



Submission to Manitoba Education Review Commission

From Turtle Mountain School Division

April 11, 2019

Background

Turtle Mountain School Division (TMSD) is located in southwestern Manitoba, and includes the communities of Killarney, Boissevain, Minto, as well as four Hutterite communities. The area encompassing Turtle Mountain School Division includes four rural municipalities, including the R.M.'s of Killarney/Turtle Mountain, Boissevain/Morton, Prairie Lakes, and Grassland. In addition to overseeing seven schools, we also provide oversight and support to two adult education sites within the communities of Killarney and Boissevain.

Over the past several decades much has changed within TMSD, as can be said for much of rural Manitoba. The TMSD Board of Trustees has been diligent over the years to ensure operating efficiency, while at the same time maintaining support for high quality programming to meet the needs of all students. Schools operating in the communities of Dunrea and Ninette were closed due to declining enrolment. Along with the closure of schools, the Board of Trustees reduced from a nine member Board to six.

Over the last ten years the student population within Turtle Mountain School Division has stabilized, and is now rising due to increased industry and immigration. This is expected to continue into the future.

What Defines Turtle Mountain School Division

Turtle Mountain School Division is closely connected to the communities within the division. We have active parent councils, and we seek parent and community feedback when planning our future direction. We have held parent information evenings in conjunction with teacher professional development days. Included within the supporting documents is our four year strategic plan, one which was derived from a community forum where we had a strong presence of students, staff, parents and community members.

Our annual report to the province is also included within the supporting documents. You will note there are several areas of focus within TMSD, including improvement in literacy and numeracy, strengthening student resilience and mental health, career development, as well as student engagement and deeper learning. Within Turtle Mountain School Division we pay close attention to the various data sources available to us, including student achievement as well as

attendance data. Academic programming, including literacy and numeracy, continues to be an area of focus within Turtle Mountain School Division. The attached supporting documents include data in relation to student attendance, grade nine credit attainment in Math and English Language Arts, grade 12 provincial exam data, as well as student graduation data. It is noteworthy that we are among the highest in the province in several of these areas.

Turtle Mountain School Division is very connected to the business communities within the division. For many years we have partnered with local businesses and organizations through our student internship and apprenticeship programs. These programs have been very successful, and offer students hands on experiential learning which helps to shape student career pathways. We ensure all students receive career development opportunities, including exploration, experiential learning, and planning, which starts in the middle years and carries forward throughout high school.

Also included with the supporting documents are examples of various initiatives occurring within TMSD. Many of these initiatives are unique to the division, and have been supported by the Board of Trustees in order to meet the needs of the students within our communities.

Along with these initiatives, there are other aspects of our education environments which provide support to student achievement and success. Our classroom experiences are very rich and engaging for our students, in part because we have managed to keep our pupil/teacher ratios low. We ensure necessary classroom supports are provided, and we provide quality and targeted professional development support for staff based upon the priorities within our strategic plan. We have skilled clinicians including speech language, occupational therapy, social work, and psychologist support which otherwise would be very difficult for families to access in our region given the shortage of trained professionals in rural areas.

Why We Want to Remain as We Are

Fear of change is human nature, yet our desire to remain as we are is much more grounded in evidence than fear. We know the amalgamations which occurred in the early 2000's resulted in no cost savings, and in many cases costs increased (see attached Owens Report, 2005). We already take advantage of many of the benefits that would come with larger school divisions. We often share resources and expertise with our neighboring divisions and, when feasible, we cost-share professional development opportunities. Other considerations include:

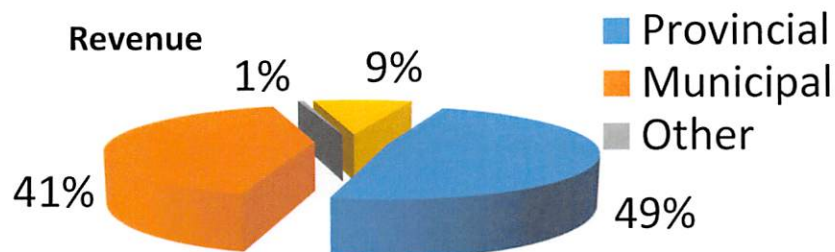
- We will be able to continue to build the strong connections we have among the schools/division and our communities.
- We have a positive working relationship with our employee groups.
- We already run efficiently and use our resources carefully.

- We are able to respond quickly when an emergent need arises, such as the need to increase staff when a school realizes a significant increase in enrolment.
- We strongly believe geographic challenges in rural Manitoba must also be considered. Cohesiveness requires ongoing communication, and while technology has helped it is still important to ensure divisional representation is able to regularly be in schools to provide support.
- We currently do not have significant infrastructure needs as a school division. Our modest division office and bus garages serve their intended purposes.

Request/Recommendations

To our knowledge, the closest face-to-face consultation will be in the Brandon area. While we would have preferred a consultation to occur within Turtle Mountain School Division, if this cannot occur we request participation within our region.

We also understand the province does not intend to review the current funding model for public school divisions. We feel if a full review of public education in Manitoba is going to occur it must include funding considerations. We know the previously established formula guarantee is being accessed by 20 out of 37 school divisions, and this should be a clear indicator that the funding model is in need of revision. As per the chart below, the province currently funds 49% of our budget. This percentage used to be much higher, as is the case in other school divisions. Despite the need over the years to see a greater percentage of funding come from municipal sources, within Turtle Mountain School Division we maintain a mil rate that is among the lowest in the region.

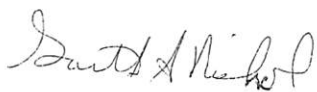


We also ask that as the commission gathers feedback, and then conducts a review and provides recommendations to government, that consideration be given to what occurred subsequent to the last time school division amalgamations occurred in Manitoba. It did not realize financial savings, and it did not result in increased student achievement. We also ask the Commission to pay close attention to the climate, context, and culture within this province when making comparisons to what occurred in other provinces. Our context within Manitoba is unique.

Local school Boards remain important and relevant, and should be maintained. Smaller school divisions remain efficient, and have demonstrated successes with student achievement. Though the province as a whole may place lower with regards to international test scores, this is not reflective of what is occurring within each individual region or school division. International test scores are also not reflective of many other factors which are more difficult to quantify, including socio-economic challenges.

The review of public education is welcomed by Turtle Mountain School Division, and we have a chance to get it right rather than spend the next decade or more dealing with the fallout from not doing so. We thank the Commission for your time, and we are open to further dialogue at your convenience.

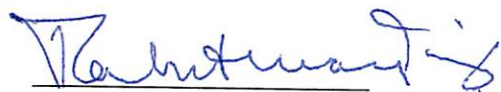
The Turtle Mountain School Division Board of Trustees:



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