

MAR 10 2011

Minister of Education



Legislative Building
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0B3

February 18, 2011

Sandi Urban-Hall, President
Saskatchewan School Boards Association
400 - 2222 Thirteenth Avenue
REGINA SK S4P 3M7

Dear Ms. Urban-Hall:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide responses to the resolutions passed at your 2010 annual general meeting. Enclosed are the ministry's response to each resolution.

I look forward to our continued collaboration in providing the best possible educational opportunities and experiences for all learners to succeed in Saskatchewan's education system.

Sincerely,

Donna Harpauer
Minister of Education

cc. Audrey Roadhouse, Deputy Minister of Education

**Ministry of Education Response to
Saskatchewan School Boards Association
Annual General Meeting - 2010 Resolutions**

3.2-A BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association impress upon the Ministry of Education the fallacy of rigid adherence to maintaining a “Board share” of capital costs and the urgency of clarifying capital funding arrangements explicitly, recognizing that, pursuant to new funding arrangements, school boards have no local capacity to raise a percentage share of capital project costs.

- The Government of Saskatchewan has provided direction to the Ministry of Education that school divisions will be given the opportunity to request approval to borrow up to 35% of the finances required to fund their share of capital projects, including Major, Block and non-school facility capital. With respect to the school division 35% share requirement, further detail is anticipated to be provided on budget day.

2.1-A BE IT RESOLVED that Boards of Education work to actualize the principles outlined in the Saskatchewan Provincial Policy Framework “Nourishing Minds – Eat Well, Learn Well, Live Well” introduced in October 2009;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby the Saskatchewan Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, to acknowledge all real costs associated with implementing this Framework document, including such initiatives as staff and volunteer training, minor facility renovations, and other necessary resources. All real costs should be recognized from new monies to implement this policy.

- The Ministry of Education applauds and acknowledges the Saskatchewan School Boards Association’s supportive resolution to “actualize the principles outlined in the Nourishing Minds: Eat Well, Learn Well, Live Well policy document”. The level of support for this resolution reflects a broad understanding by delegates that boards of education, school divisions, schools, families, and communities share responsibility for improving the health and learning of our children and youth. As a result of this resolution and the delegates response, I anticipate with interest, additional information about the steps that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association plans to take to “actualize the principles outlined” in the policy document.
- The second part to the Saskatchewan School Boards Association resolution; the request for new monies to implement the policy requires further consideration. It is acknowledged that there are costs associated with all policies; however additional funding may not be required to successfully implement this new policy. Many of the changes suggested in the policy framework require changes in approach and practice and do not require additional staffing or facility renovations. Schools with high populations of vulnerable students, such as designated Community Schools, are expected to offer anti-hunger and nutrition education programming. These schools are provided with additional resources to meet those needs. In addition, alternate funding sources, donations, grants and partnerships provide additional resources for nutrition programming.

- A document was prepared in April 2010 to identify the anticipated costs to school divisions for implementation of the aforementioned nutrition policy document (attached). This document has been vetted through a number of sources for input and feedback. I am interested in your feedback to this document and any concrete suggestions for additional resources to support improving the learning and well-being of students.

5-B BE IT RESOLVED that the Association representatives urge the Ministry of Education New PreK-12 Education Funding System Advisory Committee to recommend that the Ministry of Education increase the incentives for people to become trained as student support professional specialists and to remain in their home positions in rural and northern locations.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Association representatives urge the Ministry of Education New PreK-12 Education System Advisory Committee to recommend that the Ministry of Education and Saskatchewan based universities increase the number of openings for people wishing to be trained as student support professional specialists.

- Education in Saskatchewan is a shared responsibility. The Ministry of Education provides leadership through legislation, policy development, and teacher resources. The ministry also allocates funding to assist school divisions in providing appropriate programs and supports. Boards of education are in the best position to make decisions about the allocation of funds related to the staffing needs of their school divisions. Student Support Services Branch, Ministry of Education consults with the universities of Regina and Saskatoon to identify emerging trends and provincial pressures in the field of student support services and works collaboratively, when possible, to assist universities in responding to these needs.

3.1-B BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby the Government of Saskatchewan to declare and support Education as its number one priority.

- We all have a stake in the success of our students. We have a shared desire to have a student-focused education system that lays the foundation for achievement.
- Education is of vital importance if our province is to continue to grow and prosper. We want to ensure that students are able to make the most of the opportunities before them. This is why student achievement continues to be a priority for the Government of Saskatchewan.
- Education is key for the growth of our communities, to our economy, and most importantly, to ensuring equality of opportunity for everyone in Saskatchewan.
- We must all work together to address the achievement gaps between First Nations, Métis and non-First Nations students.
- We have made an unprecedented investment in school capital over the past three years - \$402.6 million in the province's K-12 education infrastructure since November 2007.
- Since November 2007, well over one third of our schools have benefited from either a minor or a major capital project.
- In 2010-11, funding for school divisions increased by \$33 million or 2.1%.

- For the past several years, the education sector has received increased funding on a school division fiscal year as follows:
 - In 2010-11 an increase of 2.1% over the previous year
 - In 2009-10 an increase of 5.9% over the previous year
 - In 2008-09 an increase of 6.7% over the previous year
 These increases have exceeded the rate of inflation. Fluctuations in enrolment were also addressed.
- Research shows that early learning has a positive impact on child development, early literacy and student achievement. Government has been working hard to expand early learning programs that help build a strong foundation for the future of students.
- Early learning and child care will remain a priority for the Government of Saskatchewan.
- Since November 2007, the government has added 75 new prekindergarten programs representing a 45% increase.
- Since November 2007, the total number of funded licensed childcare spaces in Saskatchewan has increased by 30%, or by 2,935 spaces.

3.1-G BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby the provincial government to make Prekindergarten education a high priority during the 2011, and future, provincial budgeting process.

- The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to increasing the number of Prekindergarten programs for vulnerable three- and four-year old children. Prekindergarten expansion will be considered within the upcoming government budgeting process. Since November 2007, the government has added 75 new prekindergarten programs representing a 45% increase.

5-C BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION lobby the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to institute the Eye See...Eye Learn (ESEL) program in all school divisions in Saskatchewan.

- Boards of Education have the legal authority through the Education Act, 1995 to develop appropriate programs and hire staff, including professional and paraprofessional staff to deliver programs. In order to support the Children's Vision Initiative, the Ministry of Health is providing the Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists with \$60,000 per year for three years.

3.1-F BE IT RESOLVED that the Association representatives urge the Ministry of Education New PreK-12 Education Funding System Advisory Committee to recommend that the principles of equity are developed in the new funding model through various factors that take into consideration the Northern disparities and differences of poverty, geography, cost of living, languages and culture.

- The ministry and stakeholders jointly developed principles to guide the model development work. These principles are being used to guide the decision making processes throughout development work.
- The formulas within the distribution model are consistent with the agreed upon guiding principles of mutual responsibility, accountability, transparency, equity and stability.

- We have heard from our school division stakeholders that “uniqueness” of each school division is an important element. We recognize this and understand that factors such as geographic dispersion for example, are important to take into account.
- The formulas within the new funding distribution model support the equitable distribution of funding. They support the creation of a funding distribution model that reflects the costs of providing programs and services and recognizes cost differences amongst boards of education in providing programs and services.
- The new funding distribution model recognizes cost differences amongst boards of education in providing programs and services. The formulas within each component of the funding distribution model consider the cost drivers for delivery of education programs and services. Boards of education continue to have the authority to allocate resources among most cost areas and among schools to meet provincial priorities and student needs.

5-D BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby the Ministry of Education to set as one of its priorities investigating the gaps occurring between our high school Grade 12 and our post secondary education (primarily in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts), and upon its findings, initiate strategies to improve the transition from K-12 to post secondary education.

- The recent 2010 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report (page 95) confirms the importance of the SSBA resolution 5D. Saskatchewan is not as successful as many other provinces, and western countries, in advancing the career prospects of its students through attending post secondary educational institutions or gaining employment after high school. We will be discussing the issues you have raised further in a February meeting with the officials in the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, based on our indicators.
- May I highlight the many Ministry of Education efforts underway to support transitions. For curriculum development in all areas of study, the ministry established a Provincial Reference Committee that includes representatives from the appropriate faculties at the Saskatchewan post secondary institutions. The input and feedback from those stakeholders influences not only the development of the curriculum, but facilitates efforts to coordinate secondary to post secondary transitions. Other K-12 examples of such coordination are the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol-commissioned research gathering feedback on the expectations and needs of mathematics for students after high school. Business and industry are typically involved. The fruits of these efforts will become evident as students complete the new secondary level mathematics program (in the 2012-13 school year) and move into the post secondary institutions.
- At the same time, the Ministry of Education believes that high levels of literacy and achievement in mathematics are the foundations of success in both post secondary education and the workplace. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has student achievement and smooth transitions as priorities, within the Continuous Improvement Framework, in our collaborative planning efforts with school boards across the province. The underlying purposes of such efforts are to facilitate the ready bridging of our high school graduates to further study or gainful employment.

- We must also signal the importance of Graduate Retention and Tax Benefit programs, Gradworks and the Saskatchewan Training Allowance. Through such efforts, this government aims to facilitate greater numbers of students into a growing economy. Indeed, the entire Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration can be seen as dedicated largely to the challenges your resolution has identified.

3.2-B BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby government to work with the Association to explore a revenue sharing mechanism to fund the board of education share of capital projects.

- The direction provided in the Deputy Minister's letter to school divisions regarding the 65-35% funding share of capital projects has provided a mechanism to fund school divisions' share of capital projects. It is anticipated that additional information on the 35% share and process for approval of borrowing, will be provided to school divisions on budget day.

3.1 A BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association lobby the Ministry of Education to provide funding to upgrade and maintain record storage facilities as required for the preservation of school division records.

- The Ministry of Education has been working in consultation with school divisions and provincial education stakeholders to develop a new funding distribution model. We believe this process will lead to a more consistent and accountable system for all students in Saskatchewan.

5-G BE IT RESOLVED that the SSBA immediately approach government to examine the reasons/issues why the Ministers of Education and Finance wish to extend the jurisdiction of the Provincial Auditor to the Conseil scolaire Fransaskois (CSF) and to boards of education, explore whether there are other options for addressing those issues and, if the optimal resolution is extension of the Provincial Auditor's jurisdiction, then examine what the scope of the Provincial Auditor's jurisdiction should be.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Association lobby government to clearly establish any extension of the jurisdiction of the Provincial Auditor to the CSF and boards of education by legislation.

- The Lieutenant Governor in Council now determines education tax rates, making boards of education and the conseil scolaire accounts public money.
- The Provincial Auditor Act states that the auditor shall examine all accounts related to public money; therefore, the Ministry of Finance included boards of education and the conseil scolaire audited financial statements in the governments' financial statements.
- Boards of education and the conseil scolaire have the authority to appoint an independent auditor.
- The Provincial Auditor Act allows the Provincial Auditor to rely on the reports of appointed auditors of boards of education and the conseil scolaire.
- As the authority for the Provincial Auditor to examine boards of education and the conseil scolaire accounts is within The Provincial Auditor Act, changes to The Education Act, 1995 are not necessary.

5-A BE IT RESOLVED that the Association representatives urge the Ministry of Education new PreK-12 Education Funding System Advisory Committee to recommend allocating the necessary child care spaces in all Northern communities that have met the start-up requirements for these much needed spaces.

- The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to enhancing child care spaces in Northern Saskatchewan communities. The Northern Lights School Division is in the process of developing 62 child care spaces in three different Northern communities.