



Local Voices/Local Choices Public Education Review to Occur in 2019

The provincial government has announced it will be conducting a review of the Manitoba public education system beginning sometime in 2019, and it is anticipated this review will include public consultation. As citizens within the communities of Turtle Mountain School Division, it will be important to advocate for school division autonomy to ensure we are locally able to continue making decisions based on what is best for the students within our schools and communities. Turtle Mountain School Division has a strategic plan which stems directly from community feedback, and maintaining a strong relationship between the school division and communities remains very important. A local school division is also better able to respond to needs within the schools, both in the short and long term.

An article was published on Steinbach Online on August 20, 2018 in which new Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen shared his thoughts on the possible future direction of public education in Manitoba, including the possibility of school division amalgamations. In response, the Manitoba School Boards Association wrote an editorial to ensure the public has accurate information and the correct context. Excerpts from the editorial are shared here so the public within Turtle Mountain School Division has this information prior to the education review occurring in 2019:

“In the year 2000/01, the NDP Government reduced the number of school boards down to 37 from 57. The target: millions of dollars in savings and a strategy to streamline our education system for even better results. Make it more manageable and comparable to other provinces, or so they argued at that time.

In 2001, an independent review commissioned by the Government, the Owens Report, found that the elimination of 20 school boards resulted in virtually no savings. Instead, dollars were spent to save dimes. Bigger school divisions meant bigger costs. Bigger was in fact not better. Owens concluded that the time spent on the amalgamation process would have been better invested in meaningful education reform. The only real impact of this turn-of-the-millennium attempt to fix something that did "not seem quite right" was to remove ownership of public schools from small town communities.

Either we wish to protect and defend the right of our local neighbourhoods and communities to own our public school system, or we choose to give away those rights to bigger education authorities. The regrettable alternative is a regional model as exists in healthcare, where only five regional health authorities make decisions on behalf of hundreds of communities and thousands of citizens. Either we value having a local voice and vote in the education of our children, or we replace the democracy we have with the tried-and-failed experiments of the past, and also from other provinces.

Let's then hope that into the future, as change takes place, we do not end up with more of the same: a wholesale reduction of school boards that would take valuable focus, time and efforts away from student achievement, as happened in 2001. One of the most important lessons learned from this experiment was the removal of distinctive communities' right to define and decide the future of their students and schools. We also learned that the price of eliminating school boards is incredibly high given such costs, for virtually no savings in return.”

Garth Nichol, Board Chair

For more information please see our website www.tmsd.mb.ca

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FACT SHEET

Local autonomy as a school division has allowed for a number of initiatives to occur within Turtle Mountain School Division which have been very beneficial for the youth in our communities. Examples of these initiatives are included below:

1. Fibre Connectivity

Turtle Mountain School Division was able to plan for and finance fiber optic internet connectivity for all schools in Minto, Killarney, and Boissevain.

2. Pre-School Wellness Fairs

Within schools in TMSD we annually conduct pre-school wellness fairs. These fairs include a variety of activities which enable divisional staff and other professionals from the community to engage with parents and children up to the age of four.

3. Promise Years

Promise Years is a partnership involving TMSD and several neighboring school divisions. The goal of Promise Years is to increase accessibility for clinician services such as speech/language for children who are not yet in school.

4. Division Social Worker

The Board has allocated funds to support a division Social Worker within TMSD. This position has proven to be very valuable in providing support for students who need additional help to overcome a variety of challenges.

5. Full Day Kindergarten

Several years ago the Board of Trustees allocated resources to enable full day, every day kindergarten to be offered in all schools within TMSD. This has been widely popular with families, and early years teachers indicate full day, every day kindergarten has improved student readiness for grade one.

6. Study Manitoba International Student Program

Turtle Mountain School Division is in partnership with several neighboring school divisions to offer an international student program. Within TMSD we have received students from various countries, and this has provided our resident students and home stay families with cultural experiences they otherwise would not have. The program has

continued to grow since it began ten years ago, and to date within TMSD we have hosted 132 international students.

7. Numeracy/Literacy Teacher Leaders

Developing student literacy and numeracy skills continues to be a significant area of focus within TMSD. Locally we have established teacher leaders who specialize in these areas and who work directly with students and teachers in classrooms. This promotes improved practice for all educators in the division, and well as promotes success for students.

8. Internship Programs

As part of a variety of career development initiatives within TMSD, students are offered internship opportunities where they can earn credit by working in the community and receive real-life hands on experience in a field they may wish to pursue after high school.

9. Educational Assistant Support

Turtle Mountain School Division contributes significantly more funding than what is received provincially to provide educational assistant support in classrooms. This helps to enable schools to meet the needs of all learners.

10. Professional Development

In TMSD it is believed all staff should be working continuously on professional growth. The Board of Trustees support this by providing significant professional development funding above what is provided provincially.

11. The Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium

Turtle Mountain School Division is part of a consortium of divisions which are working together to provide professional development for staff in a variety of areas, including literacy and numeracy. In doing so we are able to realize efficiencies as opposed to rural school divisions working in isolation.

12. Video Conference High School Programming

With TMSD we have established a video conference network which enables our high schools to offer shared high school programming. This has helped greatly with maintaining the viability and variety of high school electives, as well as building a sense of cohesiveness amongst our high schools.