

May 20, 2021

The Honourable Catherine Cox
Room 118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Andrew Micklefield
Room 227 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

The Honourable Jeff Wharton
Room 314 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

James Teitsma
Room 227 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Cox, Minister Wharton, MLA Micklefield and MLA Teitsma:

Thank you for making the time to virtually meet on Friday, April 16 with the River East Transcona School Division's Board of Trustees.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the critical issues of the proposed legislation, Bill 64 Modernization of Education.

First, the governance model outlined in the provisions of Bill 64 is flawed and it is anti-democratic. The elimination of elected school boards in favour of the parent-operated governance model has been tried and failed, as demonstrated in PEI. That province is now re-instituting elected school boards. Bill 64 also ensures inequitable regions in terms of student population and community engagement. For example, Winnipeg will have 100,000 plus students whereas the region of Hanover and Seine River will have 8,000 and 4,400 students respectively.

The government's messaging to the public on Bill 64 are not substantiated by factual evidence. Boardrooms are not bloated, and changes will not net a \$40 million dollar savings and Manitoba students are not failing. We contend that any savings realized by the sweeping changes contained in Bill 64 will lead to a net loss. Through experience, when River East Transcona School Division amalgamated contract harmonization cost more than \$3 million dollars annually in additional costs. Additionally, school boards cost less than 1 cent on every dollar spent on education in Manitoba – bloated boardrooms is gross exaggeration. As for Manitoba students failing, once factors such as poverty, which Manitoba has the highest poverty rate in Canada, are worked into test score rankings, Manitoba students rank 2nd in the country. This is not failing.

In our meeting, you referenced the cost per pupil spending as being inequitable amongst school divisions. For decades, RETSD has advocated for a two-step solution to resolve those funding inequities in cost per pupil. However, those suggestions have gone ignored.

We take issue with your assertion that this new education reform would have minimal change to students in the classroom. That is factually incorrect, and we implore you to look at history. Every major change to

the education system will be felt by students, staff, and our communities. We know from experience. Over the past 20 years RETSD has been dealing with the consequences of harmonization. A relevant example of this, as we are sure you can all recall, the Ukrainian Bilingual Program. This clearly demonstrates how harmonization affected students in the classroom and families. The changes contained in Bill 64 will not just be disruptive to classroom learning but it will have sweeping and devastating consequences on Manitoban families.

The lack of meaningful engagement and consultation has been experienced at every level from officials in the department of Education, Ministers and the Premier, as demonstrated through no responses, to refusals to meet and an aversion to seeking input from the field.

We implore you as our government representatives to take the necessary steps to pull Bill 64. Take time to review the recommendations in the review and through working together, we can all create legislation that is truly a modernization of education and is in the absolute best interests of Manitoba' students and future of our province.

Sincerely,



Jerry Sodomlak,
Chair, Board of Trustees