

2017

South East Cornerstone Public School Division Submission



Board of Education, South East Cornerstone
Public School Division
Submission to Governance Panel
1/23/2017

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January 23, 2017

South East Cornerstone Public School Division is located in the south east corner of the province. Our land mass covers an area of 31 000 square kilometres which is approximately the same size of Vancouver Island. We are geographically six times larger than Canada's smallest province! Travelling from corner school to the corner school takes 4.5 hours, one direction.

We provide service to 8 258 students (December 2016 enrollments). We are projecting 8 292 for September of 2017. Beyond the Prek-12 students we also provide programming to children from birth to age 5 who may be at risk of not meeting developmental milestones. We assumed the Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP) in 2011. Currently we have 119 children on caseload, which includes children from communities serviced by SECPSD as well as the First Nations' communities of Ocean Man, Pheasant Rump and White Bear. We are the only 0-22 school division in the province. This program is transformational as the benefits of school division delivery are many.

Early Years' education is an investment. Research shows a 7-10% per year return on investment based on increased school and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures (Heckman, 2012). Education is an investment in the future in our province.

We are comprised of 37 brick and mortar schools and one virtual school which provides programming to students in Grade 8 thru 12. We have a variety of school structures and populations. Our smallest schools are Macoun and Lyndale (Oungre) which both have current enrollments of 53 students in K-8. Our largest school is now Weyburn Comprehensive School with an enrollment of 896. Two of our schools are designated as schools of necessity as they are 40 km from the nearest school.

Of the students enrolled in SECPD:

- 132 are registered as Home Schoolers
- About 3.8% (316) of our students self-declare as First Nations (Sept 30 2016 Data)
Carlyle Elementary, GFK High School (Carlyle), Arcola and Stoughton have largest %
- About 7.1% of our students are English as Additional Language. This is an increase of over 5% of student population in the last 5 years.
- As of September 1st, 181 children were identified as Intensive Needs Students

We are a full service school division utilizing a Response to Intervention philosophy. We believe that students are best served by a highly trained staff. Our students who have the greatest needs require the support of professionals who are specialists in the various fields.

Our vision is “Success and Achievement for Every Student in Every School.” Our data illustrates that we are a high achieving school division.

- Our Early Learning and Care caseload has grown from 32 at inception to 119
- Upon exiting Kindergarten 89% of our children were prepared for the primary grades in 2016
- 74% of our children exited Grade 3 in 2016 reading at grade level. Two years prior we were at 65%
- 85% of our students graduate in the three year window, 89.5% in the five year window

Board of Education, Governance and Representation

We have a ten member ***Policy Governance Board of Education***. A perception commonly heard is that governance boards are less effective than management boards, and that Boards are not engaged. This is a false perception. We have experience in both management and governance boards. It is our collective view that the Director of Education is held more accountable to

achieving outcomes with a governance board than with a management board. As a Board we set the policy for the system and establish goals. The Director of Education provides an annual monitoring report for each goal referencing data and evidence which support the conclusion of the report and indicate whether the goals set are being achieved or not. The Board considers the report and determines if the data/evidence provided meets satisfaction. There have been occasions where the reports are accepted as is and there have been times when the Director has been asked to provide further information.

Beyond the monitoring reports on the goals established the Board of Education participates in three Wall Walks with Senior Administration and Coordinators annually. The Wall Walks are an opportunity for the Board to engage in conversations regarding the success of the Level Two or system plan. Discussions are held on what is going well, but more importantly time is spent on areas that may require course correction. Questions are posed and we identify areas to focus upon.

The Board of Education also receives annual reports from each department. The reports outline the work plan of the department, challenges and successes as well as new areas of focus and innovative plans. ***The Board is able to monitor the work of the system and ensure that the work is appropriate to the direction of the Board.***

Our Board has two standing committees, the Audit Committee and the Human Resources/Governance Committee. These are active oversight committees who ensure the work of the system reflects the values of the local stakeholders. Six of our members are currently certified in Pro Dir with Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy.

As a locally elected board we are able to guide and respond to the specific needs of the communities within the division. We are very familiar with our communities as they are our homes. We are accessible to our stakeholders and welcome all stakeholder communication. Our Board has engaged in processes where we formally reach out to the community to collect voice. Conversations with the Board, Cornerstone Tomorrow, Thought Exchange, attendance at SCC meetings, hosting annual SCC forums, meeting annually with South East Cornerstone Teachers Association (SECTA) Executive and President, regular meetings with Holy Family Board and an annual meeting with White Bear Education Council are examples of our engagement work. ***Our concern is that this voice, this important connection to our communities will be lost in larger systems with more distant Boards.*** We also do not believe that Appointed Boards will achieve the same level of engagement with the communities. We know that parental and community involvement enhance the education of children and youth and that is our goal.

We are also concerned with the potential of a set number of meetings. To do the work, to connect with community, to respond to local needs, takes time. This is time very well spent. Our Board understands the interests and desires of our communities and can make decisions that support these needs. Limiting the meetings may not allow us to do our work to make these connections and collect that important voice.

We have reservations about the potential that there would possibly be a differing governance structure for Public systems and Separate systems. ***We believe strongly in equity.*** It is important that opportunities and voice of community are equitable among all children and families in the province. We have a very strong relationship with our sister school division, Holy Family Roman Catholic School Division. Our school division provides education to students in 6-12, 9-12 and 10-12 in three communities to students who begin their schooling in Holy Family. If SECPD were to become part of a larger system, that local interplay between systems may not be as successful.

We strongly believe in elected boards and their purpose.

While we believe 10 members is appropriate to our system size and demographic, we are open to discussing the number of board members. We recommend that both population and geography be part of that consideration.

Locally elected boards guide and respond to the specific needs of the students and communities within the division. We have many pieces that are unique to our system, that were designed

to meet our needs, our local voice, our demographic, and our priorities. Examples include: Response to Intervention (Premier's Award), Early Learning and Care, Partnership with Holy Family Roman Catholic School Division, South East Region Community Mobilization (HUB), South East Community Protocol for Violence Threat Risk Assessment, South East Region Industry Education Council, and Partnership with Treaty Four Alliance (ISSI). We are presently engaged in conversations with Southeast College.

Each year Board Members complete an evaluation of the Board, the standing committees and the Board Chair. The Board analyzes the data and develops plans to address areas identified as deficient. During this process individual Board members also complete a survey which assesses their own gifts, talents and knowledge to determine if, as a Board, we require further training. We determine which members have experience in a variety of categories including, but not limited to, accounting, board and governance, business management, labour relations, education pedagogy, facility maintenance, and risk management.

The work we do with the School Community Councils is invaluable. Each Board member is encouraged to attend SCC meetings in each school community they represent. The School Community Councils are comprised of individuals who are interested in working to support the neighborhood school and the learning plan within it. Once per year, the Board hosts

a SCC Forum to bring together the SCC's for networking and professional development. These are most successful when we hold multiple events to allow for limited driving. Many SCC members are working parents with young children whose time is limited and thus travel and time demands need to be very carefully considered. ***The focus of the SCC is very different than the focus of the Board of Education.*** We complement each other's purposes.

We believe there is absolute value in the role of the SCC at the local school level. However, that role is not one of governance. If each SCC acted in a capacity of governance, we would have 37 mini-governing bodies in our division alone each with an agenda and direction. The establishment of SCC's was to put in place a structure to ensure parental and community engagement. This structure supports student outcome achievement. ***If the work of the SCC was to change and become governance, beyond the aforementioned concern, we believe that the student learning would be negatively impacted.*** Also, SCC members are not interested in, nor necessarily knowledgeable of system governance. The current role of the SCC greatly supports the achievement of the ESSP Level 3 plan.

The size of systems is a concern of ours. In our experience it can be challenging to ensure in-person engagement opportunities across a large geographic area. We have moved to utilize technology, which does save time and money.

However, it is not conducive to forming, maintaining or enhancing relationships. We've experienced communities, those situated a significant distance from central office, who feel and express a disconnection. Options where school divisions become much larger like the Provincial Model, Regional Model, or amalgamated larger systems would definitely fall victim to this and we believe it would be adverse to student success.

Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)

Our Board has been supportive of and engaged in the ESSP since its inception. We have participated and provided feedback through the Catchball process at every opportunity. We fully support the work of the PLT and believe that there is benefit garnered for all Saskatchewan students when we work as one cohesive unit. **We believe that the momentum of the ESSP is of paramount importance. This work has been transformational.** This is the first time in this province that all Boards of Education have committed to a common plan with common goals and have reported on the progress. All of these pieces are aligned with Premier Wall's Vision 2020.

Our Board has been through several amalgamation processes. ***We know firsthand the work that goes into establishing an amalgamated school division.*** Several school divisions came together to form SECPD, some of which had previously

amalgamated. It was difficult work to develop a culture, an identity, to align processes, practices and procedures. Our experience has taught us that it took 4-5 years to get past management and back into focusing on students. Prior to that we focused on aligning LINC, SEIU and CUPE agreements, developing administrative procedures to standardize all processes across the system, supporting the awareness and practice of the procedures, implementing a system wide technology plan, developing standardization of school level/system practices in finance and reporting, and developing common goals across the system. We worked to bring all of the transportation departments and facilities departments into one cohesive unit and process. The change in land titles alone was an incredibly work-intensive and expensive undertaking. Rebranding from many former school divisions to one was very costly in terms of time, effort and dollars. In short, we were pre-occupied with management. ***Future potential amalgamation will take our focus off of the ESSP and students making it very difficult to meet our 2020 Vision.***

Furthermore, ***from our experience of previous amalgamation, there is not a saving of money.*** Different roles are needed to continue the work required. We would anticipate that other structures would need to be established to replace those that already exist. The reference in the review to an Education Quality Council with responsibility for monitoring system performance is puzzling. We would submit that the Boards of Education presently assume this role. ***The cost to operate***

education with structural change would be comparable and the loss of productivity and delayed achievement of the ESSP as the structures are developed and become efficient would not enhance education in rural Saskatchewan.

It may be prudent to revisit the boundaries developed in prior amalgamation. For example, course corrections may be considered to adjust boundaries which may not be meeting the needs of families.

The ESSP has an outcome specifically designated to Sector Wide Efficiencies. It is our understanding that the efficiencies found have been higher than the goal set at this point. This is an area that our Board is committed to continue to work towards engaging in and working with others to meet further efficiencies.

We are aware that there is some public perception that there is excessive administration and governance cost in the current structure and furthermore there seems to be a lack of understanding and appreciation for the work administration does to support the system. Regarding cost, salary and benefit costs for Governance represent 0.2% of our total operating budget while salary and benefit costs for Administration represents 2.7%.

We've previously spoken to the value of Governance. The role of administration has equal value. In Premier Brad Wall's Growth Plan, Vision20/20, he identifies specific goals including, graduation rates, closing the gap for First Nation youth, and

improved literacy. At the request of the Ministry, every Director in the Province worked with First Nation entities and Ministry staff to establish the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). The Level One Plan, the provincial plan, was developed and adopted by all boards in the province. It was then incumbent on the Board to ensure that the Level Two Plan, the system plan, aligned with the provincial plan. Intensive system work began, ensuring that all schools in every division established a School Improvement plan that aligned with Level Two and Level One (ESSP).

Simply advising staff in each school of what the expectations of the system are, does not ensure that the goals are being met. This takes implementation, monitoring and corrective actions. Not all educators in our system are necessarily standing in front of students in a classroom. Superintendents are ensuring implementation of the ESSP in each school, they are monitoring progress, and ensuring supports are put in place where required to achieve the outcomes expected. We have coordinators and consultants providing supports to the classroom teachers to ensure that outcomes are achieved. These are all hard working educators and are often referred to as administration by the public and even by some of our MLA's. We are achieving our targets and in most cases exceeding the provincial averages. ***A move to standardize support staff could only work under the assumption that all systems across the province, all schools, and all students require the same support to be successful.*** We know this is not true. We see this

in our own system. Some schools receive greater support than others to meet the same desired outcomes. ***We believe it is important to differentiate.***

Reducing system administration, beyond having a negative impact on achieving the ESSP outcomes would also put additional strain on our in-school administrators. The principal's role is already a very demanding role. To add the work of senior administration to that plate would be very difficult. Recruiting administrators has become more challenging in recent years. If the position did not have the support of system administration to support in-school administrators in their work such as crisis management, the role of the principal would be far more complex and challenging.

On our Business side of our operation we have hard working staff to manage the budget preparation, payroll, facilities, transportation, human resources and labor group negotiations, health and safety, risk management, and technology. These are currently specific to the system. Reference to a common payroll, for example, where perhaps in time can be achieved, would require much work to get to that stage. We believe it would require common contracts or agreements for staff, including support staff associated with a variety of union agreements. ***Centralization may have merit, however, it will require time and expense to transition successfully.***

Our Board communicates with the public through the website, meeting highlights, public meetings, meetings with the SCC's, and media attendance at our meetings. We work to inform all the stakeholders of the work that is being done by our staff. It is very difficult to help the public to understand the important role of individuals who may not be directly in front of students.

In summary, we agree with the Letter of Transmittal submitted by Mr. Perrins. We were one of the 19 school boards who spoke with Mr. Perrins and we appreciated his time and conversation with us. We support the unanimous statements made but recognize and are most amenable to working with other systems and internally to continue to find sector-wide efficiencies. ***If the proposed changes are about costs of governance and administration, we would commit to working together to control these costs without fundamentally altering a structure which we believe is meeting the needs of students, families and communities.***

Thank you for accepting our report. Thank you for providing us an opportunity to express our feedback on the governance review. We look forward to conversations where we continue to work together to provide a quality education for all of our children.

