



Submission to the  
Perrins Governance Review Panel

Prepared by  
**the Prairie Spirit Board of Education  
and Administration**

## Introduction

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education appreciates an opportunity to share its beliefs and values regarding good governance and the critical roles of government, boards of education, division administration, teachers and parents in providing high quality learning experiences for the children of this province. Saskatchewan is defined by its people; education plays a pivotal role in developing the students of Saskatchewan to become world leaders.

The Board understands that the proposed changes to education governance in Saskatchewan, as outlined in the *Educational Governance Review Report*, would, if implemented, be historic. These changes would shape education in our province long into the future. Therefore, any changes must be carefully planned and must serve our children well.

**education plays a pivotal  
role in developing the  
students of Saskatchewan  
to become world leaders**

## Executive Summary

It is impossible to respond to governance model options without first considering what it is that we most desire for our students. Deep and meaningful student learning and ongoing adult learning must remain the priority for education and guide any governance or organizational restructuring.

The Board acknowledges and appreciates Dan Perrins' work in producing his report after taking into consideration the many stakeholders who offered their perspectives. The feedback received from stakeholders is summarized in the transmittal letter. However, it is disappointing that the proposed governance models fail to reflect this important feedback. In fact, although there has been unanimous support from stakeholders for maintaining the current governance model, this is not presented as an option in the report. In addition, although the new governance models are compared to one another, they are not compared to the current governance model in the report's analysis.

Boards of education elected by their communities provide the best opportunity to govern in a relationship-rich environment that connects community to the school division and its learning culture. Current school divisions have developed trust and strong relationships with their communities. A distant Board in a large geographic area would be challenged to establish a similar connection to community.

From the perspective of the Prairie Spirit Board of Education and administration, the compelling reason for a major change to the governance structure in the Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 education sector in Saskatchewan has not been clearly articulated by the Ministry of Education or by this report. As a result, it is difficult to determine what problem(s) the proposed options are solving. At best, we assume power, effectiveness and efficiencies to be the main areas of concern and focus. However, we know democratic and collaborative practices outperform mandates, checklists and conformity.

The Prairie Spirit Board does not believe there is sufficient evidence that major governance changes as proposed would save money or improve student learning. By contrast, the proposed changes would erode a long-standing democratic process and diminish parent and citizen voice in our education system.

Michael Fullan is a recognized authority on educational reform. His caution to politicians is to resist the temptation to make decisions that solve short-term problems to the detriment of the future. He says the focus should be on creating sustainable opportunities that will impact student learning throughout a system by supporting classroom teachers and school administrators to achieve collective efficacy. He urges governments to remain committed to this process for ten or more years to achieve the results

that are nurtured and flourish in an organization’s learning culture. The Education Sector Strategic Plan has had only two years to bring about learning change and improvement.

### **Change must begin with learning in mind**

As a school division, our most important responsibility is to collaboratively develop system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices that include inquiry, discovery, creativity, assessment for learning, relevancy, innovation, risk-taking and meaningful learning. The process that would be used by the Ministry to support system-wide student learning improvement following a major governance change or restructuring is not addressed in this report, yet it is the most important component of governance. Boards of education are influential in ensuring resources and optimum conditions are available to facilitate learning improvement.

In Prairie Spirit, we know that when teachers work together with their colleagues and are supported in classrooms, student learning will improve. Michael Fullan and John Hattie, recognized educational experts, inform us that the research is clear: the single most impactful “innovation” that will improve student learning is collaborative efficacy, or when teachers believe that by working together with their colleagues they can dramatically improve student learning. Furthermore, the autonomy of teachers to engage in well-researched practices provides both ownership and internal accountability to continue to improve their practices. This approach has been shown to lead to three years of student learning in a single school year, a tremendous impact.

Therefore, the classroom is the focal point of change and student learning improvement. The classroom is also the place of learning for the teacher. Professional development embedded in the classroom has proven to be a great agent of change because teachers are able to observe how a strategy works in their classroom and with their students.

**the classroom is the focal point of change and student learning improvement**

Principals and vice-principals provide support and leadership to learn alongside teachers, helping school-wide improvement to flourish. The role of superintendents is essential to support and nudge adults into cognitive discomfort as they engage in new practices. Superintendents work alongside principals and teachers to build capacity and bring about system change.

When teachers are able to engage in these collaborative practices, they readily accept that—like their students—they are on a learning journey. For this reason, the conditions needed to improve adult learning are viewed with equal importance as student learning. Our response to the Perrins Report is based on these beliefs regarding student and adult learning.

### **Current education governance structure**

#### ***Strengths of the current governance model***

The Perrins Report identifies some of the strengths of the current education governance model, including:

- Maintaining local accountability
- Improving communication between the Board and communities
- Allowing ratepayers better access to decision makers
- Providing opportunity for strong local voice
- Developing a local culture of learning through the leadership of boards of education

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education believes that these strengths would be strikingly absent in the proposed governance models presented in the Perrins Report.

***Reasons for changes to the current governance model***

From the perspective of the Prairie Spirit Board of Education and administration, the reason for a major change to the governance structure in the Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 education sector in Saskatchewan has not been clearly articulated by the Ministry of Education or by this report. The report seems to suggest that more government authority and direction setting—as well as a change in the education governance structure—would lead to better student outcomes, more consistent practices in governance, administration and operations and greater efficiencies province-wide. However, the report itself states that it is difficult to isolate the impact of the form of school board governance on student achievement.

**the reason for a major change to the governance structure in the education sector in Saskatchewan has not been clearly articulated**

By contrast, the disruption of making major changes to school divisions would threaten a strong focus on student learning. It is unclear if the time, human resources, additional costs and disruptions associated with reducing the number of public school divisions would be worthwhile

to improve efficiencies. No data has been provided that places a dollar figure on the inefficiencies that exist or a dollar amount on efficiencies that would be achieved by the “3SHealth” model that is used as an example in the report.

Without a compelling reason for major changes, the report appears to detail the following concerns or problems as drivers for change:

- The Ministry does not have the legislative authority to direct boards of education to implement specific efficiencies or hold Boards accountable to follow through with student learning directives to achieve the established student outcomes.
- Student outcomes are not improving at the desired rate needed to achieve the goals of Vision 2020 (Saskatchewan Plan for Growth).
- Education funding must be reduced and there must be greater evidence that education funding is being used more efficiently and effectively by school divisions.
- Operational efficiencies, equitable staffing levels and consistent compensation practices for trustees and administrators must be ensured.

It is the belief of the Prairie Spirit Board of Education that each of these concerns could be addressed through legislative changes, without the disruption of major governance changes throughout the province.

In terms of a commitment to learning improvement, there is strong support from all 28 school divisions for the Education Sector Strategic Plan. Many school divisions have undertaken the work within the sector plan and further localized its processes. Furthermore, many school divisions, under the leadership of boards of education and administration, identified the areas of improvement that are outcomes in the sector plan long before it was developed.

Without the analytics and supporting data, it appears a bold and unfounded claim that efficiencies or effectiveness would occur or that student outcomes would improve with the change in authority moving from boards of education to the Ministry. The underlying assumption in the report is that administration and governance costs would be reduced in each of the options as it would cost less overall to operate fewer school divisions. Again, there is no evidence or estimate of cost savings with a change in structure.

Implementing consistent practices for all school divisions can lead to cost savings or increased costs, depending on the school division.

When consolidating or centralizing operations, efficiencies must be considered along with effectiveness and the timeliness of service. Centralized services work most effectively when most of the services provided are the same throughout the organization. The variance that exists within Agreements and within our communities (especially the north and the differences between rural and urban divisions) adds complexity to centralized services, possibly minimizing efficiencies and effectiveness. Local teacher agreements that require changes in newly-formed school divisions typically incur greater costs for employee benefits. Newly ratified local teacher agreements could further increase the costs for Locally Determined Terms and Conditions of Employment.

Another assumption found in the report is that school divisions are inefficient and lacking transparency. School divisions are funded annually through the application of the funding distribution model. Each year, school divisions are required to submit a balanced budget to the Ministry for approval at the end of June. School boards often set aside funds for large projects and, through frugal practices, end the school year with a surplus. When expenditures are greater than those funds allocated in a school year, surplus dollars are used to balance the budget. These practices demonstrate that boards of education are exemplary stewards of the resources that are allocated to them by government.

The proposed models in the report seem to suggest that, in the absence of boards of education, School Community Councils (SCC) would serve to provide local voice in schools. An expanded role for SCCs would be completely untenable in a greatly enlarged school division, particularly as proposed in options 1 and 2 in the report. This new expectation would require a level of commitment that many parents and community members are unable or unwilling to make. The structure and purpose of SCCs would require changes to fulfill this added responsibility in fewer and much larger public school divisions in the province.

Perhaps one of the most disappointing assumptions in the report is that elected school trustees lack the diversity and skills to govern effectively. Prairie Spirit believes this is a disservice to the highly committed and dedicated elected officials who serve to provide the best learning experiences for our students. They, like all elected officials, provide a local community perspective to the broader view of the school division. They allocate resources and identify priorities to ensure student and community needs are considered. Their broad range of experiences, education, background, careers and community leadership provides diverse perspectives and a high level of trust from their communities. Boards of education, like elected officials in government, rely on administration and consultants to investigate, research and provide the necessary analytics to inform them to make decisions. Boards consider options and risks and then make the best decision possible with the information they have.

### **Cautions and challenges**

- Extensive changes to education governance are not required for government to acquire authority and oversight for education sector efficiencies or provincial student achievement goals. These priorities can be accomplished with legislative and regulatory changes.
- The current costs for governance (\$11.3 million) would not be saved in its entirety in any of the options identified in the report. In addition to the human costs, reestablishing a learning culture in a newly formed school division and taking the focus away from a student learning emphasis would be disruptive. Additional costs and/or savings in governance and administration in newly defined public school divisions are undetermined. In each of the governance options, additional

entities are suggested or recommended without providing estimated costs. Past experience tells us amalgamating school divisions is not a cost savings endeavor.

- Option 3B suggests that Prairie Spirit School Division may be consolidated with one or more neighbouring school divisions. According to the government’s own data, Prairie Spirit’s governance and administrative expenditures and instructional staffing levels make it one of the most efficient school divisions in the province. When considering the graduation rates for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal students and other student achievement indicators, Prairie Spirit is one of the most effective school divisions.

**past experience tells us  
amalgamating school divisions is  
not a cost savings endeavor**

Over the past four years, Prairie Spirit made substantial budget reductions totaling well over \$11 million in response to funding levels. With Prairie Spirit’s demonstrated efficiencies and effectiveness, eliminating the school division is incongruent to the reasons for adopting one of the governance options. It is ironic, then, that Prairie Spirit would be affected by each of the four proposed governance changes in the Perrins Report.

- Improving the learning experience for students must be the preeminent reason for change, particularly change as comprehensive as the Perrins Report suggests. There is no mention in this report of how we would support adult learning to achieve improved learning for all students in a new governance model. A teacher is the most influential person to develop and facilitate a student’s growth.

The role of school administration and division administration is essential in working side by side to achieve collective teacher efficacy to improve student learning. Division administration is only identified in the report as a cost saving measure when reducing the number of public school divisions. The importance of their role in student learning and school operations has been seriously understated in this report and is in sharp contrast to the importance Fullan places on division learning leadership provided by senior administrators.

- What are the unintended consequences for students as they become a part of a much larger school division as described in the first two options or option 3B where student enrolment in one school division can be as low as 1600 while another would have as many as 34,000 students? The most serious may be a complete distaste for public education and a proliferation of private schools, establishing different experiences for students coming from more affluent backgrounds. There would undoubtedly be unintended consequences for parents as well, as they lose their voice in the education of their children.

### **Constitutional considerations**

The Perrins Report specifically states that separate school divisions are excluded from the four amalgamation options and they will not have boundary changes mandated by government. By contrast, public school divisions would experience great change in Options 1 and 2, while Option 3 would lead to significant change for some public divisions. Each of the amalgamation options in the report would have a significant impact on Prairie Spirit School Division.

The report states separate school boards will be expected to comply with other areas of fiscal and student achievement responsibility within the governance change process. However, it would be a reasonable assumption that all school divisions—including separate school divisions—must be part of all aspects of restructuring, including amalgamation. It would be illogical to assume that all of the inefficiencies exist in public school divisions. In addition, it would be decidedly inequitable if the public

school system moves to appointed boards of education while the separate school system remains unchanged with democratically elected boards of education.

The Perrins Report focuses on reconfiguring public school divisions at great human cost and with inevitable disruption to student learning. The result would be to achieve partial, if any, savings in the current overall governance costs of \$11.3 million. By contrast, the costs for supporting two public school systems in Saskatchewan (public and separate) could be estimated at \$100 million. This cost estimate is based on a report for the province of Ontario in 2006 regarding the duplication of services with two public education systems.

Some of the conditions that led to the creation of the Constitution and *The Saskatchewan Act of 1905* are no longer reflected in the current multi-cultural and multi-denominational composition of Saskatchewan and Canada. Exploring constitutional change is imperative to achieve cultural, fiscal and governance equity in education. Constitutional change will be required at some point to reflect the realities of a changing and diverse population. This is especially relevant since the separate and public school divisions are in direct competition for the same students. In essence, Saskatchewan's education system has evolved into two publicly funded education systems. Constitutional change is difficult and time consuming, but it is possible if it is the will of government to reduce costs and avoid duplication of services.

Prairie Spirit is not suggesting eliminating separate school divisions as an only option. Often, moving from one extreme on a continuum of change to a middle ground is a much more responsible approach. The following options are presented for the consideration of the panel and Minister Morgan:

- Move toward constitutional change and eliminate two publicly funded education systems in the province—public and separate—to achieve efficiencies of \$100 million or more; or
- Find greater efficiencies by providing faith-based learning opportunities in the same school building in an inclusive setting; and
- Enact legislation that will require separate school divisions to enroll only those students who meet the requirements to attend the separate school; i.e., only students of Catholic faith may receive funding to attend Catholic schools; and
- Amalgamate separate school divisions according to the same “compelling” evidence for the amalgamation of public schools.

We recognize the establishment of separate school divisions as a constitutional right. If, however, the purpose of the Perrins Report is to improve efficiencies, separate school divisions must be included in governance and amalgamation changes.

## **Recommendations**

The foremost recommendation from the Prairie Spirit Board of Education is that the current governance model in the province should not change. Boards of education maintain local accountability and ensure strong communication in their communities. Provincially, they have influence to make government accountable to fund education appropriately and to ensure the direction they are mandating is consistent with their goals of education and with those of their community members.

In practice, the Ministry has many mechanisms to assert its authority and to ensure school divisions comply with their directives. The current governance structure leans heavily in government's favor and boards of education have decision-making authority where it should rest, with their communities.

The report illustrates a clear bias that government wants and is able to change the power structure in education and this is likely to occur. Given that it may, the following recommendations are made without endorsing any of the options presented in the report.

We do not agree with the magnitude of the change being proposed nor do we support that only public school divisions bear the brunt of change. It is also concerning that a student learning framework is not considered within the governance model options. These serious shortcomings are addressed in the hybrid model that is offered in the following graphic, along with the following recommendations:

1. The Government of Saskatchewan continues to work collaboratively with the Education Sector to establish short and long term learning outcomes for Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 students through the development of a learning improvement model that is grounded in a philosophy of experiential student learning and adult development.
2. The Government of Saskatchewan moves forward to make the necessary legislative and regulatory changes to provide the authority to the government to set the direction to establish governance and administrative practices that will lead to greater similarity and consistency across the province, while allowing for local autonomy within the established structure.
3. The Government of Saskatchewan supports a ten-year plan of learning improvement that is focused on supporting teachers to adopt a philosophy of learning that mirrors early learning curriculum and the broad goals of Saskatchewan education, where knowledge and skill acquisition are applied by students to understand and improve themselves, their community and the world in which they will become its caregivers.
4. The Government of Saskatchewan establishes an Educational Advisory Committee, led by external experts, to provide an overarching philosophy of what experiential learning may look like and how to implement this philosophy to achieve classroom, school and system improvement. This philosophical approach will borrow heavily from the research in early learning, conferring or learning side by side, and the principles in *Following Their Voices*, supporting adult learning with embedded professional development, and establishing the conditions for collective efficacy for teachers. Michael Fullan would be an exceptional resource to establish the membership and mandate of the committee.
5. The strategic directions of the Provincial Leadership Team (PLT) are embedded within the framework established by the Educational Advisory Committee.
6. The Government of Saskatchewan establishes a provincial operational entity that has decision-making authority to centralize and consolidate operational functions that are not direct classroom services. The decentralization of operational functions such as payroll, purchasing, transportation, accounting, an integrated data software system and facilities may be centralized if a strong business case can be made to illustrate cost and service effectiveness. Decentralization practices should occur only after extensive planning and pilots have been tested.
7. Elected boards of education continue to govern the public school divisions in their current configuration of 28 (or two fewer) school divisions. It is suggested, with hesitance, that the two “single school” divisions join neighboring school divisions that would best serve the needs of their communities.



8. If amalgamation of school divisions for the purpose of efficiency is going to occur, all school divisions—including separate school divisions—must be involved. Government has the legislative authority to amalgamate separate school divisions when the decision is not denominational in nature, but is based on finding efficiencies. The costs associated with governance and administration on page 28 of the Perrins report illustrate efficiencies can be achieved in school divisions with a larger student enrolment and smaller geographic size. School divisions with an enrolment of less than 4,000 students generally have greater administrative and governance costs per student.
9. The role of school boards is to provide local voice, direction and autonomy, and internal and collective ownership to fulfill the direction from the Ministry and the Education Sector Strategic Plan. The role of boards of education can be developed and refined within their own organization and within the mandate of directives established by the government.

**the role of school boards is to provide local voice, direction and autonomy, and internal and collective ownership to fulfill the direction from the Ministry**
10. Based on the recommendations made above, the following graphic illustrates how a hybrid approach may be used to:
  - fulfill the government’s need for legislative authority and direction;
  - create a vision and philosophical framework for learning across the province; and
  - maintain a provincial learning improvement focus, led by the PLT.

Boards of education would provide local voice and autonomy within a culture that provides the conditions and supports for teachers to improve student learning in their classrooms, schools, school divisions and would ultimately improve provincial outcomes, with direction, creativity and autonomy.

# Governance Option

