Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Board's Written Response to the Perrins Report for the Consultation Panel

January 20, 2017

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Dear Consultation Panel Members,

The Board of Education of Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division (SRPSD) thanks the panel members for their investment of time and expertise as they conducted the consultation. The Board's conversation with the Panel was open, honest and productive and has been a valuable step in this process. On the following pages you will find several of the ideas that trustees shared with you during the conversation, but in addition you will find several additional ideas and examples that illustrate the Board's perspective. As well, there are several documents that are attached as appendices for further detail and consideration.

As you review the ideas that follow, you will find that they provide evidence and rationale for four foundational ideas:

1. Current structure works because locally elected Boards bring great value, in many ways, to the education sector and to each student's learning experience.
2. There is not sufficient evidence that any of the options in the Perrins Report are less expensive or more effective than current structures. Proceeding without evidence is not good enough for SRPSD students.
3. There are improvements to legislation and other elements of the Sector that can lead to better experiences for students while controlling costs. These enhancements can be achieved without undertaking major changes to governance across the Sector.
4. Time, energy and money spent on dismantling current structure and rebuilding some unproven structure is unnecessary, wasteful and will undermine the transformational change to student learning that the ESSP has initiated.

The Board urges the panel to convey strongly to the Minister that students must come first in his deliberations. The changes proposed in the Perrins report put governance and control before student learning and that is not good enough for SRPSD students or for students across the province. Should the Panel members or the Minister need further clarification about any of the items in this document, please contact the division at your convenience.

Yours in Education



Barry Hollick
Chair, Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division

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1. Purpose of the Review (page 3 of report)

a. Concern that the purpose of Perrin's review seems vague and does not consider that the current "system of governance and structure is needed in Saskatchewan's K-12 education sector to achieve the outcomes". Perrins consulted with 32 groups during the writing of his report and all of them indicated that the current structure enables elected school boards to perform their responsibilities very well. WHY do we need to do something different?

b. What is broken? What are we trying to "fix"? The government seems to lack clarity in a response to these questions so proceeding with a costly solution to a poorly defined problem is a risky endeavour.

c. If money is the problem, Boards can respond to difficult fiscal realities while preserving essential aspects of education and sustaining momentum on the ESSP.

d. If money is the problem: the time, expense and disruption required to rebuild a new structure will almost certainly outweigh the portion of the $12 million currently spent on governance that might be saved.

e. If legislative authority and control is the problem: government and Boards can undertake a review of the outdated Education Act and make necessary adjustments without "blowing up" the current structure and rebuilding something new and unproven. We may need arthroscopic surgery, not an amputation (or an autopsy).

f. This process seems very rushed – a 3-4 week review and report writing period, followed by a 3-4 week consultation. We should take the time to let Boards deal with current fiscal challenges and then take time to do a thorough review of the problem. Hasty decisions are rarely effective ones.

2. Current Structure (page 4-5 of report)

a. Locally elected Boards bring value to Education and support student learning by providing a local voice, by being accountable to the public and families, by being passionate advocates for students, and by being capable stewards of fiscal and human resources.

b. Current structure and varied roles for Minister, Ministry, Boards and others is effective: the checks and balances of power provide for local variation within a provincial mandate. Some refinements are possible within the current structure to enhance student learning.

c. SCCs are a great avenue for parents to engage in local school planning enhancement but SCCs are not a suitable venue to expect broad system-wide perspectives. There is great risk in alienating parents and community if the SCC structure and mandate is stretched beyond its current role. Most SCC members are pleased with their current role and those who are interested in a greater role will seek that in Board elections.

d. If the removal of school board ability to levy tax has led to some legislative authority challenges for the government then either restore that taxing authority to Boards or conduct a full review of the legislation – there is no need to dismantle a structure that works.

e. The current structure includes an administrative structure and teacher-leader structure that is essential to providing the pressure and support to realize Board goals. A restructuring of

governance will have an impact on administrators and teachers which in turn affects students. This impact needs full recognition and careful planning before proceeding.

f. Should the Government review and update the Education Act (and Regulations) there are several changes that might enhance student learning experiences and/or generate cost savings without substantial restructuring. One example is that the current funding formula and current Regulations limit school consolidation and school review which limits facility rationalization.

g. The Board is concerned that the proposed options affect only the Public system (not Separate or Francophone) and has the risk of undermining the public system and supporting a two-tiered system which is contrary to principles of good governance.

   i. There are legal protections for families to access faith-based education for the religious minority, but that legal protection does not necessarily protect any particular size, form or structure for Separate boards. Government may have the right to alter the structure to provide religious education in similar ways that it outlines in the options to alter the structure for public education.

   ii. Some parents have stated that if amalgamation and/or appointed boards proceed they may take their children out of a public school and put them into the Catholic system to retain local voice.

3. Principals of Good Governance (page 18-19 of report)

a. SRPSD is a locally elected Board that embodies all of the principles of good governance outlined in the report. The Board provides comment on three of these principles below.

b. **Strategic Direction**

   i. The SRPSD board is fully engaged in establishing strategic directions and monitoring progress towards strategic goals. The board works with but is not just a rubber stamp for Administration.

   ii. Examples of the Board's demonstration of Strategic Direction include ESSP alignment, Strategic Plan, facility renewal, board advocacy plan and development plan

c. Efficiency and Effectiveness

   i. SRPSD has significant history of effective management

      1. Leaders in amalgamations (1997-98 and 2005-06)
      2. Facilities management to sustain effective operations of several buildings near or more than 100 years old
      3. Both self-declared FNM students and non-self-declared exceed provincial counterparts on several measures, including grad rates

   ii. SRPSD has significant history of realizing fiscal efficiencies

      1. Board consistently underspends both the allocation from the distribution formula and the division budget line on governance so that those funds are available for use in other areas
      2. Plans for current budget restrictions to review the number of trustees was well underway prior to Perrins Report. Additionally, we have begun a

discussion with the nearby Separate school division to explore shared transportation.

3. Reallocation of Community School Funding to places of most need in response to changing demographics not historical designations
4. Absorb cost of Syrian Refugee needs within current budget

iii. SRPSD Trustees consistently improve their fiscal management skill set and the Board meets fiscal targets. Should the Minister require further clarity and consistency across the province, that can be arranged with legislation or other processes that enable Board sharing but that do not require a complete governance restructuring

iv. Note that all of the options presented in the report include an expanded role of government and bureaucracy which are unlikely to be less than the current costs of board governance

v. The Board, in conjunction and compliance with Ministry expectations, provides oversight, monitoring and effectiveness. An undefined "Quality Council" with an unspecified mandate is unnecessary

vi. Pursued consolidation of schools, but Education Regulations limit Boards ability to rationalize facilities. The SRPSD would welcome a review and change of regulations.

vii. The Board would welcome further review of effectiveness and efficiency (payroll, procurement, transportation, other) but these do NOT require a change in governance structure – simply some focused efforts, and possibly some legislative review.

viii. SRPSD has a high proportion of vulnerable students so the Board finds savings in other areas and allocates extra financial resources to support those student needs. Here is a summary of some measures of vulnerability:

1. Ministry statistics indicate the transience factor in SRPSD is twice the provincial average.
2. Of the 9000 students in the division we have student need that drives:
    a. special support programs: 206 students
    b. hospital program (family treatment/mental health): 346 students
    c. classroom Inclusion and Intervention Plans: 607 students
    d. English Language Learners: 284
    e. Emergency lunches (in addition to the established nutrition programs): 977 per week (nearly 200 per day)

These are 5 simple measures that do not convey the whole picture of vulnerability that the board makes locally informed and supported decisions about resource allocation. The funding model provides $11 Million for Student Support Services, but SRPSD allocates $15 Million through reductions in other areas.

d. Participation

This principle of good governance requires that people who are impacted by decisions have an opportunity to have input either directly or through legitimate organizations or individuals that represent them.

i. The Board's engagement with SCCs and the public is robust and effective
ii. The Board's relationships with First Nations students, families, bands and tribal councils are broad, diverse in structure, and effective. (Kisēwātotātowin agreement, several ISSI agreements, Elders in Schools, many informal relationships and conversations)
iii. Our Saskatchewan Rivers Students for Change (SRSC) is a student group that has voice and presence in various ways, including at the Board table. Each high school in the division selects three representatives and these 33 young leaders elect an executive and meet regularly. This SRSC elects two members to join the Board as Student Trustees at every open session of the Board and they connect the voice of the students directly to the board.
iv. We believe and support FNM participation and representation at the Board table
    1. If legislation is adjusted to enable and support broader FNM representation it should be a provincial response
    2. FNM representation should include elections to honour the democratic process and the FN people that have been and are currently elected
v. Public participation in the current structure takes many forms
    1. Recent elections saw 12 candidates for 5 city positions (at large)
    2. Recent elections saw some rural acclamations which can be seen as an endorsement of strong representatives rather than lack of participation

4. Selecting Board Members (p.19-20 of Report)

There is very little evidence to support appointed boards of education, but there are many reasons to continue to select boards of education through democratic election. Some of these reasons include:

i. Locally elected Boards are the best and most effective governors of education
ii. Locally elected Boards bring passion and community voice to the Board table and are also more likely to represent the students' and division's interests at other tables and gatherings.
iii. Appointed Public boards are much less likely to demonstrate the elements of good governance on p. 18-19 of the report. Elements especially challenging are Equity (Public appointed and Separate elected); Accountability (to parents, students and public or to government who made appointments); and Participation (how inclined are stakeholders to engage)
iv. Although many factors, in addition to governance, affect PISA success, jurisdictions that lead the country (AB, BC, QC) all have elected boards which suggests appointed boards are not the answer to improved PISA success
v. Elected boards bring essential value to many aspects of the system and they are an embodiment of the value and function of democracy, an idea that is foundational to our country and that we work to instill in our students.

5. Options Proposed (p. 20-27 of Report)

NONE of the options are proven in research, nor analyzed in a business case scenario. Why would un-proven and un-costed options be worthy of consideration? Unsupported options are not good enough for the students and families of Saskatchewan Rivers Public School division.

i. The decision to pursue any of the options will remove the focus on student learning and will take the province further away from the Goals outlined in the Plan for Growth and in the ESSP. Moving away from a student-first, learning-centred focus and towards a system-first focus is not good enough for the students of SRPSD or this province.
ii. The SRPSD Board is committed to finding efficiencies, is supportive of a review of the legislation and is interested in making changes to the sector that will improve learning experiences for students. These can and should be done without destroying the current governance structures
iii. Options 1, 2 and possibly 3a point to an expanded role for provincial government which is contrary to the government's own goal of "smaller government" in the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth.
iv. If the purpose outlined on page 3 is to identify the system "needed in Saskatchewan's K-12 education sector to achieve the outcomes" why is the current structure not one of the options?
v. Why has the ESSP not been given time to reach the 2020 targets it first established as there is evidence of gaining momentum across the sector?
vi. Why are Boards not given the opportunity to address current fiscal challenges, as they have done in the past? Note that the current government has not seen the reductions in revenues that previous governments have seen and that Boards weathered (as in early 1990s when boards weathered 0 and below funding changes)
vii. The public and parents consistently show support for education and boards. Who is suggesting new options are required and why?
viii. SCCs have raised a number of big questions and concerns about the process and about the risk posed by all of the options considered.

6. Conclusion

The Board of Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division believes that the current governance structure, and particularly locally elected boards, can and must be sustained. Changes in the sector are possible, and the Board supports changes to improve the legislation, regulation and practices that improve student experiences in schools and classrooms. The changes proposed in the Perrins report seem to put governance and control before student learning and that is not good enough for SRPSD students or for students across the province.

7. List of appendices

a. **SRPSD's resolution (approved by SSBA membership)** that encourages a review of legislation and regulations
b. Kisewatotatowin agreement with Muskoday First Nation that demonstrates the relationship and trust between Chief and Council and the locally elected Board.
c. SCC Members' Questions and Concerns that outline some of the concerns of local parents and community members.

Appendix A: Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Divisions Resolution for SSBA

BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association request, on behalf of Boards of Education in the province, a Ministerial review of Section 95.8 of *The Education Regulations, 1986* as they relate to school review, enrolment thresholds and the proximity of other schools in school divisions, and that the SSBA work jointly with the Ministry of Education to renew Section 95.8 of *The Education Regulations, 1986.*

Saskatchewan Rivers S.D. No. 119

The capacity of boards of education to access capital funding and renew infrastructure in rural schools and schools with stable or steadily declining student enrolment is significantly limited by the terms and conditions laid out in *The Education Regulations, 1986*, which state:

> 95.8(2) A board of education may only carry out a review of a school pursuant to section 87.2 if the Act if:
> (b) projected enrolment for the school under review for the following school year is less than:
>
> (i) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 4 only, 25 pupils;
> (ii) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 5 only, 30 pupils;
> (iii) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 6 only, 37 pupils;
> (iv) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 7 only, 44 pupils;
> (v) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 8 only, 51 pupils;
> (vi) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 9 only, 58 pupils;
> (vii) for a school offering kindergarten to Grade 12, 88 pupils.

Subsequent sections of *The Education Regulations, 1986* impose additional limitations on boards of education`s capacity to review schools based on geographical proximity to other schools within a school division.

Boards of education, especially those facing declining enrolment, are committed to creating sustainable, robust schools that are adequately resourced and offer the variety of programs that best meet the needs of students in the province of Saskatchewan. In some cases, this may mean that schools with low enrolments must be maintained. In other instances, it may be in the best interests of the students that schools within close proximity to each other be consolidated. In many cases school divisions are maintaining high-cost programming for multiple schools with declining enrolments. Regardless, Section 95.8 of *The Education Regulations, 1986* prevents boards of education from proactively reviewing schools, seeking program and/or school consolidation and making decisions that are both cost-efficient and in the best interests of the students and communities they serve.

Having approved and agreed to the **Education Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2020**, boards of education are accountable for the stated outcomes contained within it**,** namely that;

> `By 2017, the increase in operational education spending will not exceed the general wage increases and inflationary costs within the sector…`

If Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education are to jointly actualize the desired outcomes of the **Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2014-2020,** they need to work jointly to review and renew Section 95.8 of

The Education Regulations, 1986. Ultimately, the very roles, powers and responsibilities of boards of education pertaining to school reviews that are provided for in *The Education Act, 1995* are contravened by the terms and conditions laid out in Section 95.8 of *The Education Regulations, 1986*. In short, this is a matter of Board autonomy and Board autonomy is that which all boards of education in the province should actively seek to preserve.

Cost of resolution:

The cost to boards of education will vary; any additional costs to boards should be offset by operational efficiencies.

Appendix B: Partnership Agreement with Muskoday First Nation

Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division
Excellence for Every Learner

MUSKODAY FIRST NATION #99

Kisēwātotātowin Partnership

This Memorandum of Understanding acknowledges the partnership between Muskoday First Nation and the Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division signed on this 22nd day of October, 2012 at Muskoday Community School.

The partners acknowledge and uphold the Rights of the Child and the Inherent and Treaty Right to Education. Together, the partners will enhance Education by providing opportunities to promote and engage First Nations Education Principles and will improve learning outcomes for all students in the region.

Muskoday First Nation and Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division agree to work together with support from the Saskatoon Tribal Council to:

- Acknowledge and honour the significance of Indigenous Knowledge as a vital component of the partnership, whereby Indigenous Knowledge will be valued and equated with mainstream teachings.
- Recognize, and ensure Treaty knowledge is honoured within the educational system to support healthy relations among all students.
- Create an equitable and collaborative leadership model to ensure that decision making is a shared process and representative of the partners.
- Share services, professional development, information and resources between partners.
- Create supports to aid student transition between respective schools, as well as into post-secondary education.
- Strengthen respectful and ethical co-curricular and extra-curricular relationships.
- Expand First Nation cultural understanding and responsiveness.
- Improve student academic and social outcomes.
- Maintain a responsible fiscal relationship that is transparent and accountable.
- Ensure the highest standards of instruction and learning environments.
- Maintain the Spirit and Intent with future agreements and/or contracts.

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Barry Hollick, Board Chair
Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division

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Chief Austin Bear
Muskoday First Nation

Appendix C: Big Questions and Concerns from SCCs in SRPSD

K – 12 Education Governance Review (Perrins Report)

SRPSD School Community Councils Feedback

January 13, 2013

BIG CONCERNS:

- Seems like a large change brought on suddenly. Why?
- Short Timeline has potential for hasty errors! (3 week study, followed by report out just before Christmas, 3 week consultation)
- What is the rationale for this? Time frame is so short – could be status quo for a year- more consultation
- Let Divisions find efficiencies on their own
- No dollar amount provided in the report about costs of the proposed options.
- Little or no reference to students or student learning in the report
- Our school division is not like other school divisions
- How do you meet the individuality of students/schools and divisions?
- No warning – how come this wasn't brought up at election time?
- Centralization is not favourable.
- Why elected and appointed? – Why not both public and separate included?
- If appointed – where is local voice? Appointed Board, appointed CEOs – no Local Voice
- Options decrease Diversity
- Autonomy of schools and school divisions is a good thing that may be lost.
- Classroom impacts – Student/teacher ratio
- Reallocating efficiencies - will proposed savings be put back into education?
- Consideration to raise taxes should be included
- How would these options affect student-teacher ratios, and class size ratios?
- Will schools in smaller communities have closures because of options?
- With change to boards/division how will feedback and communication to/from communities and families remain effective?
- If it is money then raising taxes may be an option.
- All our divisions have unique situations and are so different. If we don't have local decision making how will we deal with these unique situations?
- Lack of clarity on First Nations involvement and participation?
- Need someone local to call/phone/talk with and someone with vested interest and lives in the community.
- Will staffing levels change?
- Too much focus on business model (not on students)
- Everyone has a say now with our current size. Will we be heard in a larger system?
- How fast can major decisions be made if local contact is not there? (i.e.: fire at Meath Park School)

K – 12 Education Governance Review (Perrins Report)

SRPSD School Community Councils Feedback

January 13, 2013

BIG QUESTIONS:

- Why are you doing this?
- Why?– its unproven
- Amalgamation timeline – Why the rush?
- What benefit or harm is this doing to the students? They are our priority.
- What are the cost savings for each option? - (3)
- What exactly are the efficiencies? (in dollar savings and providing quality education)
- How will they know the needs of each region?
- What are the biggest issues for student today?
- What was the cost of this report?
- Should a 3rd party be brought in for consultation?
- How about raising taxes to fight the deficit?
- How can a government make such an important decision in such a short time frame?
- Why is the "status quo" not a choice?
- What role would SCC's have in this new system?
- Transparency – what details are available financial/Education branch?
- What is the financial savings audit showing for all options?
- Where will short term / long term finances be allocated?
- Can larger purchasing agreements provincially save money and save current division boundaries and structures?
- Please explain why the separate school divisions are not required to change their structure i.e.: public division should also mean separate (Catholic division).
- Is it right to tax people for education but not provide a voice?
- What other areas within education have they investigated to save costs rather than divisional structure changes?
- Have any of these models been researched and found effective?
- Why the short time frame for changes of this magnitude?
- What is the saving going to be? Health board? 10 to 20 million – doesn't make sense.
- Where is the evidence of financial savings, will it be retained?
- What happens to professional support staff/special needs now determined by local need?