



**TURTLE MOUNTAIN  
SCHOOL DIVISION**



**TURTLE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DIVISION**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING**

**VISIONING DAY REPORT**

**SEPTEMBER 17, 2011**

**INTERNATIONAL PEACE GARDEN**

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## ***Introduction***

On September 17, 2011 the Turtle Mountain School Division (TMSD) embarked upon a visioning process in order to inform a 4 year strategic planning process. Approximately 27 members of the staff, students and community representatives attended a retreat at the International Peace Gardens to provide a broad perspective for the School Board to consider. This report summarizes the proceedings of the day and recommendations.

## **Visioning Process**

An external facilitator was engaged to plan and lead the visioning day following consultation with the Board and Superintendent. The Board and facilitator discussed the purpose and goals of the visioning day and a process was developed to promote engagement of participants. School Division staff and the Board identified and invited participants who would be representative of the communities, students, and staff.

The visioning session began with an outline of the purpose, format of the day, and introductions. Each participant introduced themselves & described what they liked or like about school.

The TMSD Board has adopted the following set of beliefs that guide their decisions and day to day operations. These were presented to the group with an invitation to comment on how the beliefs could be revised to reflect the perspective of the community and students. The current beliefs of the TMSD Board are:

1. We will be accountable for our decisions.
2. We will operate in an open and public way.
3. We will work as a team and attempt to involve public in decision-making and encourage the taking of responsibility at many levels.
4. We will remain open to new ideas, consider and listen to the input of others.
5. We value honesty.
6. We believe in fiscal responsibility.

## ***Environmental Scan & Implications***

The Superintendent provided an overview of the Division, including new programs, challenges, and provincial mandates. This was followed by a large group discussion about the information presented and the current situation in the Division.

The latest School Division Annual Plan (2011/12) priorities were also provided to participants. These priorities are:

- We will work to develop students' skills to assist them in leading meaningful lives.
- We will promote professional development, for all levels of the organization, that improves the quality of education offered to our students.
- We will communicate effectively with our stakeholders.
- We will provide sage environments for students and staff within the Division.

Many factors influence the ability to plan and deliver education in the Turtle Mountain School Division. The following factors were discussed by participants.

## **Political/Legislative Influences**


Education is the responsibility of the provincial government and school divisions must adhere to relevant legislation. The introduction of Bill 13, recent legislation requiring youth under the age of 18 years to attend school, was discussed. The Superintendent clarified some of the regulations regarding school attendance pursuant to this legislation and the implications for enrollment numbers. The legislation also includes a requirement for schools to offer opportunities appropriate to the abilities of students.


## **Economic Factors**


One of the most significant factors influencing the School Board's ability to deliver education is funding. The Division has been facing a decline in enrollment for a number of years.


The Board felt that declining enrollment was a significant issue that should be discussed with community members and staff. Funding is considerably affected by the numbers of students attending schools. Without a critical mass of students, it becomes difficult to offer the variety of programs that will benefit all students. The Board requested the thoughts of the group with respect to addressing the issue of declining enrollment and its impact on students and education in the Division.

## Addressing Declining Enrollment


 **Review School Configuration:** There was a lot of discussion about how schools are configured & how courses could be delivered. It was suggested that the Board could consider having one high school and one middle school in the Division (one in Killarney, one in Boissevain) in order to be able to offer students options and to allow each of these communities to maintain a school. This was important because schools are considered a foundation of the community. It was also suggested that communities could reorganize grades and continue to offer Kindergarten to Grade 4. This option would have an impact on transportation times, which would need to be examined carefully.

 **Review Course Delivery Models:** Itinerant specialty teachers could be another solution but this may pose timetabling issues. This solution keeps students in their home communities. It was noted that changes in course delivery may have implications from a union perspective. Creative timetabling & modular courses may assist students to obtain required courses. Participants felt strongly that we have qualified teachers in our communities.

 **Consider Impact on Teaching and other Staff:** Any change in school configuration or course delivery model would have an impact on staff. It may influence teacher workload (a teacher may have three Grade 9 classes rather than one). Participants felt it was important to look at solutions that would ensure availability of specialty teachers, which impacts the quality of education & options available. Participants felt that reconfiguring schools could address this.

 **Build Capacity in Small Schools:** It was recognized that it is not possible to offer everything in a small school. Without a solution, some students won't have options because certain courses can't be taken by correspondence. Some may go elsewhere to obtain prerequisites/electives. Availability of sports teams may have an impact on scholarship opportunities & ultimately where some students choose to attend school.

Research supports that relationships with students are the most important part of school, so there is a need to balance caring with quality of education. There was a discussion about the effectiveness of combined classes. In very small schools having multiple grades can be a challenge but students do get a quality education. Offering multiple classes in the earlier grades is different than high school. Many students from small schools with combined classrooms are on the honour roll in high school.

 **Utilize Technology:** Some participants suggested leveraging technology through virtual classrooms. This would enhance the course options available to students.

📖 ***Enhance Career Technology Studies:*** In order to retain the interest of various students, it was suggested that career technology studies could be enhanced by offering more options for hands-on activities and courses that facilitate entering the trades. Students wondered about the value of offering courses that they didn't consider useful in the future. Realistic study options that are useful for real life may help to attract and retain students.

📖 ***Explore Partnerships for Community Solutions:*** There are a number of actions that could enhance enrollment but are not influenced directly by the Division. Partnerships to enhance sustainable development would benefit both schools and communities.

Recruitment of new residents to Rural Municipalities and Towns could bring more families and children to our communities. Participants mentioned that housing options would need to be available for young families. It was suggested that the Board and municipal governments could work jointly on solutions such as discussing tax incentives.

It would be valuable to discuss the situation with community, including a long term workforce strategy and proactive planning to minimize the impact of teacher retirements. There was a discussion about the politics of communities & the need for rural communities to look beyond their traditional borders to consider the "big picture" in the interest of students. Often communities define themselves by a small geographic area but one participant wondered if we need to redefine what a community is & whether we need to think about a larger area.

To attain mutually agreeable solutions the Board and communities need to work together. We need to foster a culture of cooperation rather than competition among communities. This can be a huge opportunity and we need to teach students this cooperative way of thinking early.

📖 ***Promote Home Stay Program for International Students:*** In the past, international students have been welcomed into homes of families in the Division. Because they are not residents of the Division who would be included in enrollment numbers and thereby contribute to funding, these students pay to attend our schools. International student fees have historically been substantial, representing a potential source of revenue if local families are willing to host students.

📖 ***Engage in Proactive Planning:*** It was suggested that the Board consider solutions through advanced planning (proactive vs. reactive). The Board could consider different funding options by considering costs/models & funding formulas. Professional development for teachers was considered essential, especially related to succession planning for specialist teachers. There was agreement that the Division plan needs to be based on opportunities for kids. Participants were interested in learning more about the Board's process for developing their annual budget.

## **Sociocultural Factors**

The declining population in rural communities is affecting enrollment. There is interest in sustainable development among communities, which in turn affects the sustainability of schools. While many participants recognize the limited capacity of small schools to offer sufficient course options, there are other factors to consider, such as the importance of relationships among students & teachers.

Participants felt that it was necessary to have opportunities for families (employment, recreational, cultural, continuing education) and students (variety of course options) available in communities to attract new residents, especially professionals.

## **Technological Factors**

There is the potential to leverage technology to enhance student access to course options, however current systems have limited capacity for expansion without significant investment.

Technology is considered a tool for learning. There is value in leveraging technology to maximize course opportunities and to utilize the skills of specialty teachers who are available. Kids are comfortable with technology and participants felt that today's students could adapt easily to courses delivered this way.

There is value in options such as ITV which could be utilized to enhance course opportunities for students, but there is a cost associated with this technology and it must be reliable in order to be effective.

## **Environmental Factors**

Some divisions are moving to electronic resources which would replace textbooks. While this reduces the environmental impact of school activities, there is a significant cost associated with setting up such a system. There was concern about potential abuse of this type of technology, with students noting examples within current systems. Teachers provided some suggestions for how this could be managed.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

### **Strengths**

Because the Division is small, participants felt that staff really care and take ownership of our schools. Whether staff are directly or indirectly involved with students, everyone has a vested interest in the students. It was felt that students truly were the first priority for both staff & the Board, who promote an inclusive environment.

The Superintendent stated that there are good administrators in schools with strong communication skills who deal with issues well. Staff show their pride by maintaining schools well. Participants stated that we have a strong Board that supports small schools.

A Student Service Review demonstrated a strong Resource & Guidance component. Staff with these responsibilities have the necessary qualifications and services are student-centered.

The communities also have a sense of ownership and support their schools. Local businesses support the students and schools through involvement in internships and apprenticeships.

### **Weaknesses**

The trend in declining enrollment limits the ability of the School Division to offer a variety of courses and programs.

There is interest in utilizing technology to enhance options for students but the capacity to use this technology is limited by the bandwidth available.

### **Opportunities**

It was noted that there has been improvement in many areas, but there is always room for improvement. There is an opportunity to increase interest in positions on School Boards.

Participants were interested in sustainable development of classrooms and facilities. From a planning perspective, there is a desire to gain a better understanding of effective course delivery, such as blending.

It was mentioned that the governance model can create tension between Board and teachers. This seems to be a natural effect of the model but participants suggested that this tension can be reduced by working on mutual understanding between teachers and Board. Some work has already been done in this area through focus groups with specialty teachers and liaison meetings.

It was noted that a lot has been done already to improve communication from the Board, yet there could still be room for improvement. Participants suggested that communication with municipal governments (Rural Municipalities and Towns) could be improved. Along the same lines were comments that there are opportunities to enhance existing partnerships and establish new partnerships.

It was recognized that if students cannot obtain the prerequisites needed for future studies they may go elsewhere. There is an opportunity to harness the power of technology by enhancing high speed internet reliability. Students that are keenly interested in sports and wish to seek a sports scholarship are only able to pursue this in a school that is large enough to offer these sports.

There is understanding that the influences on education are larger than just the schools and School Division. The viability of communities affects the sustainability of the education system. Vibrant communities with adequate housing and viable employment opportunities can attract young adults who will raise their families there.

## **Threats**

There is the potential for a continued decline in enrollment. There were concerns about the impact of enrollment trends and provincial decisions regarding taxation on funding. Some participants were worried about amalgamation with another School Division.

## ***Group Consensus Building***

Participants were then asked to discuss the following question in small groups:

***What are the most important priorities for the School Division to work toward over the next 4 years?***

Once small groups had identified their ideas the large group reconvened to present their thoughts and work through a facilitated process. The process was chosen to facilitate group consensus on priority areas. The final results of the discussion are summarized below.

The four year plan was considered a tool to formalize planning in a 4 year cycle, enhancing accountability & communication.

The group asked the Board to consider adding to the Beliefs a statement related to sustainable education for sustainable communities & education for sustainable development.

## Priorities

The priorities identified by the participants were:

- 📖 **Leveraging technology:** Invest in technology & IT infrastructure.
- 📖 **Engaging partners:** Improve communication with/engaging communities & partners to solve common issues and empower teachers & students.
- 📖 **Increasing enrollment:** Bring families to our communities, explore reasons for choosing home/private schooling & promote international student Home Stay program.
- 📖 **Providing Quality Programming:** Proactive planning to reduce impact of declining enrollment & maintain what we have through; ensuring availability of specialty teachers, maintaining low student/teacher ratio, exploring effective models of course delivery, maintaining extracurricular programs, and supporting current professional development opportunities.
- 📖 **Accessing funding:** Access funding , practice fiscal responsibility and seek alternate funding sources.

Participants were asked to provide any thoughts about the current set of beliefs that the Board adheres to. Comments related to the beliefs included;

- “Enhance internet capabilities to enhance educational opportunities we can provide students.”
- “Perhaps sustainable development should be added.”

Based on the ideas discussed and priorities identified by students, staff and the Board, the following recommendations are presented for the Board to consider:

***Recommendations:***

1. ***Review the current model of course delivery:*** Consider the costs, benefits and capacity of different models for the Division to offer education to students. There was discussion among the participants that it would be worth reviewing school configuration or changing the way courses are delivered in the Division in order to meet the needs of current and future students. They are sensitive to the fact that this may not be an ideal solution from a community perspective but recognize the importance of considering what is best for the students.

There needs to be a balance between the essential role of caring that is provided in a school setting with the opportunities offered through the courses available to students. There is also potential to look at itinerant teachers who could offer courses in more than one school or using technology to enhance student options. If the technology option is explored it will be important to consider the value gained compared to the investment required.

The staff in the Division would like to explore best practice models for rural education. It would be beneficial to investigate successful course delivery models that have been implemented in other jurisdictions in Canada & beyond. Other countries such as Australia have been facing these issues for a number of years and may have developed some innovative solutions that could be applied here.

2. ***Involve teachers and other division staff in discussions about effective models:*** Consider the impact of any decisions on teaching staff. It was clear that teachers bring a passion to teaching the subjects they enjoy and that specialty teachers are a valuable resource that participants want to keep. The staff are the greatest resource for schools and professional development opportunities as well as succession planning will be critical to maintaining teaching staff required to offer specialized courses.

3. ***Engage partners in planning options:*** Partnerships will be key to successful planning. Working together was a frequent theme in discussions. Families need to work with the schools, schools need to work with communities, and the Division/Board needs to work with the teachers & communities, to name a few examples. Only through cooperation and inclusive planning will mutually agreeable solutions be achieved. Shared benefits can be realized by working together to attract new families and international students to our communities.

**4. *Maintain the current focus on the needs of the students:*** Above all it will be critical to keep in mind whose interests we are serving – the current & future students. Any discussions and decisions should be held against the Mission Statement of the Turtle Mountain School Division:

“The students are the focus of all our efforts. The Division strives to provide an education that prepares individuals for a meaningful life in a changing world. We promote a learning environment that begins in the home, continues in the school and is supported by the community.”

## APPENDIX A

### EVALUATION RESULTS

Twenty-six participants submitted evaluation forms.

Please rate how satisfied you are with the following:

Opportunity to participate	0 ☹️	3 😐	22 😊	1 No answer
I feel that my opinions were heard	0 ☹️	2 😐	23 😊	1 No answer
Organization of the day	0 ☹️	3 😐	22 😊	1 No answer
Setting	1 ☹️	10 😐	14 😊	1 No answer

#### *Other comments:*

Most comments were related to the setting, which participants felt was too cool but many really enjoyed the lunch!

Selected comments were as follows:

“A good day. A chance for everyone to be heard.”

“Very informative & interesting.”

“Good to have this process every 4 years.”

“I learned several interesting things about how things work. Well done!”

“Next steps are really important. Please engage partners in figuring out how to move forward. Thanks for the opportunity.”

“Looking forward to seeing the report. Have felt today proved an opportunity for an excellent discussion between people from a variety of area. The talks were open and professional. Thank you.”

“Appreciated opportunity to see/learn how the school division structure & local government can work together in relation to declining enrollment.”

“Good experience. Informative.”

“There should be more students attending, it is all about them, right?”

“Liked the wide, diverse group of participants.”

“Could have been done in ½ day. No wireless service? Could have been done in either Killarney/Boissevain.”

“More teachers to talk about their thoughts on teaching outside of the comfort zone.”

## **APPENDIX B**

### **VISIONING DAY RESULTS**

#### **Ideas to address declining enrollment:**

- ⊗ One high school & one middle school (Killarney & Boissevain)
  - Keep options, each keeps a school
- ⊗ Leveraging technology (virtual classrooms)
- ⊗ RMs & Towns” recruit new residents
  - Work on solutions jointly (tax incentives)
  - Options offered at school are important, especially when attracting professionals
- ⊗ Increase career technology studies
  - Hands-on, trades
  - Realistic options, useful for real life
- ⊗ Housing options for young families
- ⊗ Proactive vs. reactive (advanced planning)
- ⊗ Funding options (consider costs/models & funding formulas)
- ⊗ Professional development for teachers (succession planning: specialist teachers)
- ⊗ Discuss with community, long term workforce strategy, proactive (impact of retirements)
- ⊗ Specialty teachers (quality of education, options available, teachers want to teach the subject they enjoy – bring a passion to their teaching). Amalgamating schools could address
- ⊗ Itinerant specialty teachers, timetabling issue?, keeps students in home community
- ⊗ Impact on transportation times
- ⊗ Reorganizing grades (All schools have K-4, 1 middle years, 1 high school)
- ⊗ Division plan needs to be based on opportunities for kids
- ⊗ Union implications
- ⊗ Teacher workload (may have 3 Grade 9 classes)
- ⊗ Politics of communities, need to look at “Big picture”
  - Need to work together, culture of cooperation rather than competition among communities, huge opportunity, need to teach students this way of thinking early
  - Defining community: what does it mean? Does it need to be bigger?
- ⊗ Creative timetabling, modular courses
- ⊗ Relationships with students makes the difference (research supports)
  - Need to balance caring with quality of education
- ⊗ Some students won’t have options (some courses can’t be taken by correspondence)
- ⊗ Combined classes not as effective?
- ⊗ Some may go elsewhere to obtain prerequisites/electives
- ⊗ Schools are a foundation of the community
- ⊗ Can’t offer everything in a small school
- ⊗ Sports teams (impact on scholarship opportunities)
- ⊗ We have qualified teachers in our communities

- ⊗ Usefulness of certain courses? Need to put funding in teachers, skills may be valuable in the future (e.g. computer)
  - Technology is a tool for learning, leveraging technology: utilize specialty teachers
  - Kids are comfortable with technology
  - Value in ITV program if working well (costs money)
  - Classroom time is important
- ⊗ Small schools – multiple grades a challenge but students do get a quality education. Earlier grades different than high school. Many students from small schools (combined classrooms) are on honour roll in high school
- ⊗ What is the budgeting process for Division? Begin with a “wish list” but decisions depend on funding provided

### **Discussion of Context**

- ⊗ Priority is students
- ⊗ How many parents understand funding realities?
- ⊗ Funding based on enrollment (Guarantee 2%) \$7,000/student if they leave, enrollment changes impact every line in the budget, waive tax incentive grant
  - More important to maintain status quo
  - Local taxing authority
- ⊗ Department of Education mandates for programming without additional funding
- ⊗ How do we maintain what we have?
- ⊗ Education for parents
- ⊗ Bill 13: doesn't count students leaving before June 30, 2011, 1 day re-registered: included, Requirement to provide appropriate education for students' abilities, enrichment opportunities

### **5 Years**

- ⊗ Significant economic development
- ⊗ More babies
- ⊗ Not amalgamated with another Division
- ⊗ Sustainable development
- ⊗ Keep our kids (in our schools, returning or staying in communities)
  - Need something to attract them back, exposure to local opportunities (career studies)
  - Telecommuting becoming an option
  - Ability to work at home
- ⊗ More family involvement (e.g., PAC), parent engagement, communication with families (not necessarily meetings)

## **Strengths**

- ⊗ Small: ownership
- ⊗ Teachers care & have ownership
- ⊗ Good administrators in schools (communication, deal with issues well)
- ⊗ Schools in good shape, well maintained
- ⊗ Staff have a vested interest (whether directly or indirectly involved with students)
- ⊗ Students are the first priority
- ⊗ Student Service Review: strong Resource & Guidance (qualifications, student-centered)
- ⊗ Inclusive environment
- ⊗ Strong Board that supports small schools
- ⊗ Communities support schools
- ⊗ Business supports schools (internship/apprenticeship)
- ⊗ ICT has grown significantly (web page)
- ⊗ Communication: schools, Division, families, other levels of government
- ⊗ Teachers that model learning (PD)
- ⊗ Strong extracurricular

## **Areas to Improve**

- ⊗ Communication (including with municipalities & towns)
- ⊗ Partnerships
- ⊗ Increase interest in positions on School Boards
- ⊗ Sustainable development (Classrooms, facilities)
- ⊗ Governance model can create tension between Board & teachers, need to work on mutual understanding between teachers & Board (Focus groups done with specialty teachers, liaison meetings)
- ⊗ Has been improvement in many areas, but always room for improvement
- ⊗ High speed internet reliability
- ⊗ Better understanding of effective course delivery (e.g., blending?)

TMSD STRATEGIC PLANNING VISIONING DAY REPORT

**TOOL:**

Formalize the TMSD Priorities Schedule (4 year cycle, accountability, communication)

Consider adding to Beliefs: Sustainable education for sustainable communities, education for sustainable development

<b>Leveraging Technology</b>	<b>Engaging Partners</b>	<b>Increasing Enrollment</b>	<b>Providing Quality Programming</b>	<b>Maximizing Funding</b>
Broadband (internet highway)	Engaging communities to solve common issues	Increase enrollment	Maintaining what we have NOW!	Fiscal Responsibility
Bandwidth (Fibre Optics)	Empower teachers & students	Bring families to area/work with RM/Towns	Teacher demographics (availability of specialty teachers)	Alternate funding sources
Use technology	Improve communication partnerships (RMs/Towns)	Explore reasons for people choosing home/private schools	Proactive – on impact of declining enrollment	Access funding
Increase IT infrastructure	Keep communications open	Promote Home Stay Program	Keep student:teacher ratio low	
Continue improvement to internet service		International students	Explore course delivery	
Lobbying for improved internet access			Maintaining extracurricular programming	
Commitment to technology			Course options	
Keep up with technology advancements			New & effective models for course delivery	
			Student/Teacher ratios	
			Up to date Professional Development	