of local voice through the reduction of locally elected boards of education will have a negative effect on the experiences of students and communities, particularly in rural Saskatchewan.
  - Elected trustees have a responsibility to and are accountable for those who elect them. Appointed Boards have a responsibility to the entity (government) who appoints them. Communities will lose their voice regarding the education of their children if School Boards are appointed.
- Locally elected boards are the voice of the people and provide a connection and accountability with the school community.
- Decisions are best made at the grassroots level and school boards have built credibility and relationships with their communities.
  - Students in our communities have different needs than students elsewhere. Locally elected boards provide for an opportunity for local needs to be met in a timely, meaningful and effective manner.
  - Appointed boards = taxation without representation.
- Locally elected boards contribute a more democratic and transparent education system.
- See middle of second paragraph on page 8 of the Perrins report:
  - “In the past, Newfoundland and Quebec appointed or partially appointed boards and in the case of Newfoundland, a public referendum led back to elected boards.”
  - Point to be made: it’s been tried in other jurisdictions and appointed boards of education does not work.
- Appointed boards do not support the needs of the students. For example, during the aftermath of the La Loche shooting, the Ministry traveled to La Loche and tried to address the needs of the community. It was soon realized that the community needed the help and assistance of local individuals and individuals who were familiar with the community. Only then could the local context of the situation be identified, the individuals involved felt supported and progress could be made. Education is a local matter, specific to those who live in each community and therefore, belongs in the community.
- Board members are elected to these positions because people in each community believe in them and can rely on their involvement and sincere belief in students. Appointed boards won’t have that same accountability. (MLAs are elected, HUBS are local, city police address local needs in specific communities, etc.). Are appointed board members going to be chosen based on their passion for student learning and their commitment to the community or appointed based on set criteria in a government generated skills matrix? We need elected trustees who know the community nuances and will be advocates for children. If there is a skills gap on an elected board of education, it can be easily addressed through professional development. How does the government address a skills gap in cabinet when cabinet ministers have a skills gap? Look to appoint them?
- Partnerships created in the current school division structure will be will be lost.

- The option of the appointed boards does not honor the diversity and talents of our local communities.