

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL MANITOBANS

We, the undersigned, call on the Government of Manitoba to reconsider its intention to pursue the passage of Bill 64 – The Education Modernization Act for the purpose of allowing greater public dialogue on the advisability of the changes proposed therein.

Until March 15, 2021 the Manitoba education system was often the envy of other Canadian provinces, our American neighbours and our international friends, particularly those in the OECD countries. As Manitoba superintendents we took our role as educational leaders on the forefront of educational advancement seriously, enthusiastically embracing made-in-Manitoba solutions to social, economic and political challenges, and carrying them to all corners of the earth in leadership roles beyond Manitoba. We were often asked by our colleagues far and near, “how are your new initiatives possible?”

Our response inevitably included the facts that we worked in a non-partisan environment, where children and the public good were given primary consideration, and everyone – the government, the ministry, boards of trustees, superintendents, principals, teachers, and communities worked together on matters of common interest. We did not care where ideas came from or whose ideas they were – they were ideas to be shared and agreed upon. We celebrated and publicized each others’ initiatives and achievements as if they were our own, and we learned from each other. And we assumed that, if an idea had merit in pursuit of education for all, all would support it and each other. Not to be taken for granted any more.

As just a few examples of Manitoba leadership in education:

On Sustainability Education

Our Deputy Minister of the day, supported by all educational partners, took a Manitoba sustainability education agenda to the United Nations and worldwide, always acknowledging that this was a collective enterprise in development and implementation.

On Educational Response to Child Poverty

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST), now the Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA), supported by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), initiated a Canada-wide discussion on the educational consequences of child poverty. This conversation, which is continuing to this day, has resulted in hundreds of school projects, and collaboration with the Social Planning Council, addressing the needs of poor children and families at the community school level.

Mental Health Education and Supports

MASS initiated a study and focus on the relationship between the mental health of students and their educational experiences addressing how schools might attend to mental health concerns, something which has proved to be prescient in light of the current pandemic. A first in North American education.

Social Justice Issues

The Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS), in support of Manitoba children, families, and teachers, took the lead, campaigning and advocating for gender rights and racial justice, and supported teachers working on other human rights and equality issues.

Inclusive Education and Accessibility

Originated by Manitoba parents, and supported by community organizations and the faculties of education, tremendous strides have been made in inclusivity and accessibility in school and other public places.

Indigenous Education

Manitoba is the home of the Manitoba First Nations School System (MFNSS), conceived by the Manitoba First Nations Resource Centre (MFNERC) in which over 10 First Nations combined their resources to enhance education for on-reserve children. It is another Manitoba first, the only one of its kind in Canada. It owes at least some of its success to the supportive efforts of MSBA, MASS, MTS, and Manitoba Education and the pioneering work of the Frontier School Division, also a Manitoba first, supported by governments of all stripes. One of the main features of Frontier is the partnership between over 10 First Nations and a public school system with elected trustees.

Accomplishments like this, of which there are too many to mention, are only possible where people trust each other, value and nurture their relationships and are not jealous of each others' achievements –where they work together for something greater than themselves and their organizations. Not caring who was recognized, or who got the credit, made these educational advancements as provincial triumphs into local, national and international contributions to the education and well-being of our children, our communities and our world.

Among other inaccurate contentions, Bill 64 is based on false and divisive premises and promises – of quality (test scores vs poverty); participation (individual parents vs school boards); collegiality and professionalism (principals vs teachers); and, efficiency (extreme centralization vs local discretion). Nowhere in the world have the solutions being advocated ended in the results being proclaimed. And everywhere in the world, extreme centralization has led to standard formula-driven prescriptions – one size-fits-all answers – insensitive to local differences and impervious to local input. And nowhere in the world have they increased trust in government.

The loss is magnified, loss of confidence in government accompanied by a breakdown in mutually beneficial relationships among the guardians of public schools. And the loss of the collective “people” power which has resulted in a continuous improvement of a system considered among the best in the world.

Bill 64, now being implemented by government even before it passes, places the relationships which led to our working together for better schools everywhere at risk. In the process it jeopardizes public education itself. For the sake of all Manitobans, and the future of Manitoba education, some of its provisions must be reconsidered. We urge all Manitobans to inform

themselves, and to let our politicians know that we expect better from them than this divisive and destructive bill.

RECENTLY RETIRED SUPERINTENDENTS

Coralie Bryant	Bob Cesmystruck	Karen Crozier	Paul Cuthbert
Ray Derksen	Arnold Dysart	Catherine Fidierchuk	Cam Giavedoni
Brian Gouriluk	Don Hurton	John Janzen	Ken Klassen
Scott Kwaznitza	Pauline Lafond-Bouchard	Brett Lough	Lawrence Lussier
Ross Metcalfe	Paul Moreau	Dan Reagan	Strini Reddy
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