



March 29, 2021

The Honourable Cliff Cullen
Minister of Education
Government of Manitoba
168 Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Cullen:

The Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) is composed of provincial school boards associations and represents school boards and trustees throughout Canada. Collectively, we the Presidents, have extensive experience and are well positioned to speak with a high level of expertise to effective public school system governance.

We are gravely concerned that Bill 64 includes a plan to eliminate school boards in Manitoba. It is inconceivable that a fundamental pillar of the reforms called for in the *Report of the Commission on K to 12 Education*, which your government commissioned, could be eliminated.

As Presidents and members of the CSBA, we are uniquely positioned to speak to the positive impacts of effective school board governance and the benefits of decisions made collaboratively by trustees and provincial governments. In areas of the country where provincial and locally elected education officials work collaboratively, it is very clear that students benefit. This approach to co-governance would create the conditions in Manitoba to achieve system improvements.

On the other hand, we have seen little evidence of any benefit to students, families and communities in jurisdictions that have moved to centralized control of public education. Often portrayed as a viable alternative to school boards, it is clear that school advisory councils simply are not fully willing or effective in shaping policy and practices in ways that meet the needs of communities and students. At best they are advisory to administration, often creating a false sense of influence to families and communities with no concrete impact or accountability.

Communities and populations already at risk have the most to lose in a centralized system with no authentic local authority. To provide a concrete example, democratically elected school boards in Nova Scotia included dedicated African Nova Scotian trustees and Mi'kmaq trustees. When school boards were eliminated, these voices were removed from decision-making that is fundamental to their needs. Replacing them with appointed advisory councils with limited or no authority has marginalized their voice in

educating their children and youth. As explained by Niigaan Sinclair, Anishinaabe educator, leader and columnist in his recent article, *The Manitoba government's Bill 64, the Education Modernization Act, is a 100 per cent step backwards for Indigenous education*: "This bill turns back the clock by seeking to return to the same top-down, centrally controlled political and cultural ideology that led to the problems Indigenous learners face in the current system. It also threatens to undo everything that has been successful, such as the recent improvement to graduation rates and more culturally based learning." (March 19, 2021, Winnipeg Free Press).

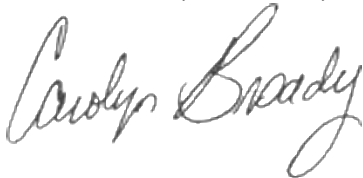
As Presidents, we fully support education review and reform, provided that it is based on research and is responsive to the needs of all students and diverse communities. We support the recommendations in the report, *Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future* that clearly outlines much needed improvements and includes a thoughtful review and revitalization of governing school boards. We support your government's goal of improving student achievement and closing the gaps among specific populations. It is important to point out that jurisdictions in the country that outperform Manitoba do, in fact, have elected school boards and a provincial school board association that works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Unfortunately, Bill 64, ignores the evidence on the important role of effective school boards.

We implore you and your government to reconsider your decision and to revise Bill 64 to include, as one of your measures, a thoughtful revitalization of democratically elected school boards. There are, as the report suggests, governance models and professional development supports that will result in strengthening governing boards and the role they play to ensure accountable and transparent public systems. We the Presidents and the CSBA would be pleased to work with your government and the Manitoba School Boards Association to this end.

Sincerely,



Laurie French, President, CSBA



Carolyn Broady, Vice President, CSBA



Alan Campbell, President, MSBA

Handwritten signature of Cathy Abraham in black ink.

Cathy Abraham, President, OPSBA

Handwritten signature of Dan Lamoureux in black ink.

Dan Lamoureux, President, QESBA

Handwritten signature of Denis Chartrand in black ink.

Denis Chartrand, Président, ACÉPO

Handwritten signature of Goronwy Price in black ink.

Goronwy Price, Chair, NLESD

Handwritten signature of Lorrie Jess in blue ink.

Lorrie Jess, President, ASBA

Handwritten signature of Robert Fowler in blue ink.

Robert Fowler, Chair, NBDEC

Handwritten signature of Shawn Davidson in black ink.

Shawn Davidson, President, SSBA

Handwritten signature of Stephanie Higginson in blue ink.

Stephanie Higginson, President, BCSTA