



# BETTER EDUCATION STARTS **TODAY**

***PUTTING STUDENTS** FIRST*





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## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Education is said to be the great equalizer, and now more than ever, our students deserve a system that will ensure they are front and centre and have the right resources in place to succeed.

Our government committed to reviewing and renewing our education system. This once-in-a-generation review heard from thousands of Manitobans as the K-12 Commissioners embarked on one of the largest public consultations in Manitoba's history. I want to thank the Commissioners for their dedication and commitment to the work over the year leading up to their final report. The recommendations provide critical insights and direction on shaping a modern education system for tomorrow.

Over the past year, there have been many learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic that must also inform the path forward. Students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators demonstrated resiliency, dedication and innovation over the last year.

I would like to acknowledge their perseverance and efforts to ensure learning continues even now as we continue to keep the safety of schools as our top priority. We must apply the learnings of the last year to improve our schools and classrooms for the better.

Our system is at a critical point. Manitoba's education system has some of the highest spending per student, yet our students are at or near the bottom of national and international rankings. Per capita, we have the highest number of school divisions and trustees across all provinces. There are 37 duplicative bureaucracies across Manitoba built on an inconsistent funding formula reliant on education property taxes. For too long, "local voice" has focussed on setting tax rates and repetitive collective bargaining.

We need a provincial system that is consistent, efficient and focused on student success—built from the bottom up versus top down. We want a system that knows how valuable parental voice is at the local school level and will look at empowering it. We want a system that focuses less on bureaucracy and more on ensuring resources and energy are spent in the classroom, where they are needed most. We must ensure our teachers, staff and school leaders can excel at fostering learning and supporting student success.

Manitoba deserves the best. Through the Better Education Starts Today Strategy, our government is putting students first so no matter what path they choose they are well prepared for success in a global world. Although there is a lot of work ahead of us, we look forward to working in partnership with all Manitobans to ensure that our most valuable assets—our children—have the opportunity to succeed as future leaders in the Province.



**Hon. Cliff Cullen**

Minister of Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First** has been developed in response to the recommendations of the Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education as well as the learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commission was established to review our province's K to 12 education system with the goals of improving outcomes for students, ensuring long-term sustainability and enhancing public confidence in our education system. Based on extensive consultations in the spring of 2019, the Commission submitted its report, *Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future*, to the Minister of Education in early March 2020. After a pause to focus the system on the COVID-19 response, Manitoba is pleased to release the Commission's report. **Manitoba accepts the spirit and intent of the Commission's 75 recommendations and has developed a clear plan of action to modernize the education system.**

A modern K to 12 system that puts students first is a priority. Currently, Manitoba is among the highest spending per student, yet our student outcomes are at or near the bottom of national and international rankings. Manitoba has the highest number of school divisions and trustees, per capita, of all the provinces, resulting in different resources for students and parents across the province. Working together, we have an opportunity to improve performance and get better outcomes for all our children by shifting these resources to the classroom and investing in schools.

Within the next five years, our goal is to ensure our students have the most improved performance in Canada. We will build a consistent and aligned provincial education system that is student-centred, parent-friendly, classroom-focused and accountable for results. To do this, Manitoba will:

- **Shift more resources to the classroom** to ensure that student learning and achievement come first.
- **Unify our education system with a focus on accountability for results** so our children perform better and stop falling behind.
- **Give parents and caregivers a greater role in their children's education** by actively participating in the design and oversight of the system.
- **Ensure that all students are ready for lifelong success** regardless of where in the province they live.
- **Ensure that teachers, school staff and leaders have the capacity, knowledge and tools** they need to support student performance.

Priority actions have been identified across four pillars of student success. The strategy also commits to the philosophy of inclusion and student achievement for all; improving outcomes for Indigenous students; and prioritizing French language education in keeping with Charter rights for minority education.

As we move to modernize our education system, we will make every effort to maintain stability in the classroom for students, parents and teachers. Students will see no immediate changes in their everyday school life, but there will be an increased emphasis on engagement, mental health and well-being and better preparing them for whatever path they choose across post-secondary, trades, workforce or entrepreneurship. For parents, their children will go to the same school unless they choose otherwise. Parents will have access to better information on how their children are performing and a stronger voice in the education system.





The Commission identified a sense of urgency in improving student achievement in Manitoba schools. To this end, consultations on the priority actions will commence immediately towards establishing a transformation roadmap by September 2021. We share the Commission's optimism for improvement in student achievement and for the future of education in this province. This must become the shared mission of all those involved in the education system. This can only be accomplished if all educational partners work together and maintain the focus on putting students first.

# INTRODUCTION

## ***The Commission on K to 12 Education***

In January 2019, the province announced a nine-member Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education to conduct a comprehensive review of the province's K to 12 system. The Commission's mandate was broad, focusing on improving student outcomes, closing achievement gaps, creating long-term sustainability and enhancing public confidence. The review was intended to create an education system for Manitoba to become the most improved education system in Canada.

The Commission was tasked with conducting public consultations and drawing from research and best practices to propose a new vision for K to 12 education and making recommendations aligned to their mandate.

The Commission received 2,309 written submissions, 62 formal briefs, 8,891 public survey responses and 1,260 teacher survey responses while 159 educators submitted best practices, 1,690 people participated in public workshops and 137 students participated in student focused workshops.

The Commission submitted its final report, *Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future*, to the Minister of Education in early March 2020. The 75 recommendations of the Commission represent the most extensive reform of Manitoba's K to 12 education system in decades and are organized around 10 imperatives for action.

## ***The Impact of COVID-19***

The Commission's report arrived just as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in our province. The release was postponed to shift attention to protecting the health and safety of Manitobans. By the end of March 2020, Manitoba Education had suspended in-class learning and resources were focused on minimizing the impact of school closures for over 200,000 students and planning for a safe return to in-class learning as soon as possible. Out of necessity, the whole education system adapted and transformed at an accelerated pace.

Reflecting on the past year, we have witnessed enormous commitment and dedication across the entire education system. We also acknowledge the toll the pandemic has had on all members of the school community from students and parents to teachers, staff and principals. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the context of education overnight and clarified the need for change across Manitoba's education system. The pandemic underscored inequities and inconsistencies in our systems but also opened the door to new ways of educating, supporting

### **10 Imperatives for Action**

1. Strengthen Educator Capacity
2. Increase School Leadership Effectiveness
3. Improve Student Engagement & Well being
4. Close the Achievement Gap for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous
5. Commit to Equitable Outcomes for All
6. Ensure Quality in Rural, Northern and Remote
7. Strengthen the Delivery of French Language Education
8. Expand Community Education & Strengthen Public Engagement
9. Improve Foundational Skills
10. Enhance Effectiveness of Governance & Funding

and reaching students. We need to incorporate what we learned through the pandemic to build further innovation and resiliency into our systems. Priority actions outlined in this strategy take these experiences and learnings into consideration, described further in Appendix A.

While the future of education in Manitoba is top of mind, keeping schools safe and open remains a top priority. We are committed to working with families, public health, school leaders and stakeholders to continue operating safe schools during the pandemic. This includes ensuring students have access to the learning supports and resources they need to participate in high-quality education.

## Lessons Learned from COVID-19

1. With 37 different governing bodies it was difficult to be agile and respond quickly, yet that is what Manitobans expected and needed. Combined with longstanding inequities in funding, resources and prioritization, the result was vastly different experiences and resources for parents and students across the province. We need a consistent and unified provincial education system that provides similar levels of service no matter where families live.
2. Parents and caregivers played an important role during COVID-19, yet they struggled to access information about changes and to inform and influence decisions. We must sustain parent engagement by providing consistent tools and processes for them to inform student success at the school level and in the system as a whole.
3. A lack of consistent, province-wide data made real-time planning and decision making difficult, undermining our ability to innovate and continuously improve and to allocate resources where they are needed most.
4. Inconsistent technology and technological capacity across divisions and schools undermined the ability to teach, learn, innovate, problem solve and maintain human connections in a virtual world in a consistent and reliable way. We must have adequate and consistent technology and internet access across the province, as online learning has a place in our education system and is here to stay.
5. COVID-19 affected student engagement and learning differently, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work now or for the future.
6. Mental health and well-being are important for everyone and must be at the forefront of planning for the school community.
7. Teaching and learning have evolved and can change for the better by bringing the best from this experience forward and continuing to innovate.
8. Our education system is resilient, and we need to build on this as a foundation for modernizing the K to 12 education system.

See Appendix A for more details.



## ***Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First***

The Better Education Starts Today strategy is our government's vision and set of priority actions needed to ensure we are putting Manitoba students first. The vision is for **all Manitoba students to succeed, no matter where they live, their background, or their individual circumstances**. The success of Manitoba's students will continue post-graduation as they move into further education, enter the labour force and begin to build lives and livelihoods as adults here in Manitoba.

Within the next five years, our goal is to ensure our students have the most improved performance in Canada. Working together, we will build a consistent and aligned provincial education system where:

- **Students** receive high-quality education and programming in both English and French to achieve improved outcomes throughout their K-12 education and beyond.
- **Parents\*** have a stronger voice in decisions at their school, more involvement in system oversight and better information about their child's performance.
- **Teachers and staff** have professional knowledge, tools and resources to deliver high-quality learning and prepare our students for a rapidly changing world.
- **School leaders** are supported in their role as education leaders, building a learning community, supporting teachers, improving student performance and engaging parents.
- **The education system** provides responsive and consistent services across the province to close gaps in recruitment and IT and is accountable for results
- **Schools** receive funding that is fair and sustainable, directed to where it is needed most, and provide more opportunities and supports to all students in Manitoba no matter where they live.

\*Please note: In this document, the word "parent" is used broadly to refer not just to parents but to guardians, caregivers and other family members who help children learn both at home and school.

# Four Pillars for Student Success



## GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

Build a consistent and aligned provincial education system that is accountable for results and engages parents.



## HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING AND OUTCOMES

Improve learning and outcomes for all students across the province through high and measurable standards of excellence.



## FUTURE-READY STUDENTS

Engage students and build competencies for lifelong success.



## EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Ensure teachers, school staff and leaders have the knowledge, skills and tools to support student performance.

# PILLAR 1: GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

To improve student outcomes, we first need to build an education system that is consistent and aligned across the province. Many of the Commission's recommendations call for increased system capacity, clear expectations for those delivering education and accountability to all taxpayers. Our current system is complex, with multiple levels of bureaucracy that result in a great deal of variation in standards, programming and resources depending on where families live. Manitoba needs a unified system that reduces disparities while responding to local needs.

## *What Will Success Look Like?*

- ✓ 37 elected regional school boards unified into 15 regions (plus DFSM) by July 1, 2022.
- ✓ Resources shifted to classrooms by reducing administrative costs to be in line with other provinces.
- ✓ School Community Councils established for all schools by 2023.
- ✓ School-level assessment data available to all local school communities to identify areas for improvement and to inform decision making locally and provincially.
- ✓ Resources distributed more equitably across regions and schools by moving the funding model away from reliance on education property taxes starting in 2023.

## *A Special Note to Students and Parents*

There will be no immediate changes in every day school life. Policies for school catchment and school of choice remain the same. Over time, the goal is to move decision making closer to students by strengthening the role schools play in the overall system, giving parents more voice, and shifting more resources to the classroom where they are needed most.

### **1.1 Implement a new provincial governance model that is coordinated, accountable and engages parents at the school level and in the design and oversight of the overall education system**

The Commission highlighted that schools and parents have important roles in student learning and achievement. Yet, Manitoba's education system has multiple layers of bureaucracy with little school-level governance and no formal voice for parents. This complex system with 37 school boards also makes rapid and coordinated response difficult—as we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. Manitoba has the highest number of school divisions and trustees, per capita, of all the provinces. There are 54 trustees in Winnipeg alone, compared to 22 in Toronto, seven in Calgary and nine in Edmonton. With the eventual phase out of education taxes, as well as the move towards central bargaining, this complex system is no longer necessary.

A new provincial governance model will be implemented by July 1, 2022, that will streamline administrative functions while providing strong parental involvement at the school level, as well as in the design and oversight of the overall education system (see Appendix B). Manitoba upholds our commitment to protecting Charter rights for minority education by maintaining the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) and its governance body.



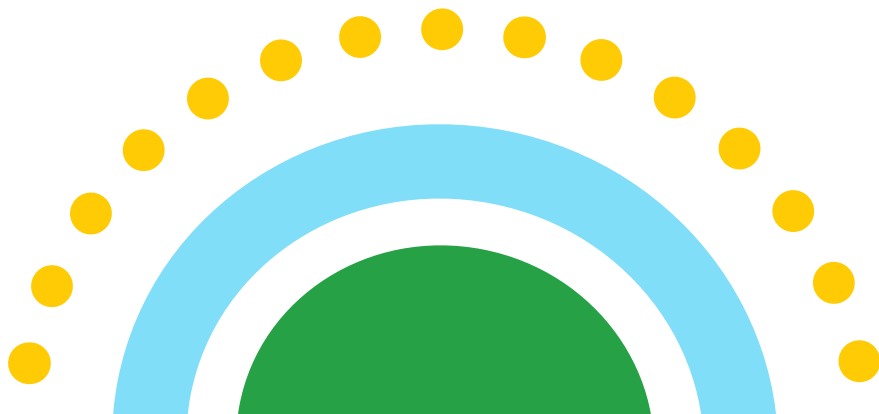


## Priority Actions

- Establish a new **Education Act** to serve as the foundation for change in K to 12 education by creating the system capacity and coherence needed for improved outcomes.
- Unify **37 elected regional school boards** into 15 regions, plus Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM).
- Retain two boards to oversee the delivery of education: a newly created **Provincial Education Authority** (appointed members) and the DSFM (elected trustees).
- Develop a **Provincial Advisory Council on Education** comprised of 16 elected representatives reporting to the Minister.
- Engage parents by establishing **School Community Councils** in every school and providing funding for each council.
- **Transform the Department of Education** to focus its role on providing policy direction and leadership for the system.
- Redirect dollars from operational efficiencies back to the classroom as part of our **Education Funding Guarantee**.

## Other Actions

- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of those responsible for an effective, efficient and accountable K to 12 education system.
- Publish annual school improvement plans focused on student achievement and well-being, developed by the principal with the school community.



## 1.2 Develop a fair and sustainable funding model

Manitoba needs a fair and sustainable funding model. We are the only province to set taxes at the school division level. This means some divisions collect more revenue than others. Since education property taxes comprise 42% of all education funding it leads to disparities in funding for schools and outcomes for students. While funding was outside the mandate of the Commission, financial accountability and funding discrepancies came up during the consultations. The Commission recommended moving away from education property taxes completely, and heard strong calls for greater system equity, highlighted by differences in programming and supports across the province.

The new model will simplify funding to schools, better support specialized learning needs, and create predictability in funding. This will support planning and provide flexibility to school and regional leaders to address local needs.

### Priority Actions

- Develop a **new provincial funding model** that is fair, transparent and sustainable.

## 1.3 Enhance performance measurement, data and analytics to drive results

We spend over \$58 million annually on Information Technology in our education system, and still we cannot easily access provincial data on key outcomes, attendance and other system performance measures. A unified technology system is needed to inform decision making around resources, supports and programming. Even a modest 20% savings will provide \$11 million that can be towards our improvement efforts. A consolidated system will collect information to show how schools and districts are performing. Schools can use the results to identify areas for improvement and build their annual school improvement plans in consultation with School Community Councils. This will contribute to a more transparent K to 12 system that is focused on continuous improvement.

### Priority Actions

- Undertake scoping for a provincial **Student Information System**.
- Develop a **provincial data and performance measurement strategy** that will measure, monitor and report on key outcomes for all students related to achievement, engagement and satisfaction.
- Launch a **provincial survey** for students, their parents and staff regarding their school experience to inform school plans and broader decision making.

### Other Actions

- Explore how emerging technologies and the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) may be used to create efficiencies within the K to 12 system.
- Create a common identifier number for every student to track their performance and pathways throughout their K to 12 education and into the post-secondary system.
- Build a user-friendly public platform with access to data and information that schools and regions can use for strategic planning on the outcomes of the school system.



## PILLAR 2: HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING AND OUTCOMES

The Commission's consultations highlighted the importance of foundational knowledge and problem-solving skills students need to learn, work and succeed in a rapidly changing and uncertain world. This imperative has been magnified throughout COVID-19. High and measurable standards for learning outcomes, system-wide curriculum implementation, and more rigorous student assessment are required for all students to realize their potential as they engage in advanced education and the labour market.

### What Will Success Look Like?

- ✓ Manitoba moves from among the lowest performing provinces on national and international assessments to the most improved.
- ✓ 100% of schools have improved their student scores for literacy and numeracy and have developed clear plans for supporting all learners.
- ✓ The achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is the most improved in the country.
- ✓ Students with special learning needs receive timely assessment, learning supports and clinical services.
- ✓ Parents are more informed about their students' learning and outcomes and receive information about broader system performance.

### 2.1 Strengthen curriculum implementation and renewal with a focus on literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy skills are the foundation of better educational outcomes, economic well-being and social inclusion. Performance in Manitoba has much room for improvement. Based on provincial assessment, only 64% of students are meeting expectations in literacy, falling short of the province's target of 75%, with numeracy sitting much lower at 55%.

To improve student outcomes, the Commission recommended focusing on deep implementation of the existing K to 12 curriculum, including a focus on foundational knowledge, skills and abilities students should have when they finish high school to be able to transition to advanced education, employment or other opportunities. Deep implementation requires consistent application and support for evidence-based teaching practices. While we acknowledge that a focus on implementation is key, it is clear from the consultations that curriculum updates also are needed for relevant, modern and effective learning.

### Priority Actions

- Appoint a **Provincial Curriculum Advisory Panel** to provide input into the direction of the provincial curriculum.
- Develop a **new provincial curriculum framework** that includes clear and measurable standards for what students are expected to learn.
- Focus system resources towards **curriculum implementation** and learning at the classroom level, with a distinct focus on four official school programs: English, Français, French Immersion and Senior Years Technology.
- Launch a **Teachers' Idea Fund** to promote creativity and innovation in responding to the impacts of COVID-19, as well as contributing to the improvement of the K to 12 system.

## Other Actions

- Develop a new K-10 Science Curriculum Framework.
- Review the curriculum and credit requirement for Physical Education/Health Education for Grade 11 and 12.
- Revise the French Immersion curriculum policy to provide concrete, actionable steps schools can take to fully implement the French Immersion program.
- Examine how to expand successful projects piloted during the pandemic, including the use of technology to integrate French culture in classrooms.
- Communicate curriculum and learning outcomes to parents and caregivers to support their active involvement in their child's learning.
- Review course credit designations and graduation requirements for high school courses, including the "E" designation of courses, designed to assist students in the early stages of learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) to make the transition into regular Senior Years courses.
- Include EAL and Newcomer Education perspectives (language, literacy, and cultural components) as one of the pillars within the new K to 12 Curriculum Framework so that all curriculum will embed language, literacy and cultural components.

## 2.2 Improve student assessment and reporting

Student assessment provides information about a student's knowledge and skills in relation to specific learning outcomes defined by curriculum. Teachers use this information to identify strengths and areas for improvement and engage parents and students as part of the learning. There are two major forms of assessment, one is not effective without the other:

- Formative assessment monitors student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by teachers to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning.
- Summative assessment evaluates student learning at the end of an instructional unit or term by comparing it against a benchmark.

Currently in Manitoba, formative assessments measure students' reading and numeracy skills in Grades 3/4 and Grades 7/8. Grade 12 students demonstrate their learning on provincially set summative assessments in language arts and mathematics. The most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results are cause for concern. Manitoba consistently ranks among the lowest across Canada on national and international student assessments for reading, math and science. In the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 15-year-old students in Manitoba were below the Canadian average, ranking ninth out of 10 provinces in reading and ranking last in math. Just two years prior, Manitoba's Grade 8 students had ranked last in math on the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP). Manitoba dropped 35 points in reading between 2000 and 2018, 51 points for math scores and 38 points for science.

***"For us as Commissioners, this is not the time for excuses or continued explanations about the performance of Manitoba's students. We know they can do better. It is time to pay attention to the objective assessments that currently exist and to put in place the recommendations to bring about improvement"*** (pg. 32).

### Priority Actions

- Implement **new provincial summative assessments** at Grades 3 or 4, 6 or 7, and 10, with school-level data made available to local school communities.
- Implement a **provincial report card for students with special needs** to measure progress in both academic and non-academic domains.

### Other Actions

- Strengthen the implementation of classroom-based formative assessments and using provincial report card data to measure outcomes and the competencies needed for life.
- Increase access and transparency to provincial, regional and school-level aggregate outcomes data such as provincial tests and report card data.

## 2.3 Shift resources to enhance learning and inclusion in the classroom

Manitoba has incorporated a strong philosophy of inclusion within its educational system. Educators, students, and parents alike have embraced the opportunities afforded, but there is much opportunity for improvement.

*"[I]t is vitally important for our society that kids like [my son] are included in their schools and treated with dignity. Kids who see this happening grow into adults who have never questioned that all people have value to contribute. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that this is not the case."* (Parent Brief)

COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of student-specific planning and the need to ensure students with special learning needs are well understood across various spectrums: exceptional learning, social/emotional, behavioural, sensory, physical, cognitive/intellectual, communication, academic or special health-care needs. Improving our system will include a strategic redirection of education resources to the front lines of the system—individual classrooms—where they will have the greatest impact on changing student outcomes. The consultations suggest that more dialogue is needed to inform future investments and approaches.

*"More PD for teachers and school leaders. Better university programming to prepare student teachers to plan for and assess a real classroom of students, and more practical experience with things like guided reading and math groups. More EA support for classrooms."* (Public survey)

### Priority Actions

- Establish a new **Minister's Advisory Council on Inclusive Education** to revitalize Manitoba's philosophy of inclusion, with a mandate to identify professional learning needs and enhanced classroom-level supports, as well as strategies to ensure timely assessment, learning supports and clinical services.

### Other Actions

- Review and modernize special education certificates granted by Manitoba Education to re-affirm the provincial philosophy of inclusion and to reflect current and future system needs.
- Define a comprehensive approach to early and ongoing identification and intervention in reading, writing and math to solidify the foundational skills necessary for future learning.
- Enhance collaboration among teachers, student services professionals and parents to facilitate early and ongoing identification of learning needs and appropriate supports for children and youth with special needs, including the most effective use and deployment of educational resources.



## 2.4 Increase achievement and outcomes for Indigenous students

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called upon jurisdictions to close the achievement gap and strengthen student pathways for Indigenous students. In Manitoba, 51% of Indigenous students graduate on time compared to 90% of non-Indigenous students. The Commission report highlighted the “predictive power of these outcomes is considerably higher for Indigenous students who can expect their likelihood of graduating ‘on-time’ to increase seven-fold if they pass Grade 9 mathematics and language arts in their first year of high school” (pg. 30). Improving outcomes for Indigenous students and advancing reconciliation will require dedicated efforts.

Learning environments for Indigenous students must infuse culturally and evidence-informed strategies that embed Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Students need to see themselves reflected in the space and in the texts they interact with by incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and being in classrooms. This will build a sense of community for all learners and help close the achievement gap. Indigenous curriculum should include First Nations, Métis and Indigenous histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles and traditional knowledge systems. Additionally, land-based education and the inclusion of Elders and Knowledge Keepers are critical components of the Indigenous curriculum.

### Priority Actions

- Implement an **Indigenous Inclusion Strategy** in partnership with the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council to advance reconciliation and close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and strengthen student pathways to success.
- Create an **Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative** to support student and teacher learning and to promote Indigenous world views in curriculum, programs and parent, family and community engagement.

### Other Actions

- Enhance age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions.
- Embed regular monitoring, analysis and reporting of Indigenous student achievement data as part of provincial student data and reporting.
- Ensure that every principal takes concrete actions to improve the achievement of Indigenous students and includes improvements as part of their annual school plans.

## PILLAR 3: FUTURE-READY STUDENTS

Our schools are key to lifelong success by engaging students in learning, fostering innovation and creativity, as well as supporting transitions while in school and into adulthood. Pathways to further education and employment must reflect student and employer needs. The education system must work with partners to holistically support needs of children and youth, including mental health and wellness and responding to the impacts of poverty on learning.

If K to 12 education provides the foundation for students' lives, then graduation holds the key to the future. Even earlier, Grade 9 credit attainment is a key determinant of a student's likelihood of completing high school. In 2017/18, Grade 9 credit attainment was 89.5%, below the target of 93% by 2024.

We must improve graduation rates and ensure that more students have the qualifications to enter the labour market or pursue post-secondary education, apprenticeship programs and their selected career pathways. As of 2019, 82% of students graduated; the goal is to improve to 85% by 2024. In particular, we must focus on closing the gap for Indigenous students whose graduation rate is 51%.

### ***What Will Success Look Like?***

- ✓ Students are more engaged and attendance improves.
- ✓ More students have access to provincial online, distance and remote learning platforms.
- ✓ Students are better equipped with the relevant future-ready skills needed to succeed in tomorrow's workplace.
- ✓ Students and the broader school community have access to mental health and well-being resources.
- ✓ By 2024, 85% of students graduate, including a 20% increase among Indigenous students.
- ✓ More students starting out in French Immersion remain in the French Immersion Program through to Grade 12.
- ✓ More female students, Indigenous students and Francophone students complete high school sciences, calculus, and technology education programs.

### **3.1 Enhance student engagement, mental health and well-being**

Experiencing the connections between learning and real life, a sense of belonging, feeling valued and being supported are key to student success. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the importance of engagement and well-being on student success and the importance of schools being equipped to provide the necessary supports. Recent experiences with remote learning have shown that, in order to learn, students must be engaged and actively participate in their learning. It also highlights the need for belonging and community and the important role families and schools play in student success and well-being.

The increased demand for mental health supports throughout the pandemic has led to new innovative "non-traditional" and informal approaches to helping families, students, and staff. This includes helplines and resources where people can contact help through texts, chat lines, video conferences and breakout rooms. This spotlight on the importance of mental health will contribute to a comprehensive, holistic strategy for the school community, including mental health promotion and efforts to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues and improve student outcomes.



*"A more holistic approach needs to happen in regards to the mental health of many students."*

(Teacher survey)

### Priority Actions

- Establish a **Provincial Student Advisory Council** to provide youth perspectives, insights and advice to the Minister of Education on topics that are current and emerging for Manitoba K to 12 students.
- Partner with the new department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery to build upon **enhanced mental health programming** introduced during the pandemic.

### Other Actions

- Implement Manitoba Education's new Mental Health and Addictions Curriculum.
- Create French Language student networks to provide opportunities for connections with other French language learners across the province.

## 3.2 Advance intersectoral work on reducing disparities and addressing absenteeism

A good educational foundation from Kindergarten to high school is a pathway to a better life that can break the cycle of poverty and dependence. COVID-19 has underscored the role of schools as community hubs that facilitate a wide range of supports and services that extend beyond classrooms. As eloquently put in the Commission report, "There must be a focus within the educational system on both excellence and equity as these are not polar opposites, but are two sides of the same coin" (pg. 78).

The Commission identified the necessity for the school system to work with others to leverage expertise and resources to address the full scope of student needs and improve attendance and engagement.

*"The biggest challenge I've faced in achieving success in school is actually being there. I know I can do the work and listen to instructions but it's hard to be here sometimes."* (Student comment)

*"If we want our children to have healthy productive lives, if we want our society to benefit from the contribution many of these absent children could make to our society if they had an education, then Manitoba must figure out how to have more of our children attending school regularly."* (Brief)

### Priority Actions

- Establish a taskforce, in connection to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, to examine the linkages between poverty and education and support the implementation of strategies to improve engagement and outcomes for all students.
- Work with intersectoral partners to improve student attendance by designing an action plan, implementing a new provincial attendance policy and developing a system to measure, assess and respond to the root causes that lead to chronic absenteeism, including supporting parents and caregivers in their roles.

### Other Actions

- Review and update Manitoba's Provincial Code of Conduct: Appropriate Interventions and Disciplinary Consequences (2017) and develop a policy on the use of exclusionary practices (i.e., seclusion, suspension, and expulsion) for all students.
- Work across government and with the education system to improve and address gaps in nutrition programming for school-aged children, including how home nutrition programming can support families.

- Explore creative and innovative approaches to expand access to the arts in all schools, including music, visual arts, dance, drama and other value-added community activities, to make it possible for all children to broaden their exploration of career-related and employment-ready experiences.

### 3.3 Support successful student transitions into and throughout K to 12

Schools play a critical role in leveling the playing field for opportunities and supporting students and families to navigate transitions throughout their K to 12 careers. Successful transitions create a sense of well-being and security in the new school environment and help develop positive attitudes and emotions towards school. Effective transition planning incorporates recognition of abilities and ensures continuity of supports necessary for student success. This includes targeted early childhood interventions and strategies that will promote early learning and prevent children from falling behind in the early years.

#### Priority Actions

- Collaborate with First Nations partners to scope options for sharing **high-level student data** to strengthen transitions and mobility between federal (on-reserve) and provincial (off-reserve) education systems.
- Introduce a **consistent and comprehensive approach to early years assessments** with a focus on children entering kindergarten, as well as students who have experienced disrupted learning (e.g., refugees).

#### Other Actions

- Explore intensive language acquisition courses to ensure credits are recognized and support a smooth transition to post-secondary learning.
- Collaborate with First Nations partners to discuss a plan for advancing technology education and technical vocation facilities.
- Renew interdepartmental protocols to guide school transitions including Guidelines for Transitions of Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community (2008) and Early Childhood Transitions to School for Children with Additional Support Needs (2015).
- Adapt Language Arts high school credits to respond to current needs for newcomers, refugees, and other youth who have had their learning interrupted.

### 3.4 Build pathways to post-secondary education, training and employment

For Manitoba's students to compete and excel they require educational and training opportunities that are current, engaging and responsive to labour market needs. Evolving labour markets and the demand for a highly skilled workforce will require Manitoba to re-evaluate how we prepare students for the future of work. The recent release of Manitoba's Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy identifies ways for students build the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to connect to jobs through access to and completion of post-secondary education, work-integrated learning, career development and technology education in both English and French. These and other strategies will ensure Manitobans have the right skills to contribute to a growing economy and achieve ongoing success. Improved collaboration across K to 12 education, post-secondary institutions, employers, training providers, adult education and government departments will align education opportunities with labour market needs and prepare students for current and future opportunities.

#### Priority Actions

- **Advance Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) skills** through experiential and workplace technical-vocational learning experiences. Work with partners to expand apprenticeship programs, with a specific focus on students in Français and French Immersion programs and those who live in rural and remote communities.

- **Develop new credits and micro-credential programs** to ensure successful transitions from high school to post-secondary and/or to work experience and the labour market, including a focus on digital literacy and digital learning.

### Other Actions

- Embed career development within the K to 12 curriculum to support academic achievement and future-ready skills, skilled trades and technology.
- Enhance guidelines to expand high school work-integrated learning and experiences, industry partnerships and improved safety education for youth employment.
- Explore intensive language acquisition courses to ensure credits are recognized and support a smooth transition to post-secondary learning and employment
- Pilot new initiatives to ensure female students complete high school sciences, calculus and technology education programs.

## 3.5 Build a provincial system of remote learning

While virtual learning was referenced as an extension of learning in the consultations, COVID-19 has accelerated the need to incorporate it in our modern education systems. While many schools and school divisions were already modernizing and integrating technology in innovative ways prior to COVID-19, not all schools were equally ready. Some faced challenges in adapting to remote learning, including students and staff alike. Remote learning can be a tool to respond to individual learning needs and enhance access to programming. Experiences from COVID-19 show us that more work on digital literacy, connectivity and accessible technologies are needed to bridge the digital divide.

### Priority Actions

- Develop a **provincial remote learning strategy** for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Launch a **provincial online high school** in English and French for Grades 9 to 12, including summer school, with an emphasis on increasing the use of technology even when connectivity is a challenge.

### Other Actions

- Explore the continuation of a provincial K to 8 virtual school or learning platform.
- Enhance implementation of the Provincial Remote Learning Framework and principles to guide the ongoing development of remote learning and teaching.





## PILLAR 4: EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

*There is a foundational relationship between high-quality learning, high-performing education systems and high-quality teachers and leaders. "Most helpful thing in achieving success is having teachers who actually care."* (Student comment)

As stated in the Commission's report, educators are preparing the next generation of citizens, leaders, and solution finders which comes "with immense responsibilities and public cries for accountability in the profession" (pg. 9). Efforts to improve Manitoba's education system must ensure that teachers are highly trained before they enter classrooms and engage in quality professional learning throughout their careers.

### What Will Success Look Like?

- ✓ Teachers, staff and school leaders have the professional learning they need for excellence and satisfaction.
- ✓ Teachers are recognized by professional excellence standards and practices.
- ✓ Principals have a focused leadership role within the school community that supports teacher professional learning, parent engagement and student learning.
- ✓ Schools are fully staffed with highly skilled professionals who are representative of and knowledgeable about the school communities they serve.

### 4.1 Establish professional standards and a regulatory framework to guide teacher training and professional practice

Teachers have a high impact on student achievement and outcomes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) claims that the highest performing education systems prioritize the quality of teachers over the size of classes (2018). The standards governing the teaching profession help ensure student protection while promoting quality and excellence within the profession. During its consultations, the Commission heard that the most effective way to recognize teachers as professionals who are accountable to the public is to establish a regulatory body to oversee the profession. There are various practices across the country. Ontario, for example, has a College of Teachers and Saskatchewan currently has the Professional Teachers Regulatory Board. British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia do not. Further consultation and planning are needed to determine the best approach.

### Priority Actions

- Develop **teaching and leadership standards** for professional practice and conduct that will guide teacher education, practice, evaluation and ongoing professional growth.
- Undertake a **review of regulatory frameworks** for strengthening the teaching profession and promoting high standards of teaching and leadership, including professional development, teacher education programs, certifications, fitness to practice, and discipline of certified teachers, including scoping for a Manitoba College of Educators or equivalent regulatory body.

### Other Actions

- Consult on the development of a provincial framework for the ongoing professional development and

evaluation of teachers and school administrators, including observation of teachers by administrators with a requirement for the development of action plans for improvement.

## 4.2 Create a provincial framework for professional learning

Supporting high-quality professional learning for teachers and school staff from pre-service to new hires and ongoing development is essential to improving the education system. During consultations, participants raised questions about the quality and relevance of professional learning for teachers, staff and school leaders. Manitoba Education funds just over \$7 million annually towards professional learning. A framework that builds on the successes of virtual professional learning experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic will expand opportunity and reach more teachers. Best practices for professional learning must be considered, including a strong focus on job-embedded learning, access to on-demand resources, individualized approaches, as well as collaborative planning with colleagues, mentors and instructional coaches through professional learning communities.

A new professional learning framework will address the evolving needs of today's educators, equipping them for the complexities and demands of any Manitoba student community. Areas of focus will include the implementation of specific curricula (e.g., Mathematics, Language Arts, others), transferable competencies students will need upon graduation to be Future-Ready, the competencies and practices required to support students with special needs, human rights, trauma-informed pedagogy, the effective integration of Indigenous content and histories, and teaching English as an Additional Language students.

### Priority Actions

- Conduct a **review of funding designated for professional learning** assessed against best practices, results, and a more flexible model that can be tailored to individual needs.
- Create an **innovative and results-based professional learning framework** that addresses learning needs for school staff across the continuum of pre-service, new hires and ongoing development.
- Provide **sustained professional development for the implementation of K to 8 Mathematics and K to 12 Language Arts curricula**.

### Other Actions

- As part of a professional learning framework, develop and implement a provincial strategy that supports new teachers in the first five years of their career.
- Develop a system to provide all Manitoba teachers the opportunity to experience continuous upskilling in areas of digital literacy.
- Develop effective approaches to enhance teacher development in the area of newcomer/English as an Additional Language (EAL) education in pre-service, first five years, and ongoing learning.
- Explore increased opportunities for on-site practical opportunities for pre-service students.

## 4.3 Enhance school leadership

The role of the principal is second only to the role of teachers in terms of school-related factors that impact student learning. The importance of this role will be enhanced with a new emphasis on school governance and the establishment of school community councils.

The K to 12 Commission speaks to “principal work intensification,” highlighting the complexity of their role as instructional leaders with managerial tasks. As leaders of their school community, principals need to operate clearly within the management domain—removed from the real or perceived conflict of interest that currently exists with management and employees in the same union.

### Priority Actions

- Develop a new **provincial school leadership framework** to strengthen the role of school principals and vice principals as instructional and school leaders who are well equipped to support diverse school community needs, engage parents and drive improvement at their schools.
- Work with principals and vice-principals to facilitate their **ongoing professional learning** needs.
- **Remove principals and vice-principals from teacher bargaining units** while including an option for returning to classroom teaching to remain in the teacher union and thereby protect their seniority, pension, benefits and other entitlements.

### Other Actions

- Explore the supports principals need to be successful in their role as education leaders including a review of business functions at the school level, including maintenance, operations, accounting and financial roles of principals to enable them to focus on school leadership, teaching, learning, parent and community engagement, school management and school effectiveness.
- Review and bring forward recommendations for the annual school improvement plan.

## 4.4 Focus on recruitment, retention and workforce planning

We need to build up our education workforce to support better student outcomes. Workforce disparities exist throughout the province at all levels of the education system from teachers with subject area specialities, Indigenous and French language teachers, school leaders, clinicians, trained support staff and certified bus drivers. The Commission highlighted specific demands in the industry for an increase in math, chemistry, physics and French educators in particular. A strategy is needed to address these workforce gaps so all students have equitable access to resources and programming across the province. Efforts to attract and retain professionals who both work and live in rural and northern regions must be a priority, including the exploration of further incentives and recruitment strategies.

### Priority Actions

- Work across governments, faculties of education and within the K to 12 system to create a **comprehensive school staff recruitment and retention strategy** to address workforce needs in rural, remote and northern communities, and address limited supplies of French language and Indigenous languages teachers.
- Coordinate enhanced **training opportunities for Educational Assistants**, including French Educational Assistant certification.
- Establish a **provincial table teacher bargaining framework**.

### Other Actions

- Explore the use of math specialists in schools to improve numeracy learning and performance.

## CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD

While the path is set for the governance structure to be implemented by July 1, 2022, other aspects of the plan will require further engagement with students, parents, teachers, staff, school leaders, education stakeholders, post-secondary institutions, members of the First Nations School System, other indigenous organizations, Manitoba's Francophone community, community groups, municipalities, Hutterian colonies and the larger business community.

To kick off the development of a full *Better Education Starts Today* roadmap to be released by September 2021, we are taking immediate action as follows:

- Consulting with parents, existing advisory councils and schools on the role parents can and should play in general, and on School Community Councils specifically.
- Consulting with the school community and education stakeholders on priority actions.
- Issuing calls for proposals for larger scale initiatives, including curriculum implementation, updates to the provincial assessment framework and developing a new funding model.

The Commission identified a sense of urgency in improving student achievement in Manitoba schools. This must become the shared mission of all those involved in the education system. Becoming the most improved education system in Canada will not happen overnight, and government cannot do it alone. The pandemic has shown the important role all stakeholders play in ensuring successful learning and outcomes for students.

We thank the Commission members for their hard work and dedication as they set out a path towards improving educational outcomes in Manitoba. We share the Commission's optimism for improvement in student achievement and for the future of education in this province. **Our children's success is indeed Manitoba's future. We are ready for the change.**

**For more information, please visit [www.bettereducationmb.ca](http://www.bettereducationmb.ca)**



# APPENDIX A: ONE YEAR LATER: LEARNING FROM COVID-19 TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

## Overview

COVID-19 has drastically changed the way we work, learn, and interact with others. Schools are no exception. The impact of school closures and disrupted learning has been significant since schools serve the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of children. Schools also serve as integral sources of support and community hubs, especially for those living in vulnerable circumstances, those experiencing mental health challenges or those with special learning needs. The pandemic has reminded us of the important economic role schools play, not only in educating the future workforce, but also in enabling parents and caregivers to work.

This past year has pushed the education system to adapt and innovate at an accelerated pace. Throughout this unprecedented time, we have witnessed enormous commitment and dedication among education stakeholders and partners. We must also recognize the toll it has had on all members of the school community and, therefore, must find ways to sustain improvement and restore where needed.

Informed by our engagement with our system partners over the course of the pandemic, the following are key lessons learned from COVID-19 that will help to inform and shape the future of education:

1. With 37 different governing bodies it was difficult to be agile and respond quickly, yet that is what Manitobans expected and needed. Combined with longstanding inequities in funding, resources and prioritization, the result was vastly different experiences and resources for parents and students across the province. We need a consistent and unified provincial education system that provides similar levels of service no matter where families live.
2. Parents and caregivers played an important role during COVID-19, yet they struggled to access information about changes and to inform and influence decisions. We must sustain parent engagement by providing consistent tools and processes for them to inform student success at the school level and in the system as a whole.
3. A lack of consistent, province-wide data made real-time planning and decision making difficult, undermining our ability to innovate and continuously improve and to allocate resources where they are needed most.
4. Inconsistent technology and technological capacity across divisions and schools undermined the ability to teach, learn, innovate, problem solve and maintain human connections in a virtual world in a consistent and reliable way. We must have adequate and consistent technology and internet access across the province, as online learning has a place in our education system and is here to stay.
5. COVID-19 affected student engagement and learning differently, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work now or for the future.
6. Mental health and well-being are important for everyone and must be at the forefront of planning for the school community.
7. Teaching and learning have evolved and can change for the better by bringing the best from this experience forward and continuing to innovate.
8. Our education system is resilient, and we need to build on this as a foundation for modernizing the K to 12 education.

## Key Lessons Learned

1. **With 37 different governing bodies it was difficult to be agile and respond quickly, yet that is what Manitobans expected and needed. Combined with longstanding inequities in funding, resources and prioritization, the result was vastly different experiences and resources for parents and students across the province. We need a consistent and unified provincial education system that provides similar levels of service no matter where families live.**

In spite of a strong commitment to work together the complex structure of education in Manitoba made this time challenging. Throughout the pandemic, there have been calls for consistent communication and provincial standards. Once the standards are set, we can focus on student learning, instead of navigating uncertainties. The pandemic highlighted that system-level planning is needed to address long-standing disparities created by out-of-date funding models, recruitment challenges and differential access to resources in rural, northern, and remote communities. A unified system working together in the best interests of Manitoba will help us achieve results beyond the pandemic.

While more consistency is required, this should be balanced with local flexibility. We saw benefits when school systems and school leaders were able to identify the needs for their local community and develop strategies in response to these needs. This highlights the central role that schools play and the need to ensure strong school leadership to put students first.

2. **Parents and caregivers played an important role during COVID-19, yet they struggled to access information about changes and to inform decisions. We must sustain parent engagement by providing consistent tools and processes for them to inform student success at the school level and in the system as a whole.**

Parental involvement in education is vital to building a nurturing, safe and engaging learning environment for children both in the home and in the classroom. Research is clear that parent engagement leads to student success. Throughout the pandemic, parents and caregivers have taken on a bigger role supporting their children's learning at home while balancing changes in their own work and personal lives. The use of technology has made parent engagement more accessible and flexible for many (e.g., virtual parent-teacher conferences and apps shared with students and parents alike). However, there are areas for improvement, most notably for parents of French Immersion students. Parents struggled to access information about changes and to inform and influence decisions. Parents have shown that they have a lot to contribute and the pandemic has reinforced the vital role they play in creating nurturing, safe and engaging learning environments. We must provide consistent tools and processes for parents to continue their engagement with education.

### Parents have an important collective voice in education

In June 2020, 30,538 parents participated in an online school re-entry survey to share their views on students returning to in-class learning and experiences with the spring 2020 remote learning.

3. **A lack of consistent, province-wide data made real-time planning and decision making difficult, undermining our ability to innovate and continuously improve and to allocate resources where they are needed most.**

Reliable, relevant and accessible student data is key to effective decision making. Existing data limitations resulted in multiple, siloed and labour-intensive requests to schools and school divisions in efforts to understand the health of our system and the impacts of changes implemented throughout the pandemic. This made timely



and effective decision making difficult. There was also demand from the public for transparent information, yet much of the time information was only available at the school or division level. We need a consolidated system to collect information to show communities how their schools and divisions are performing, whether it is focussed on the health of the system or student outcomes and attendance. This will contribute to a more transparent K to 12 system across the province that is focused on improvement and help build public confidence.

**4. Inconsistent technology and technological capacity across divisions and schools undermined the ability to teach, learn, innovate, problem solve and maintain human connections in a virtual world in a consistent and reliable way. We must have adequate and consistent technology and internet access across the province, as online learning has a place in our education system and is here to stay.**

While many schools and school divisions across the province were well on their way to modernizing and integrating technology in innovative ways before the arrival of COVID-19, not all schools were on equal footing, and some have faced challenges in adapting to remote learning.

In addition to highlighting our reliance on in school and face-to-face delivery of education, the pandemic has alerted us to how much technology can enable remote and online learning. It is also clear that there are opportunities to see system efficiencies by developing a single, provincial model of remote learning versus duplicating efforts across the system.

Early in the suspension of in-class learning, a scan across school divisions of the number of students with limited or no technology revealed that approximately 6 percent of the student population had technology challenges. This represents over 10,000 students. In Northern school divisions, this percentage increased to 33 percent.

It is clear that connectivity and access to technology critically affect the ability to teach, learn, innovate, and maintain connections. As education systems are adapting to new realities in the face of COVID-19, remote learning is quickly becoming an integral part of modern education. While technology will never replace a teacher, it can augment teacher effectiveness and there is a role for technology for both at home learning and in the classroom.

The experience of the pandemic demonstrated that access to technology and the Internet is essential to ensuring equity in education. When students do not have adequate access to technology, it affects their remote learning experience and their engagement in their learning. Access to technology will continue

to be an essential part of student learning post-COVID-19, which means that all students will need reliable access. Bridging the digital divide will also require greater emphasis on digital literacy.

This digital divide was also evident across teachers and school staff. The shift to remote learning in the spring highlighted immediate needs to increase professional learning related to online platforms and effective remote learning approaches. Many needed to overcome steep learning curves of their own before confidently providing meaningful remote learning experiences and assessment to students. While more staff are aware of their potential, ongoing investments and supports are required.

Despite the rocky start to remote learning in the spring of 2020, and persistent challenges related to access and connectivity, online learning has worked well in many ways for many students. Remote learning has provided new opportunities for students to work with their teachers on learning plans that reflect their home learning environments and individual needs. Online options provide greater flexibility and enhanced access to programming.

While we will never remove the need for in-person learning, particularly hands on learning with peers and educators, expanding access and capacity for high-quality remote learning improves our resilience moving out of the pandemic and provides greater flexibility and opportunity for student engagement.

**5. COVID-19 affected student engagement and learning differently, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work now, or for the future.**

Notwithstanding the resilience of Manitoba educators and students, COVID-19 disruptions have had an impact on student learning. There was a loss of instructional time because of school closures in the spring of 2020 and the need to implement remote and blended learning strategies in the current school year in order to achieve health and safety measures.

Given the critical role that schools play in the lives of students, families and communities, school closures and disruptions have had far-reaching consequences. The pandemic has also shone a light on pre-existing inequities, displaying them more clearly than ever before and in some cases exacerbating them.

Changes in the way learning occurs and varied student engagement during this time means that the impacts on learning have varied considerably. As a result, understanding the impacts of COVID-19 must be student-specific so that recovery learning can be responsive to the needs of individual students. Going forward, listening to and effectively engaging students in how best to meet their needs will be critical to helping them succeed. We also need a specialized focus on advancing French language education priorities, as well as addressing the disparities affecting indigenous students, newcomers, and children living in poverty.

It became evident early in the pandemic that, regardless of the level of restrictions, students with special learning needs and those at risk, needed the option to attend school in-person to receive the supports and the supervision they need to learn. When students with special needs are learning virtually or outside of the school setting it can be very difficult for educators to deliver the specialized supports they require.

The importance of student-specific planning was amplified, and this highlights the need for the engagement of families in planning. Some opportunities did arise. For example, clinical services such as speech/language therapy benefitted in some ways from remote learning because of the necessity of parents being present during the virtual sessions and thereby increasing parental involvement.

**6. Mental health and well-being are important for everyone and must be at the forefront of planning for the school community.**

Many youths have reported a decrease in their mental health during the pandemic. Children feel isolated without their peers. While in remote learning, students have not had opportunities for day-to-day interactions with their friends, and in-school supports for mental health may have not been as available to them. The social and emotional benefits of schools for children cannot be understated.


**Impact on home schooling enrolment**

Over 4,000 students enrolled representing a 188% increase from 2019/20.

**Impact on Nursery/ Kindergarten enrolment**

28.8% decrease in enrolment in the 2020/21 school year.





Although Manitoba teachers, staff and leaders are very capable and inspiring professionals, many have experienced a toll on their own health and well-being from their struggles to ensure their students continue to receive a quality education. These challenges have reinforced the value of implementing a mental health strategy for students and the entire school community.

COVID-19 has elevated the mental health discourse. Everyone in one way or another has personally felt the effects of isolation, sacrifice, fear, loss or fatigue because of this pandemic. Because of the growing demands for mental health supports, as well as because of the heightened pandemic restrictions, there are new innovative “non-traditional” and “less formal” approaches to helping families, students, and staff to cope with mental health concerns through the pandemic. These include helplines, resources for parents, peer groups, etc., where people can contact help through texts, chat lines, video conferences and breakout rooms. This increased awareness and broader understanding will establish the foundation going forward towards building a more comprehensive mental health strategy for the entire school community.

**7. Teaching and learning have evolved and can change for the better by bringing the best from this experience forward and continuing to innovate.**

Disruptions to in-class learning meant that many schools had to focus teaching on core curriculum, limiting electives and suspending the practical hands-on learning for some courses and programs. COVID-19 has reminded us of the importance of ensuring students have foundational knowledge as well as critical, creative and problem-solving skills necessary to learn, work and live in a rapidly changing world where information and misinformation can be difficult to discern. The ability to adapt to and thrive in different situations, along with persistence, have gained renewed recognition as important life skills during these months of the pandemic. It will be important to reflect on what makes up curriculum, how curriculum is implemented, what changes are needed and how students are assessed to ensure students transition out of school with the skills, knowledge and abilities to face the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow.

The challenges with remote learning reminded us that powerful learning can only happen when we are engaged, energetic and focussed. Manitoba’s new Remote Learning Framework highlights guiding principles for teaching and learning that reflect a commitment to students. Specifically, that student learning and well-being are enhanced when:

- students feel like they belong to a community in which everyone is valued, accepted and supported.
- students have a sense of efficacy in their ability to demonstrate progress and achievement in an online environment.
- students feel a sense of autonomy and responsibility fostered through student voice, self-regulation and metacognition.

With this renewed focus on fostering more engagement in learning and creating opportunities for students to co-create the learning there is plenty of opportunity for innovation to support teaching and learning excellence. A good practice has been to reduce screen time and emphasize learning opportunities that focus on creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and communication. These types of learning opportunities emphasize global competencies—knowing where we fit in the world and how we interact with others to create an inclusive and sustainable future for all.

Planning for a modernized classroom might consider alternatives to the current models of education where student learning is focused in classrooms for hours upon hours with few breaks. Learning is a social endeavour

and opportunities for learning and thinking together along with high yield teaching strategies underscore the importance of the classroom for social interaction with teachers and peers.

As teachers adapted to varying and changing models of blended learning (in-class and remote), the importance of collaborative time to plan with peers has been reinforced. To advance excellence in teaching, we need to rethink how professional learning can be improved, with a focus on learning that is job embedded, on demand, collaborative and individualized. Virtual learning opportunities also ensure that all teachers and staff get professional development opportunities when they need them, rather than waiting for traditional workshop or seminar sessions. Virtual learning opportunities quickly grew and responded to teachers' immediate needs, providing affordable, flexible and accessible options that will continue well beyond the pandemic.

#### **8. Our education system is resilient, and we need to build on this as a foundation for modernizing the K to 12 education.**

In spring 2020, Manitoba's education system pivoted quickly in response to the changing public health situation, and administrators, educators, families, and students quickly prepared for a new way of learning. Quick actions by everyone in the system ensured that students continued to learn. People at different levels stepped up, learned new technologies and processes and became experts on topics they had not heard of pre-COVID-19. COVID-19-related health and safety measures in the classrooms changed everything about what students and families had come to expect.

These experiences pushed people to develop new skills and expand creativity and resourcefulness. Teachers, staff and school leaders provided opportunities for students to connect with one another like creating Minecraft clubs, integrating movement breaks and applying strategies to build student confidence.

The crisis reinforced the value and importance of communication, transparency, collaboration and flexibility among stakeholders within the school system. The resilience and collaboration have been impressive and are a foundation to build upon as we plan for education recovery and a new post-pandemic world.

### **Summary**

The pandemic has highlighted challenges, opportunities, and strengths. Every day throughout the pandemic students, families and teachers have learned to adapt in creative ways to support continued learning and engagement in learning. The value of connectivity, communication, collaboration and cohesive approaches cannot be understated in reflecting on these COVID-19 learnings and will be key in planning for the future. But it goes without saying that we are still in the midst of the pandemic. Our priority must be in operating safe schools so learning can continue. We must continue to work together to:

- protect health and safety for the entire school community
- restore what has been lost
- sustain the things that have changed for the better
- address the challenges that have come to light to build a stronger and future-oriented education system

## APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF NEW GOVERNANCE MODEL

### **New Legislation**

Bill 64, The Education Modernization Act, brings forward significant, needed changes to the education system. A new provincial governance model will be implemented by July 1, 2022, giving time to transition to our new modernized educational system. It will have strong parental involvement at the school level and more student and parental engagement in the design and oversight of the overall education system. The Public Schools Act, which is over 100 years old, requires a rewrite to achieve the transformation proposed for the education system. Bill 64 will establish *The Education Act* that will incorporate the following statutes: *The Public Schools Act*; *The Education Administration Act*; and *The Community Schools Act*.

### **More Parental Engagement and School Community Councils**

In recognition of the importance of local voice in education, Bill 64 incorporates a number of changes to increase parental and community engagement by replacing informal parent councils with a School Community Council (SCC) for every school. The role of the School Community Council is to advise the school principal on school matters, including the needs of the community it serves and strategies for improving student achievement and well-being. All parents and caregivers of that school community will be members and they will elect an executive to work with the principal on matters impacting the school community. This will require a renewed emphasis on engaging parents and communities so that they are reflective of the diversity of schools.

### **Provincial Education Authority**

A Provincial Education Authority will be established to oversee K to 12 education across 15 regions throughout Manitoba, along with a consolidation of shared services like procurement, IT and workforce planning—saving money that will be reinvested directly into classrooms. The Provincial Education Authority Board will report to the Minister and include at least two elected parent representatives appointed by the Minister from the provincial advisory council.

The 15 new regions, plus DSFM, will replace 37 separate school divisions. Once the new governance model has been implemented, the new regions will be as follows:

New Regions	
Winnipeg, St. James-Assiniboia, Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, Seven Oaks and River East Transcona	Garden Valley, Western
Frontier, Kelsey, Flin Flon and Mystery Lake	Evergreen, Lakeshore
Beautiful Plains, Park West, Rolling River	Interlake, Lord Selkirk
Mountain View, Swan Valley, Turtle River	Hanover
Fort La Bosse, Southwest Horizon, Turtle Mountain	Sunrise, Whiteshell
Brandon	Seine River
Portage La Prairie, Pine Creek	Border Land, Red River Valley
Prairie Spirit, Prairie Rose	



Directors of Education will lead the delivery of K-12 education in the 15 newly established regions. They will work as part of a unified system under the Provincial Education Authority, while facilitating regional variation and local voice in the education experience in consultation with their local communities. It is expected that much of the provincial education authority's administrative duties will be carried out by the Director of Education within each region.

### **DSFM**

The Francophone school division will remain as currently structured with additional reporting requirements and new authorities for the Minister of Education. An elected trustee will also be appointed by the DSFM to sit on the provincial advisory council. The department recognizes and respects that the French language is a vital component to Manitoba's francophone community and is committed to meeting its obligations under the Charter to protect minority language rights. By continuing the DSFM governance structure and exempting them from key components of The Education Act and Bill 45, minority language rights under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are properly contemplated in Manitoba's education statutes, including the right to instruction, the right to facilities, the right to a measure of management and control, and the right to an education of a quality comparable to that provided to the majority.

With this future state in mind, Manitoba Education will no longer include direct service delivery. Instead, the department will focus on oversight of the education system, including responsibility for policy, planning, accountability, and funding. The department is already engaged in a process of internal transformation, adjusting roles and responsibilities towards our future state.

### **Provincial Advisory Council on Education**

One member of a School Community Council from each of the 15 regions will be elected to the Provincial Advisory Council for Education, along with an elected trustee from DSFM. This advisory council will provide the Minister of Education with direct parental advice on matters relating to the education system. It will ensure that the Minister is able to take local considerations into system strategic planning and decision making.





***PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST***