



January 31, 2017

Honourable Don Morgan, Q.C.
Minister of Education
Room 361, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Minister Morgan:

I am writing you to provide you with written comments from the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) regarding *The K-12 Education Governance Review*. Our comments below will follow the presentation provided to the Advisory Panel on January 26, 2017.

Very little information has been made available to the public on the actual impacts of the 2006 amalgamation of school boards. Until such information becomes available, we are unable to comment on the specifics of the models or options provided by Mr. Perrins in his report released December 21, 2016. There were, however, consistent elements between the models and options that the Board does feel comfortable commenting on at this time.

SARM is a strong supporter of municipal autonomy and believes amalgamation should only be voluntary. School divisions are in part funded by local tax dollars. Therefore, local ratepayers should have the opportunity to help direct how those funding dollars are best utilized via locally elected School Boards.

In the 2016 school board elections, there was significant interest in candidates to run for their local school board. This demonstrates the value parents and members of public place on locally elected school boards. We join Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) and the school boards in supporting elected school boards as the only effective way to represent the local voice.

With decision-making under all models being taken further away from the locals, past experience leads us to assume that further rural school closures would be inevitable. A school closure in rural Saskatchewan ultimately eliminates nearby communities.

Many children in rural areas already have long bus commutes to school. This makes for long days for young children, impacting their education and wellbeing; it not only takes time away from families, but also for the time kids have to be kids. Furthermore, there are safety concerns for children on long bus routes every day.

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Any lengthening of bus routes will no doubt exacerbate these problems and result in the relocation of existing families to other areas and limit the number those choosing to move to rural Saskatchewan.

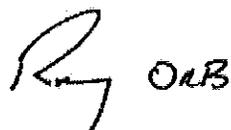
We are also concerned that moving decision-making out of rural Saskatchewan and into urban centres will deteriorate the quality of education in rural schools. Rural students have a higher on-time (3 years after entering grade 10) rate than not only urban students, but also higher than the provincial average. We do not want to see the success of rural students diminish due to structural changes in the public school system.

SARM does support the notion of implementing an Education Quality Council that reports to the Deputy Minister of Education, as outlined in Perrins' Report. Regardless of the structure of the school division, it is important to focus on education system performance, particularly student outcomes. We also agree with SSBA and the school boards that more can be done by the school divisions to find sector-wide efficiencies by working together.

SARM looks forward to continued opportunities to consult on K-12 education delivery in rural Saskatchewan. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by 'ORB'.

Ray Orb
President

Cc: K-12 Education Governance Review Advisory Panel



Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
K-12 Education Governance Review Advisory Panel
January 26, 2017 – 1:30 p.m.

Background

- On November 15, 2016 Deputy Premier and Education Minister Don Morgan announced the appointment of Dan Perrins to lead the work on a Kindergarten to Grade 12 educational governance review.
- On December 21, 2016 Minister Morgan announced the appointment of a six-person Advisory Panel to lead consultations with the education sector and public on the governance options presented in Mr. Perrins' report.

Option 1 – Provincial Model

This option consolidates the 18 existing public school boards of education into a single provincial public school board with responsibility for management of all 606 of the public schools in the province.

Option 2: Regional Model

This option establishes four regional public boards of education, accountable to the Minister of Education. Regional boundaries would be established by the Minister following consultation and could consider health services to the extent possible.

Option 3a: Division Model – Restructuring Public School Divisions

This option creates new boundaries for between eight and 14 public school divisions.

Option 3b: Division Model – Realigning Boundaries

This option implements boundary changes where realignment will support local community needs and interests.

SARM Position

- SARM opposes any further amalgamations of school boards until the Province can demonstrate how the last round of school board amalgamation benefitted rural students.
- We do not feel we can comment on the specific models or options until the provincial government can demonstrate to us how further amalgamation will benefit rural students and families.
- SARM was disappointed to see that the SSBA did not have an Executive representative appointed to the Advisory Panel.

- SARM has serious concerns about how the options in the report will predominantly affect rural school divisions. Experience has shown us that closing a school closes a community.
- In the 2016 school board elections, there was significant interest in candidates to run for their local school board. This demonstrates the value parents and members of public place on locally elected school boards. We join SSBA and the school boards in supporting elected school boards as the only effective way to represent the local voice.
- Existing school boards set area boundaries and bus routes using local knowledge. We are concerned that moving decision-making out of rural Saskatchewan and into urban centres will deteriorate the quality of education in rural schools, and that this is the first step to additional school closures in rural areas.
- Rural students have a higher on-time (3 years after entering grade 10) rate than not only urban students, but also higher than the provincial average. We do not want to see the success of rural students diminish due to structural changes in the public school system.
- Many children in rural Saskatchewan already have long bus commutes to school. This makes for long days for young children, impacting their education and wellbeing; it not only takes time away from families, but also for the time kids have to be kids. Furthermore, there are safety concerns for children on long bus routes every day. We are concerned how further lengthening bus times may exacerbate this problem.
- SARM is a strong supporter of municipal autonomy and believes amalgamation should only be voluntary.
- SARM did not support the amalgamation of existing Regional Health Authorities, and continues to support elected health boards.
- However, school divisions, unlike Regional Health Authorities, are in part funded by local tax dollars. Therefore, local ratepayers should have the opportunity to help direct how those funding dollars are best utilized via locally elected School Boards.
- SARM supports the notion of implementing an Education Quality Council that reports to the Deputy Minister of Education, as outlined in Dan Perrins' report. Regardless of the structure of the school division, it is important to focus on education system performance, particularly student outcomes.
- We also agree with SSBA and the school boards that more can be done by the school divisions to find sector-wide efficiencies by working together.