



**Submission of the  
Service Employees International Union West  
(SEIU-West)  
to the  
Saskatchewan K-12 Education Review Advisory  
Panel**

**January 23, 2017**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION: WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE CARE ..... 3**

**THE NEED FOR SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION IS NOT CLEAR ..... 4**

**THE BENEFITS OF UNION INVOLVEMENT AND A STABLE LABOUR  
RELATIONS ENVIRONMENT ..... 5**

**SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS MUST BE “ON THE TABLE” ..... 7**

**BEWARE OF THE DOWNSIDES OF MORE CENTRALIZED PROCUREMENT ..... 8**

**ELECTED LOCAL BOARDS RESPECT DIVERSITY AND PROMOTE  
ACCOUNTABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT ..... 9**

**GREATER CENTRALIZATION MAY NOT ENSURE A SAFE AND EFFECTIVE  
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ..... 10**

**CONCLUSION: KEY PRINCIPLES OF K-12 EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE ..... 10**



## INTRODUCTION: WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE CARE

SEIU-West has a significant interest in K-12 education in Saskatchewan and in the outcome of the education governance review or transformation process. We represent nearly 600 education support workers in three school divisions: Southeast Cornerstone SD #209, Chinook SD #211 and Holy Family RCSSD #140. The classifications represented include educational assistants, bus drivers, clerical/administrative staff, custodial/maintenance staff, library technicians and food service personnel. In addition, the mandate of SEIU-West includes a commitment to work “to improve the lives of working people and their families, and lead the way to a more just and humane society.”<sup>1</sup> Equitable access to education is an indispensable part of a just society: we believe that students deserve the supports they need to be successful, regardless of where they live, their income or family status.

Driven by these linked goals of representing our members and working for a just society, we have closely followed the transformational change process as it has unfolded in education, and sought opportunities to have our viewpoint heard by policymakers. We obtained a meeting with Dan Perrins via conference call on November 25, 2016, and at his invitation sent him a follow-up letter on December 2 detailing our views on education governance reform. SEIU-West senior leadership met with Education Minister, the Honourable Don Morgan, on December 16.

We thank the Panel for affording us the opportunity to meet with them in Saskatoon on January 12, and for the friendly and open-minded reception we received.<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge the Panelists’ expertise in and commitment to K-12 education in Saskatchewan, and take them at their word that they have no predetermined agenda of their own nor one imposed on them by the government.

Nevertheless, we approach our written submission to the Panel with understandable trepidation. Since the government first launched its transformational change agenda (which clearly includes this review of K-12 education governance) in spring 2016 official spokespersons, from the Premier to senior Cabinet Ministers to Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers, have been less than forthcoming about it. We and the public have been given vague and inconsistent information about how predetermined the governments intentions are, and whether the main driver of restructuring remains reduction of costs (especially wages) or alternatively, the improvement of patient or student outcomes. We do not want to

<sup>1</sup> SEIU-West. Our Mandate. [www.seiuwest.ca/about/](http://www.seiuwest.ca/about/)

<sup>2</sup> However, we wish to reiterate in writing the concerns we expressed in our meeting with the Panel about Circle Drive Alliance Church (CDAC) as the choice of venue. CDAC’s Facility Rental Policy, (<https://www.cdac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Space-Rental-Policy-CDAC.pdf>) which all renters are asked to read and sign, states that the church will refuse or terminate rentals to “any group whose intended use of the facility opposes...the Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada”. That manual ([www.cmacan.org/uploads/content/cma-manual-2016-3.pdf](http://www.cmacan.org/uploads/content/cma-manual-2016-3.pdf)) includes the following policy statements:

- “Homosexual conduct” is “incompatible with...Scripture...and cannot be condoned.” This includes “any so-called ‘marriage’ with a person of the same sex”.
- Persons who “engage in, or endorse, homosexual conduct or relationships” cannot be ministers or members of an Alliance Church.
- No church staff member “shall, under any circumstances, sanction, bless, conduct, or officially participate in” any same-sex marriage ceremony
- No church facility is to be “used in any way that would result in a [same-sex] marriage or civil union”.

Conducting public consultations about public education in a venue premised on such beliefs is clearly inappropriate. We direct the Panel to the following statement (emphasis added) in the Ministry of Education’s 2015 document *Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity*:

*The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to ensuring schools are safe and inclusive environments where student success is a priority and everyone feels included, protected and respected. It is well known that when students do not feel safe or valued, it undermines their learning and well-being. Education in Saskatchewan is founded on a principle of respect for the diversity of all students and families.* ([http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/84995-Deepening%20the%20Discussion\\_Saskatchewan%20Ministry%20of%20Education%20Oct%202015%20FINAL.pdf](http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/84995-Deepening%20the%20Discussion_Saskatchewan%20Ministry%20of%20Education%20Oct%202015%20FINAL.pdf))

We acknowledge that in some smaller communities in Saskatchewan a church-run facility may be the only available option for public meetings. However, that is clearly not the case in Saskatoon.



be seen as endorsing a process that we regard as flawed and rushed, nor to have our words selectively parsed to legitimize a predetermined outcome that is inimical to our goals of a just and humane society.

In the following sections we offer specific suggestions of matters we hope will be addressed in the Panel's final report. In recognition of the Panel's mandate "to provide findings to the Minister in relation to options presented in Perrins' Report"<sup>3</sup> our suggestions generally flow from, and often rebut, the assumptions and suggestions made in Dan Perrins' report<sup>4</sup> to the Minister of Education.

## **THE NEED FOR SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION IS NOT CLEAR**

A statement originally attributed to Hippocrates advises physicians, "Above all, do no harm."<sup>5</sup> This is sound advice for policymakers as well. Those who propose "transformational change" to the policy status quo have a duty to provide a compelling case for why change is needed, and compelling evidence that the change they propose will likely address that need.<sup>6</sup> The duty is especially strong if, as in K-12 education, children are the main targets of the policy.

We respectfully submit that, despite his efforts, Mr. Perrins' report does not discharge this duty.

His case for change, in essence, is that under the K-12 system as currently structured:

- Though steadily improving, student outcomes are not improving fast enough
- Costs are not being adequately contained (lack of "broad-based efficiencies")
- Local school boards vary too much in:
  - how they spend/allocate their provincial grants
  - in their governance style ("strategic" vs. "managerial")
  - in their "knowledge and competencies"

He is not clear enough about the causal relationship among these issues, nor about whether his recommendations will effectively address them. Above all, he understates the extent to which these issues can be addressed without the need to overhaul the *Education Act*<sup>7</sup> or current school division boundaries.

To support his claim that the current structure is failing to improve student outcomes, Perrins relies heavily on the fact that Saskatchewan students' performance on some assessment tests "continues to lag behind other Canadian provinces." (13) He does not explain whether or how this inter-provincial difference is linked to inter-divisional differences in "staffing decisions...programs offered and...supports provided." (14) Where is the evidence that greater uniformity is necessary to improve outcomes (even by this narrow measure of outcome), or that the requisite level of uniformity can only be achieved by major changes to legislation and boundaries? The short answer is that there is no evidence to this effect.

Perrins claims that "the legislation does not clearly outline a duty or power" for the Ministry to set uniform standards and outcomes for Boards, or to ensure that the standards are met. We respectfully disagree: sections 3 (responsibility of Minister), 4 (powers of Minister), and 370(1) (Cabinet's powers to make regulations) give government an array of general and specific tools to direct and monitor the

<sup>3</sup> Government of Saskatchewan. Share your thoughts on the K-12 Education Governance Review [no date].

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/public-consultations/share-your-thoughts-on-the-k-12-education-governance-review>

<sup>4</sup> Perrins D. Educational Governance Review Report—Kindergarten to Grade 12. (December 2016)

<http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/96975-Perrins-Governance-Review-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Smith CM. Origins and uses of *primum non nocere*—Above all, do no harm. *The Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 45:4 (April 2005). 371-77.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion see Rossi PH, Lipsey MW, Freeman HE. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> *Education Act, 1995*, SS 1995, c E-0.2, <http://canlii.ca/t/52jhg>

Boards. Note in particular section 3(1): “The minister is responsible for all matters not by law assigned to any other minister, department, branch or agency of the Government of Saskatchewan relating to elementary and secondary education”.

Perrins claims that the K-12 system is “challenged to achieve broad-based efficiencies” (14). However, his discussion of this challenge mentions several largely voluntary, collaborative, successful efforts by local boards to find efficiencies. He also notes that his “recent conversations with boards indicate strong commitment to seeking efficiencies” (15). Perrins does not explain why these efforts are inadequate to the point that system-wide transformation of structure and governance is required.

Perrins notes that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association and the 19 local boards that contacted him were unanimous on the following:

- Elected school boards are the only effective way to ensure local voices are heard
- Further amalgamation will not save money or improve student outcomes<sup>8</sup>
- Significant restructuring would stall the Education Sector Strategic Planning process, which has been in place for just two years and is just beginning to bear fruit
- Further “sector-wide efficiencies” could be achieved through voluntary collaboration among Boards and additional direction from government

SEIU-West endorses these points, all of which speak to the value and untapped potential of the current system.

All Saskatchewan students deserve the opportunity to succeed regardless of where they live. This is best achieved through local school boards, possessed of sufficient authority and autonomy to be responsive to local needs. This will entail, indeed require, a certain amount of local diversity in what Perrins calls the students’ “educational experience” (14).

## **THE BENEFITS OF UNION INVOLVEMENT AND A STABLE LABOUR RELATIONS ENVIRONMENT**

In the past year senior government spokespersons have been remarkably disingenuous about the labour relations (LR) impacts of transformational change. Most notably, in response to direct questions from the press and labour leaders, Finance Minister Kevin Doherty and Education Minister Morgan (who is also Deputy Premier and the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety) have claimed that they have not yet fully considered the LR implications, and/or have no particular LR plan or desired LR outcomes from health and education sector restructuring.<sup>9</sup> We respectfully submit that it is difficult to take these assurances seriously, and difficult to reconcile them with remarks by the Premier and Finance Minister about the supposed need to freeze public sector wages or rollback negotiated terms of collective agreements such as seniority and sick leave benefits.<sup>10</sup> Clearly the governance and structural changes contemplated by Mr. Perrins have significant, easily foreseeable LR implications. However, his

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that, as data presented in Perrins’ report shows, the last round of school division mergers in 2006 left Saskatchewan with the smallest number of school boards in Western Canada (18 public, 28 total)--significantly fewer than Manitoba (37), which has a comparable student population.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. remarks made by Minister Doherty in media scrum at legislature on January 18, 2017: “We have no end game to create infighting between unions and school divisions”.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Sask. government orders entire public service to cap employee compensation. CBC News. Jan. 16, 2017.

[www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/school-boards-tighten-belts-reduce-deficit-1.3937578](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/school-boards-tighten-belts-reduce-deficit-1.3937578) ; Mandryk M. Saskatchewan government's transformational change agenda requires bottom-up discussions. Leader-Post, June 7, 2016.

<http://leaderpost.com/opinion/columnists/saskatchewan-governments-transformational-change-agenda-requires-bottom-up-discussions>



report makes just two brief mentions of these implications: first, he notes that each division has “a number of locally negotiated employment contracts,” and that there will therefore need to be “a process to understand and review those contracts” (19). Later, in his list of “Challenges” associated with his “Option 1—Provincial Model” he notes that there may be “substantial” “implementation costs...with relation to combining negotiated agreements” (23).

We submit that he did not give those implications the full discussion and explanation they warrant. Above all, he did not adequately acknowledge unions’ role as stakeholders and partners in the delivery of education. The unions representing education sector workers are key stakeholders in the K-12 education sector, and share with their respective employers and the government a commitment to work together in support of Better Results, Better Experience, and Better Value for our province’s students, families, and communities.

In his letter of Transmittal Perrins lists SEIU-West among the “32 stakeholders who approached me for a conversation”, but missed the opportunity to note the essential similarity between our main arguments and those of the SSBA and school boards. In a section headed “Other Partners in Education”, he discusses the mandate and role of SSBA, STF, LEADS, SASBO, and “First Nations and Tribal Councils”, but makes no mention of the unions who represent thousands of education support workers.

In our respectful submission, the government must engage in timely, ongoing, and meaningful consultation with all educational stakeholders, including administrators, teachers and support staff and their respective organizations, as well as parents, organizations representing specific student interests, and local communities throughout the restructuring (both decision-making and implementation processes). For consultation to be meaningful, the person or group being consulted needs to have adequate information about the government’s plans, which requires significant transparency.

We must emphasize that in Saskatchewan union organizing of K-12 education support workers has occurred on a school-by-school and classification-by-classification basis. As a result, the job classifications that are unionized and the unions representing them often differ from one school to another within the same division. This is reflected in the certification orders issued by the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB).<sup>11</sup> After the last round of school division amalgamations efforts were made to sweep all support employees into a single bargaining unit. However, the SLRB consistently rejected those efforts as a violation of workers’ rights,<sup>12</sup> and the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal has upheld the SLRB’s stand on this issue.<sup>13</sup> Any legislative effort that lends to stripping union members of their rights to their chosen representation (rights recently given enhanced vigour by the Supreme Court of Canada<sup>14</sup>) has the potential to result in expensive and protracted *Charter* litigation. Triggering inter-union representation vote campaigns will destabilize the labour relations environment in ways that will impact teams and the quality education and educational support they can deliver to students and families. It will disrupt valued working relationships, and will overtax the already strained capacity of the SLRB.

<sup>11</sup> Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board. List of active certification orders (as of January 3, 2017). [www.sasklabourrelationsboard.com/pdfdoc/Granted%20as%20of%20January%203%202017](http://www.sasklabourrelationsboard.com/pdfdoc/Granted%20as%20of%20January%203%202017)

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 5506 v. Prairie South School Division No. 210, 2008 CanLII 47033 (SK LRB), <<http://canlii.ca/t/20s7f>>

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 5506 v. Prairie South School Division No. 210, 2011 SKCA 54 (CanLII), <http://canlii.ca/t/flcb1>

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada (Attorney General), [2015] 1 SCR 3, 2015 SCC 1 (CanLII), <http://canlii.ca/t/gfxx8>



Any restructuring of PreK-12 education must respect the constitutional and union rights of educational support workers and ensure the continuation of a stable and predictable labour relations environment. This requires maintaining current union jurisdiction, representation, and collective agreement rights. Stable and predictable labour relations help support efficient delivery and positive student outcomes.

## **SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS MUST BE “ON THE TABLE”**

Over the past year the Saskatchewan government has been signaling that the province is in a fiscal crisis, that transformational change is part of the solution to that crisis, and that transformational change involves putting everything government does “on the table”. However, government spokespersons and the Perrins report have indicated that the province’s separate school system cannot be subjected to the same scrutiny or transformation as the public system because the separate system is constitutionally protected. We respectfully submit that this prematurely and inappropriately forecloses debate on some crucial issues.

Although separate denominational schools in Saskatchewan do have constitutional protection, that protection is not absolute or immutable. According to section 43 of the Constitution Act, 1982<sup>15</sup> a bill to merge all Catholic school divisions into one, or to merge them with the public school divisions, would simply have to be passed by the Saskatchewan legislature and the federal Parliament. This procedure was successfully used to eliminate separate denominational school systems in Quebec<sup>16</sup> and Newfoundland.<sup>17</sup>

Separate schools make up 20-25% of the education sector in this province.<sup>18</sup> No realistic discussion of major transformation in the structure and governance of K-12 education can leave that many students and that much money “off the table”. We say this not out of a desire to “blow up” Catholic education in the province, as one Panel member factiously suggested. In effect, the province and Perrins have already raised the possibility of blowing up the public side of K-12 education. How will non-Catholic parents react if they lose their local school and/or their elected local board while their nominally Catholic neighbours do not? Will they protest the unfairness? Will they seek to place their kids in the Catholic system? If so, what will the impact be on the finances, enrolment, and capacity of the public system? Will the parents petition the government to create their own separate school division—as has already occurred in this province, and is the subject of ongoing litigation?<sup>19</sup>

Perrins seems to lean toward imposed amalgamation and restructuring of public divisions largely on the grounds that their voluntary individual and collective efforts have not produced satisfactory system-wide improvements in cost containment or student achievement. However, he seems content to leave separate school divisions free to consider “voluntary consolidations...to align more closely with the public system” (21). As we submitted above, Perrins greatly understates the amount of systemic improvement that is possible through further voluntary collaboration among the public boards.

<sup>15</sup> *Constitution Act, 1982*, Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11, <http://canlii.ca/t/lidx>

<sup>16</sup> *Constitution Amendment, 1997 (Québec)*, SI/97-141.

<sup>17</sup> *Constitution Amendment, 1998 (Newfoundland Act)*, SI/98-25.

<sup>18</sup> Based on figures in Appendix A, “Overview of Saskatchewan School Divisions” in Perrins’ report.

<sup>19</sup> Saskatchewan Catholic School Boards Association. Theodore case (2016). [www.scsba.ca/theodore-case/](http://www.scsba.ca/theodore-case/)

If cost containment in the K-12 sector is a main driver of transformational change, there should also be a discussion of the appropriateness of the government providing per-capita operating grants to private “independent” schools. Last year those grants totaled more than \$30 million.<sup>20</sup>

## **BEWARE OF THE DOWNSIDES OF MORE CENTRALIZED PROCUREMENT**

In his Option 1, the single province-wide school board model, Perrins includes a recommendation to “[i]mplement an entity to drive sector-wide operational efficiencies, something similar to 3S Health” (21). 3S Health (a.k.a. Shared Services Saskatchewan) was created in 2012 to achieve standardization and economies of scale in purchasing of goods and services of scale among the 12 Regional Health Authorities (RHAs). The recent report of the Saskatchewan Advisory Panel on Health System Structure, which recommended merging the RHAs into a single provincial health authority, noted that the case for maintaining a separate, arm’s length agency such as 3S Health is significantly weaker under a province-wide governance model.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the case for a “3S Education” seems weakest under Option 1.

SEIU-West represents about 12,000 health sector workers in four RHAs. Based on our experiences with 3S Health, particularly its role in the problematic transfer of hospital laundry services to K-Bro Linen Systems, we fear that a 3S Education might become a vehicle for privatizing support services currently provided by school division employees and/or for contracting out to distant corporations the procurement of goods and services currently procured locally. This will have negative economic impacts on local communities and families. It will also destabilize labour relations e.g. by precipitating successorship disputes at the SLRB, raiding, and union representation votes. (See “The Benefits of Union Involvement and a Stable Labour Relations Environment”, above.)

Mr. Perrins insists that “to meet current challenges and prepare for the future” (3) Saskatchewan’s K-12 system needs to improve its accountability and transparency. There are currently live legal disputes regarding the (unclear) legal status, the (lack of) transparency and accountability of 3S Health. To ensure transparency and accountability, a 3S Education or any other new or restructured institutions created by structural or governance reform must at the very least be fully subject to the authority of the Provincial Auditor,<sup>22</sup> the Information and Privacy Commissioner,<sup>23</sup> and the Ombudsman.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Tallied from the following sources:

- Government of Saskatchewan. 2016-17 Registered Independent Schools Public List. <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/86158-2016-17%20Public%20List.pdf>
- Government of Saskatchewan Public Accounts Volume 2, 2015-16. <http://www.finance.gov.sk.ca/paccts/paccts16/compendium/reports/Volume2-2015-16.pdf>
- Living Sky School Division Audited Financial Statements for the Period Ending August 31, 2015 [latest available online]. <https://www.lskysd.ca/Board/budget-financial-reports/Documents/Auditors%20Report%20and%20Financial%20Statement%20for%20the%20period%20ending%20August%2031,%202015.pdf>
- Prairie South School Division Audited Financial Statements for the Period Ending August 31, 2016. <https://www.prairiesouth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Audited-Financial-Statement-FINAL.pdf>
- Regina Public Schools Annual Report 2015-16. [http://www.rbe.sk.ca/sites/default/files/boarddocs/2015-16\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.rbe.sk.ca/sites/default/files/boarddocs/2015-16_annual_report.pdf)
- Saskatoon Public Schools. Consolidated Financial Statements for year ended August 31, 2016. <https://www.spsd.sk.ca/division/reportsandpublications/Documents/AFS%20Aug%2031%202016%20MASTER%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Organizing and Integrating Patient-Centred Care: Saskatchewan Advisory Panel on Health System Structure Report. December 2016. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/~media/news%20release%20backgrounders/2017/jan/saskatchewan%20advisory%20panel%20on%20health%20system%20structure%20report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See *Provincial Auditor Act*, SS 1983, c P-30.01, <http://canlii.ca/t/52gw8>

<sup>23</sup> See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, SS 1990-91, c F-22.01, <http://canlii.ca/t/52lh0> and *Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, SS 1990-91, c L-27.1, <http://canlii.ca/t/52h7j>

<sup>24</sup> See *Ombudsman Act*, 2012, SS 2012, c O-3.2, <http://canlii.ca/t/52k3k>



## **ELECTED LOCAL BOARDS RESPECT DIVERSITY AND PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT**

To ensure the success of each student, the educational system must properly address the unique circumstances of the local community in which the student and their family live. It is therefore essential that any reorganization within the education sector must ensure a governance structure that is accessible and accountable to local communities.

It is our submission that reducing the number of school divisions and/or creating appointed school boards will not result in meaningful improvements within the sector, nor will it increase student success measures. The accountability of school boards can only be achieved where trustees are elected within a geographic area of manageable size and with which they have a tangible connection. This provides for local input and control.

We see the election of trustees as one of the most fundamental activities of democracy given that trustees are local and familiar to the communities they are looking to serve. They are no more or less important than electing the councillors of a rural or urban municipality.

Democratically-elected local school boards are essential to ensure that educational decision-making is responsive and accountable to unique and changing local needs. If elected boards are replaced by appointed governance bodies, there will be less engagement and accountability for education services at the community level. Governance regions that are geographically too large will not be responsive to local needs—something Perrins acknowledges in his discussion of Option 3A.

School community councils, even if given a more prominent role and better resources (one of Perrins' suggestions), simply cannot make up for this. While such vehicles are intended to facilitate input, there is no foundational authority to make decisions on behalf of the schools operating within the community – it is a mere soapbox for complaint to the centralized body. How can this operate to ensure the uniqueness of community is treated as a value or that diversity is respected in decision-making? We would argue that it simply cannot. It is unlikely that the public will be willing to engage meaningfully over the long term in a body with no real voice or power to influence decision-makers.

Elected school boards have been a valuable political training ground for provincial politicians on both sides of the aisle. Such positions provide an entry point and training ground for those in higher elected office: 8/61 current Saskatchewan MLAs (13%) and 3/17 Cabinet ministers (18%) previously served as an elected school board member.<sup>25</sup>

While we oppose moves to appoint school board trustees, we appreciate that this may need to occur in specific circumstances where a vacancy occurs mid-way through the term of office. In such circumstances appointments should be approved by the school board – not done unilaterally by the executive director or by the provincial government.

A glance at recent trends in education governance in Saskatchewan and elsewhere suggests that there has been an excessive focus upon a narrowly-defined ideal of “efficiency”, at the expense of the more pressing goal of ensuring that every student has a chance to succeed. Democratically elected local school boards, if properly resourced, have the mandate and the ability to build strong family, school and

<sup>25</sup> Compiled from biographies found at <http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/> and <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/cabinet>.



community partnerships that are essential to positive student outcomes. Rather than moving to less responsive and accountable processes, we need to ensure that we reinforce robust local governance institutions.

## **GREATER CENTRALIZATION MAY NOT ENSURE A SAFE AND EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Positive student outcomes and the overall quality and efficiency of the education system depend on the creation and maintenance of a learning environment that ensures the safety and security of both students and staff.

SEIU-West members have experienced first-hand the growing number of children in the school system with complex needs, such as new Canadians, children with behavioural challenges, or children who require assistance with activities of daily living, including the administration of medications. Resources for staffing, staff training, and Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) have not kept pace with these growing needs, and in some cases have been reallocated to more centralized models of service delivery that have made the situation worse. We do not envision that further centralization of school divisions or the elimination of elected trustees will appropriately address these challenges.

SEIU-West's education sector members have told us that safety issues are increasingly prevalent in their schools. In a 2016 SEIU-West survey we found that 25% of the Educational Assistants (EAs) we represent are punched or hit by a student on a daily basis, and that nearly a third of our EAs have sought medical attention for a student-inflicted injury.

In the last five years, policy and funding changes initiated by the Ministry have led school divisions to transfer funding from school-based EA positions to a smaller number of division-based paraprofessionals deployed in roving "specialist teams". This experiment in more centralized service delivery has resulted in reduced frequency and continuity of service to the growing numbers of children with complex needs. Too often, local school staff are not made aware of the centralized schedule of the teams or do not have participation in the information gathered to build assessment of individual student needs.

Positive student outcomes and the overall quality and efficiency of the PreK-12 education system depend on creating and maintaining a learning environment that ensures the safety and health of both students and staff. As communicated to the Minister of Education in our December meeting, this sector has a pronounced and imminent need for safety protocols and appropriate training so as to cultivate a learning environment conducive to positive student outcomes. We remain wary that centralization will address these needs, rather we suspect they will be lost in the process.

## **CONCLUSION: KEY PRINCIPLES OF K-12 EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE**

The Panel reminded us that it cannot force the government to implement its recommendations. However, the Panel can and should use its report to give voice to the full range of stakeholder concerns about the government's plans for education reform, and to call upon the government to follow a higher



standard of transparency.<sup>26</sup> We call on the Panel to assert, as we do, that any restructuring of the K-12 education system in Saskatchewan must be guided by the following principles:

1. No major structural or governance changes should be made unless there is strong evidence that the proposed changes will significantly improve the quality of education provided to children, their families and communities. The overriding goal of restructuring should not be cost cutting.
2. Before and while implementing restructuring the government must engage in timely, ongoing, and meaningful consultation with all educational stakeholders, including administrators, teachers and support staff and their respective organizations, as well as parents, organizations representing specific student interests, and local communities.
3. Education must be provided equitably to students across the province. Students deserve the supports they need to be successful regardless of where they live, their income or family status, or their language or ability.
4. Students live and learn as part of local communities. Education funding for PreK-12 education must be tailored to the specific needs of those local communities, especially communities with fast-growing populations or high numbers of Indigenous children or EAL students.
5. Democratically-elected local school boards are essential to ensure that educational decision-making is responsive and accountable to unique and changing local needs. If elected boards are replaced by appointed governance bodies, there will be less engagement and accountability for education services at the community level. Governance regions that are geographically too large will not be responsive to local needs.
6. Positive student outcomes and the overall quality and efficiency of the PreK-12 education system depend on creating and maintaining a learning environment that ensures the safety and health of both students and staff.
7. Any restructuring of PreK-12 education must respect the constitutional and union rights of educational support workers and ensure the continuation of a stable and predictable labour relations environment. This requires maintaining current union jurisdiction, representation, and collective agreement rights. Stable and predictable labour relations help support efficient delivery and positive student outcomes.

<sup>26</sup> In keeping with the theme of transparency, we urge the Panel to avoid the missteps of the Advisory Panel on Health System Structure, which after more than four months has still not made good on its assurances to us that all submissions it received would be made public.