

SJASD Bill 64 Trustee Forum Q&A Responses

Below are questions that were submitted to us during the SJASD Bill 64 Trustee Forum during the registration process as well as during the event.

Q: What did the K-12 Education Review focus on?

<https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/educationreview/docs/public-discussion-paper.pdf>

I know it is a long document but if you want to dig into the actual recommendations this is where to look! Alternatively, please reach out to any of the trustees, we would all be more than happy to talk through the report or any questions you have about it! Our contact information can be found at

[https://www.sjasd.ca/Governance/SchoolBoard/Pages/default.aspx#/="](https://www.sjasd.ca/Governance/SchoolBoard/Pages/default.aspx#/=)

Q: Manitoba's quality of education has been lagging compared to other provinces for several years. How will the changes improve the quality of high school education and outcomes?

A [Trustee Hunter]: First, we need to address the question about whether Manitoba's students are lagging behind other provinces. The government uses PISA scores, a standardized test administered internationally, to measure our performance against other provinces. This data is important, but I feel it doesn't tell the whole story. In Manitoba, 86% of students are performing at grade level, and the majority who are not have compounding marginalizations such as poverty and family dysfunction. Rather than focusing on upending an education system that is working for the vast majority of children, attention must be paid to the small majority that it is not working for. SJASD is already doing that work. For example, the number one assessment criteria in our Superintendent Evaluation is Student Growth and achievement. This means the Superintendent is personally responsible and accountable for the performance of all of our students. I fear that a provincial system with Winnipeg being represented by only one Director, our students will become only a data point – not receiving the time, attention and care they need to succeed. I think the current education system is working for most and moving toward a centralized system is not going to be helpful for those it is not working for.

Q: How much of this is an effort to degrade the quality and desirability of the public school system so as to push the proliferation of a landscape of private/charter schools?

A [Trustee Hunter]: While I can't speak to the motivations of the government, but Minister Goertzen, the previous Education minister, said publicly that independently funded schools and homeschools are part of the public school system. We know that there is a lot of regard for that part of the education system from those in the PC

caucus. As someone who attended and now teaches in the public school system, I'm worried about the impact this will have for the public education system.

Q: Will there be other options for remote learning as the pandemic continues? At least until children and youth can be vaccinated?

A [Trustee Hunter]: One thing that is important to note is that St. James has been a leader throughout the pandemic. When the province was adamant that students would not wear masks in school, it was SJASD that pushed to have our children wearing masks and ensure they were distributed to all children free of charge. When the province looked for partners to increase access and the quality to remote learning, it was again SJASD who stepped up and were instrumental in getting the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre up and running. Bill 64 is not coming into effect until July 1, 2022, and I remain hopeful that by that point that this pandemic might be behind us. However, I can't speak to what the government will do regarding remote learning once the provincial education authority takes over.

Q: Will this bill affect special needs education? If so, how?

A [Trustee Lawson]: It's important to understand that, in some ways, we do not really know how Bill 64 will impact Special Needs education. What we do know, however, is that SJASD has a long history of exception support for students with special needs. In last year's budget, our school division exceeded the METRO and provincial averages in terms of funding students with exceptional needs. The problem with Bill 64 is that there are no guarantees and little likelihood that our students will be supported to the high degree that they have been under our local division and board budget decisions. There is no question that we have had many cases where principals have asked for special funding above and beyond what the province provides, and this division's Senior Admin and Board have supported those requests to ensure that our students got what they needed to succeed in school. This level of service and support to our families is only possible through local decision making, so there are significant risks to placing the needs of students with exceptional needs in the hands of a provincial governing body that has little understanding of local contexts and needs.

Q: As someone whose younger brother is non-verbal-autistic and in the True North Hockey Academy. This Bill makes me worried that the things he loves and teaches him skills will be ripped away from him just for the money for a quick government buck.

A [Trustee Hunter]: The True North Hockey Academy is a phenomenal program; it warms our heart to know that your brother gets so much joy out of it! We fear that with increased centralization and in the absence of locally elected trustees that are accountable to you, our constituents, that programming such as this will end up getting cut. This is such a shame because both scholars and youth policy advocates agree that participation in extracurricular activities, provide distinct opportunities for growth and development.

Q: How is Bill 64 going to support French immersion students and families?

A [Trustee Bowering]: As a mom to three children in the French Immersion program, I am concerned. There is nothing saying FI won't continue as is, but there is also nothing saying it will be prioritized either. Approximately 30% of students in SJASD are enrolled in FI and it is a program that we have invested in and prioritized. We have looked at ways to improve language acquisition and best teaching practices. Having the Franco-Manitoban School Division does satisfy the need from French language programming in the province. So, if the province decided FI was too expensive or creating staffing issues, they could potentially say that they are already satisfying the French programming needs with DSFM and cease the French Immersion program. I have not seen anything in the documentation that says there will be support for or even representation from the French Immersion community on any of the boards or councils.

Q: Is it true that parents will be tasked with the responsibility to oversee a school division on a volunteer basis?

A [Trustee Bowering]: We know that our School Community Councils (SCC) will be similar to our Parent Council's in that participation is in a volunteer capacity. From the government documents that have come out, it's clear the province expects parents to be actively engaged in these councils. According to the Bill 64 info documents, SCCs would function to advise the principal on:

- School priorities and programming,
- Staffing and policies related to school plans and
- Monitoring the needs of the community and student achievement.

As for the one parent representative for Metro Winnipeg, it is unclear if that person would receive any compensation or even how the process for that person to be chosen will work. Furthermore, the city of Winnipeg would have only one representative compared to 14 rural representatives on the same Council making it even more unlikely for our area concerns to be heard or prioritized.

We expect that the appointed board – appointed by the province – will be compensated, but we haven't yet heard details regarding the Parent Advisory Council on Education (PACE) with regards to compensation. As for the process to choose members of the PACE, we have been told it is likely to be an election process, but with a region the size of Winnipeg, it's unknown how this process will work.

Q: What does this mean with regards to funding for schools, like high school extra-curricular programs, supplies etc.? How much more will this cost families?

A [Trustee Glennie]: 50% of all the expenses to operate the school division comes from the province and 50% comes from taxation from the property tax bill. That 50% from the province doesn't fully cover base level education. When I say that, I mean 30 students per class, salaries for teachers, heating, air conditioning and building maintenance. I think it is going to take extra funds in the income tax pot just to cover

base education. Now, I don't think anyone wants just base level education for our children. We've talked about all the great programs in our division above and beyond basic programming. To balance a budget going forward, without raising taxes, I cannot envision the province keeping the same quality programs and services that we currently have in SJASD. I struggle to see how they could be able to continue the funding for additional programs and services.

What we do know is that today these funds come from the property tax levy and are distributed by the school board. I struggle to understand where these funds will be coming from if the funding model shifts to provincial funding. What's even more concerning to me is there is a very high chance that no one on the appointed education board or the Parent Advisory Council on Education have any connection to St. James to even know about our current programming – including school sports and divisional choirs. It's a concerning thing to me, especially with all the benefits of extracurricular activities for kids and the community, so I have no idea and can't really answer where those funds will be coming from. I can't find the money for these programs in the current plans as written.

Q: Will this affect catchment?

A [Trustee Chegus]: Presumably Bill 64 will have no recognizable impact on current school catchment areas. However, thinking it forward, the new regions which are referred to as “regional catchment areas” in the Bill, can determine what schools exist in each region. One can assume that over time schools and programming will be harmonized across the entire region. This could have an impact on where students will attend in the particular region they are in. Looking at Winnipeg, Bill 64 may not have an immediate impact, but long term, there are major implications in a region as diverse as the City of Winnipeg.

As an added note, this will increase the overall size of the “out of catchment” area, so people wanting to attend a school near their daycare a few kilometres from home on another side of a catchment line could now be competing with students across the city for the same spaces in schools. We have also seen French Immersion schools in other provinces that have gone to a lottery system for students because of high demand. So, even though your French Immersion school might be a block from your house, you might still be required to enter a lottery with students from across the city for a space in that school.

Q: Will there be school closures like what happened with Ness Middle School?

A [Trustee Chegus]: Under the terms of Bill-64 the so-called ‘moratorium on school closings’ is lifted. School closings have been suspended since 2008 in Manitoba, the only exception being where there is virtually 100% of the school community in agreement with the decision by the local Board to close a school. In the case of school closings, Bill 64 paves the way for government to ignore meaningful community consultation as a centralized board would be able to close schools.

Compare that process with what we have done in our Division regarding school closings where we developed a comprehensive school review process in response to a significant declining enrollment trend back in the 1980s. As such, our Board has extensive experience with how to ensure the community voice is heard in respect to any case where a school potentially could close due to low enrollment.

This government has repeatedly said the intent behind Bill-64 is to shift \$40 million in Board Office Admin costs to front-line services. In the context of school closings, Bill 64 arguably prioritizes the government's primary objective of cost control over the democratic rights of the community to have a say in any decision regarding any consideration concerning the closing of a local school.

Q: Many schools have different needs; with this new bill how can they guarantee that these needs will be addressed and not pushed aside?

A [Trustee Smukowich]: The Government of Manitoba's decision to eliminate elected school boards and centralize decision-making will negatively affect the education system in our province by removing local voice and accountability.

As elected officials, SJASD trustees ensure that our schools are meeting the needs of their communities and that all the schools within our division are working together towards the same goals. We achieve this by consulting and working with our entire community.

Bill 64 will not see the 37 Manitoba School Divisions amalgamated into 15 regions. The 37 school divisions, and your local voice, are being abolished and replaced by 1 central authority, which will be a bigger, disconnected, centralized bureaucracy. The members of this Provincial Education Authority will be appointed by the Minister of Education and report directly to the Minister.

The 8500 students and their families of SJASD, along with the 5 other metro school divisions currently located in Winnipeg, will be combined into one region with over 100,00 students. Each school will have a School Community Council which will replace the current Parent Councils. One member of a School Community Council from each of the 15 Manitoba Regions will be elected to the Provincial Advisory Council on Education, along with an elected trustee from DSFM. I worry how the individual school community concerns of over 100,00 students will be resolved, when they are represented by one parent on the Provincial Advisory Council on Education, with no real authority.

Q: How can the government decide to go along with this when every single community/sector of the city has different needs and worries?

A [Trustee Bowering]: I think this is largely a financially driven decision. The concerning part is, if you've had a chance to read through the K-12 Review, that the recommendations that came out in the review were largely not followed by the

government when they brought out Bill 64. We don't believe there's nothing to be gained from looking for ways to make the education system better – we do it all the time at the board table. When recommendations come from experts hired and paid to do a review and those recommendations are ignored, it leaves a lot of questions that we really can't answer. It's hard to see the path forward when the expert advice wasn't heeded.

Q: Is there any chance we can actually block/prevent the bill going through with the current government holding a majority?

A [Trustee Bowering]: Being completely honest, it is an uphill battle to be sure, but keep this in mind...when our provincial government proposed amalgamations 30 or so years ago, no one thought St. James would make it through unscathed. And yet, here we are. The autonomy of our division was maintained because community members rose up and spoke against the government's plan. For this Bill to change, we in St. James, Assiniboia, Brooklands and Headingly and people all over the province need to stand up and let our voices be heard loud and clear. Our community has fought and won before, and I believe we can do it again.

Here are some ways you can get involved:

- Contact our area MLAs and their names and contact information are provided on the screen
- Register to speak to Bill 64 by calling 204-945-3636
- Talk to other parents, friends and family about Bill 64 and help us to educate as many people as possible about this proposed legislation

Q: How does this affect teachers and support staff?

A [Trustee Smukowich]: Although we received questions regarding staffing, we are here tonight to discuss governance issues, which is the role of Trustees. As more information becomes available from the provincial government, we will provide that information to our community, but please be assured that our Senior Admin team, school administration, and union leadership will provide the most current information that impacts staffing when and if it becomes available.

Q: If the school boards are too top heavy on the trustee/administration side, why don't we just cut positions at the top?

A [Trustee Glennie]: We, as a board, have been awaiting the K-12 Education Review with anticipation. We agree changes need to be made to modernize our education system. In fact, the review had several positive recommended changes in it – including maintaining School Trustees and divisions. Unfortunately, Bill 64 does not align with this review – despite the province paying a lot of money to have it done. Different individuals will have different takeaways from Bill 64 with one person's positive being another person's negative. What I am confident in saying, as a parent of a student in school, this Bill has virtually no positive attributes. I would even argue that the Admin

cost savings of this Bill are unattainable. My concern is that once the province realizes that they cannot achieve the targeted admin savings, they will start to look within our schools to make their \$40M savings goals.

Q: How can the government decide to go along with this when every single community/sector of the city has different needs and worries?

A [Trustee Hunter]: We, your board of trustees agree. Each community has unique needs. I have visited all of my ward schools a number of times. I know the principals, teachers and even some of the students. I know our daycare directors and some of our parent council members. The Politically Appointed Education Authority Board will be responsible for overseeing all schools in Manitoba. They cannot possibly have the same knowledge of what is happening in schools that current school trustees possess.

Q: What is SJASD doing in response to Bill 64?

A [Trustee Smukowich]: Trustee Hunter is registered to speak on behalf of SJASD as there can only be one person per organization. Since the delay of the second reading of this Bill, presentations are expected to take place in the Fall of 2021. Because sweeping changes are being proposed, we encourage everyone to register to speak to Bill 64. These presentations are expected to be virtual and written submissions are also possible. More information about Bill 64 is available at sjasd.ca.

Q: What is the most effective way to have my concerns registered when contacting MLAs? Phone or email? I feel like they can just disregard/delete emails

A [Trustee Hunter]: Many government MLAs are sending out form acknowledgements for all Bill 64 inquiries. We know it is hard to take the time to write a letter or email if you know concerns will not be taken seriously but don't be discouraged but this, your MLA is your provincial representative; they are accountable to their constituents. Alternative, you can call your MLA's constituency office, leave a message and ask them to call you back.

Q: Has this bill been put in place already? If so, is there a way for us to come together and get it abolished?

A [Trustee Hunter]: Bill 64 has received first reading. The official opposition have postponed second reading to the fall session. At this point, Bill 64 will proceed to committee. In Manitoba, the public has the opportunity to make a presentation that is up to 10 minutes in length. To register you can call the Clerk's office at (204) 945-3636