

Research

R E P O R T

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An Examination of School Division Restructuring In Saskatchewan

by
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This study:

- ✓ Reports on the key proceedings that led to the restructuring of school divisions in Saskatchewan.
- ✓ Identifies the goals for the restructuring and how progress is being measured.
- ✓ Documents the work of the Education Equity Task Force and Interagency Restructuring Committee in regards to the restructuring initiative.
- ✓ Reports on the restructuring experiences of the Board of Education, Directors, and Superintendents and the perceptions of early successes or shortcomings of restructuring
- ✓ Assesses the supports from Saskatchewan Learning and other provincial organizations in establishing the new school divisions.

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**I would like to thank each of the individuals who volunteered to take part in this study through the focus group discussion, the survey, and the interviews. Your knowledge, opinions and personal anecdotes helped to shape my understanding of the restructuring process. ~ JK

Executive Summary

The Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- ❖ to provide a written record of the key proceedings that led to the provincial government's decision to mandate the restructuring of school divisions in Saskatchewan.
- ❖ to identify the goals for restructuring in the province and the indicators that show how progress is being measured.
- ❖ to provide documentation of the work of the Education Equity Task Force and to review the stakeholders' perceptions of the process.
- ❖ to provide documentation of the work of the interagency Restructuring Committee and the advice that they provided in regards to the restructuring initiative.
- ❖ to report on the restructuring experiences of those working within school divisions: the Board of Education, Directors, and Superintendents.
- ❖ to report on the perceptions of early successes or shortcomings of restructuring
- ❖ to assess the effectiveness of supports from Saskatchewan Learning and other provincial organizations in establishing the new school divisions.

The Process

Data collection for this study consisted of the following methods:

- ❖ Survey – Boards of Education, Directors and Superintendents (April – June, 2007)
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion – Rural Education Congress (March 2007)
- ❖ Interviews – Fall and winter (2007/2008)

The History

Prior to the amalgamation announcement in May of 2004 several studies had been conducted that suggested that reducing the number of school divisions in Saskatchewan would generate efficiencies in the system and lead to greater equity across the province for taxpayers and for students.

1991 - *School Finance and Governance Review* - Langlois and Scharf

1993 - *Saskatchewan Task Force on Educational Governance Report* - SSTA

2004 - *Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education* - Boughen

The Perspectives

This study considered the perspectives of a wide variety of individuals who played a role in the restructuring initiative. The data represents the opinions and experiences of representatives of Saskatchewan Learning, representatives of each of the major partners in Saskatchewan education, Directors of Education, Superintendents, and Board of Education Members.

Education Equity Task Force

The Education Equity Task Force was formed with the purpose of redrawing the boundaries of the rural school divisions. The task force was instructed to create school divisions that had a minimum of 5000 students. Additionally, they were asked to reduce the total number of Saskatchewan school divisions to fewer than 40 and to ensure that all boards would be in a position to receive a provincial grant based on the funding formula that was currently in use at the time.

The Education Equity Task Force met with every Board of Education in the province and with each of the major stakeholders in education. Several participants noted that the final

boundary map reflected that the task force had listened to the diverse perspectives and considered local priorities when making their decisions.

Restructuring Coordinating Committee

The Restructuring Coordinating Committee (RCC) was an advisory committee made up of each of the major educational stakeholder groups in Saskatchewan. This committee was charged with the task of advising the Government on the process and the key issues and decisions that were related to the restructuring initiative. Members of this committee reflected that their work was collaborative and that they felt that it was important to bring the spectrum of issues to the table to be discussed openly with all stakeholder groups. Some participants noted that the process was inefficient as a result of the diversity of issues that were raised at this table.

Perspectives From the Field

Restructuring had the greatest impact on school division personnel and board of education members in the 12 restructured school divisions. This study consulted those people through a focus group discussion, surveys, and face to face interviews. The following perspectives were shared by several of the research participants:

- ❖ Success came as the result of strong local leadership and good people working together at the school division level.
- ❖ Everyone needs to understand that change requires time.
- ❖ Culture building is hard work.
- ❖ There was too much change all at once.
- ❖ The newly restructured school divisions are too large.
- ❖ The size of the divisions makes it difficult for central office personnel and board members to form connections with people in the schools.

- ❖ Boards of Education found the shift to a policy governance model to be challenging but rewarding.
- ❖ It was difficult to have the change take place in the middle of the school year.
- ❖ It was difficult to clarify roles within the new school division.
- ❖ The government needed to move forward more aggressively with changes to the Foundational Operating Grant and they needed to change the tax structure to alleviate some of the burden on property taxes.
- ❖ School divisions are measuring success in different ways.
- ❖ Achieving equity between employees and schools in the new school divisions posed a significant challenge.
- ❖ Mistakes made by the legacy boards posed challenges for the new boards.
- ❖ Past experience with voluntary amalgamation helped to make the process go more smoothly.
- ❖ The provincially facilitated hiring process was difficult and divisive for LEADS members.
- ❖ It was time for school divisions to be restructured.

Conclusion

Four years ago, the Government of Saskatchewan announced their intention to restructure the school division boundaries in rural Saskatchewan. In this retrospective study educational stakeholders in the province shared their challenges, their frustrations, and their perceptions of success. The experience is best described by this director of education “Being able to be part of creating a new division is positive. I think the educational capacity of the division is larger and over time the student outcomes will improve.”

Introduction

“Today, I am pleased to announce the first part of a three-phased program to renew our school system. These three phases will focus on renewing and restructuring school divisions, developing a fairer system of funding from the provincial treasury, and committing to a long-term solution to lowering education property taxes in Saskatchewan.”

~ Minister of Learning, Andrew Thompson, May 13th, 2004~

Citizens of Saskatchewan expect that the public education system will offer a quality education for every child and youth between the ages of 6 and 22 (Education Act, 1995). They also expect that education throughout the province should be equitable; a student living in Climax should have as much opportunity for a quality education as a student living in Saskatoon, or Biggar, or La Ronge. “The people of Saskatchewan believe expenditures on K-12 education are an important priority” (Boughen, 2004, p. 64). The Education Equity Initiative undertaken by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2004 was intended to increase equity and to build capacity for learning. This report focuses on the school division restructuring aspect of the Education Equity Initiative.

Education in Saskatchewan is funded partly through the general coffers of the provincial government and partly through local property taxes. Boards of Education in the province have the right to levy taxes on property within their school division. Therefore, school divisions in areas where the property assessments are relatively high have the ability to raise more revenue through property taxes. The government issues grants to provide the remainder of the funding for

education. To determine the value of the grant that is distributed to each school division the government utilizes a funding formula that takes into consideration both enrollment and property assessments, and therefore, helps to achieve equity between school divisions. School divisions that are able to raise only a small amount of money through local property taxes receive a greater proportion of the provincial grant. However, funding for education still varies annually with enrollment figures, assessments, and the amount that the province budgets for education in that year.

By the early 1990's, it was evident that changes in property assessments in some geographic regions of Saskatchewan and a continual reduction in enrollment, as a result of out-migration, throughout the province had created a significant problem. By 2004, several school divisions in the province with relatively high property assessments, no longer qualified for provincial funding using the formula that was being applied to calculate the grant. As a result, the grant was no longer effective in achieving equity between school divisions. The Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education found that "the school divisions with the highest assessment per pupil [were] ...13 times wealthier than the provincial average" (Boughen, 2004, p. 111). Something needed to be done to provide equity between Saskatchewan students. Both the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and the Education Equity Task Force agreed that carefully redrawing the school division boundaries, so that each school division included some property with higher assessments and some with lower assessments, would allow for a regional pooling of taxes and lead to greater equity for both students and ratepayers (Boughen, 2003; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004) .

This report will focus on the school division restructuring phase of the Education Equity Initiative. It will include a review of official documents; data gathered via retrospective surveys

of Directors and Superintendents, and Board of Education members; and information collected through interviews with the educational partners in the province. The aim of this report is to outline the restructuring process that was implemented by Saskatchewan Learning, to reflect on the success of that process, and to query the possibilities for successes that are currently being recognized as a result of the restructuring initiative. This study has been commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) and has been undertaken by the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU).

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- ❖ to provide a written record of the key proceedings that led to the provincial government's decision to mandate the restructuring of school divisions in Saskatchewan.
- ❖ to identify the goals for restructuring in the province and the indicators that show how progress is being measured.
- ❖ to provide documentation of the work of the Education Equity Task Force and to review the stakeholders' perceptions of the process.
- ❖ to provide documentation of the work of the interagency Restructuring Committee and the advice that they provided in regard to the restructuring initiative.
- ❖ to report on the restructuring experiences of those working within school divisions: the Board of Education, Directors, and Superintendents.
- ❖ to report on the perceptions of early successes or shortcomings of restructuring.

- ❖ to assess the effectiveness of supports from Saskatchewan Learning and other provincial organizations in establishing the new school divisions.

Background for the Study

A Review of the School Division Consolidation Literature

Since 1995, every Canadian province has experienced provincially mandated rural school division restructuring (Pierce, 2003, p. 47). Saskatchewan was the last of the ten provinces to undertake provincial restructuring of educational governance (Pierce, 2003, p. 47). The research that has been conducted in the area of school division restructuring in general, most of which has been completed in the United States (US), focused on finances, school closure, student achievement, small schools, and community losses. Research conducted in Canada (e.g. Trider, 1999; Gregg, 2003; Williams, 2003), and specifically in Saskatchewan (SSTA, 1993; Langlois & Scharf, 1991; Wionzek, 1995; Reddyk, 2000), addressed the likelihood of improved efficiency and accountability that can be achieved through restructuring initiatives. While Reddyk (2000) agreed that restructuring should be a provincial initiative to eliminate the possibility that voluntary amalgamations could exclude those who were least able to raise money locally, she cautioned that special attention paid to aspects of culture building would be key to success within school divisions.

The polarization of the issue of school district consolidation by the advocates and the adversaries of the movement is notable in the US literature (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). A series of studies have been conducted by those who oppose consolidation with the intention to prove that there will be no cost savings realized from consolidation initiatives (Rural School and Community Trust, 2006; Duncombe & Yinger, 2005). Johnson (2006) pointed out that school

district consolidation is firmly linked to school closures, primarily small schools in relatively low socio-economic areas. Additionally, several studies support the belief that small schools report higher student achievement and more supportive communities (Buchanan, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Rural School and Community Trust, 2006). Schools in small communities are the cultural centers of the community (Rural School and Community Trust, 2006) and once the school is closed the community is also reduced (Buchanan, 2004; Fleming, 1997; Bard et al. 2005; Trider, 1999; Richard, 2004; Williams, 2003). “After school closure, out migration, population decline, and neighborhood deterioration are set in motion, support for public education diminishes” (Bard et al., 2005, summary). This literature strives to bring to light some of the negative aspects of school district consolidation.

In Canada, the school division restructuring research consists of two types: reflective studies, like this one, that review the process that was undertaken to restructure the educational system (Trider, 1999; Reddyk, 2000; Gregg, 2003), or projective studies that focus on the potential gains from system-wide amalgamation (SSTA, 1993; Langlois & Scharf, 1991; Wionzek, 1995). Trider (1999) explored his personal experiences as an administrator during school division amalgamation. He used an airplane analogy to describe his lasting impression of the challenges. “While the turbulence may subside to allow the flight attendants to resume service, I suggest that it will never allow us to undo our seatbelts” (p. 13). In regard to the studies of projected success, three were conducted in Saskatchewan (SSTA, 1993; Langlois & Scharf, 1991; Wionzek, 1995). Those studies agreed that within the Saskatchewan context, efficiency can be realized through a reduction in the number of school divisions.

History of School Division Amalgamation in Saskatchewan (Pre-1990)

The history of education in Saskatchewan prior to 1990, as reported by Langlois and Scharf (1991) shows a fairly consistent movement towards consolidating schools and school divisions. “Even with the passing of the first legislation dealing with secondary education, it was clear that the central authority saw the need for consolidation of schools” (Langlois & Scharf, 1991, pp. 127-128). *The School Ordinance of 1901* offered grant money as an incentive to encourage the establishment of high school classrooms with higher enrollments. *The School Act of 1912* allowed for the formation of consolidated school districts and offered an additional grant for conveyance costs to bring students to the school. In 1917 the government hired Dr. Foght to conduct a study of the organization of schools in the province. When his report was published in 1918, he recommended reorganizing the existing boards of education into municipal school districts. This would have reduced the 4075 school districts to 300 municipal school districts. A report compiled by N.L. Reid in 1933, suggested that the equalization of the tax burden could only be achieved through the creation of larger school administrative units. In 1936 another report urged for the consolidation of schools and busing of students to larger centres (Langlois & Scharf, 1993).

In the 1940’s in response to the various reports and to the pressure from teachers in the province, the Government of Saskatchewan introduced the Larger School Units Act (Lloyd, 1979). Trustees and local government authorities opposed a reduction in the number of school divisions. “The Press took up the case [against the passing of the act]...and called for a plebiscite to be taken on the question” (Lloyd, 1979, p. 66). Minister of Education, W. S. Lloyd, implored the government to hold firm on their plans but in response to the public pressure they agreed to include a clause which stated that

a petition signed by 15% of the ratepayers in any given municipality could call for a vote before the establishment of a Larger School Unit in their area. Alternatively, a similar number of ratepayers could ask for a vote after the Unit had been in existence for a period of five years. (Lloyd, 1979, p. 66)

Despite the political opposition, in 1944 the *Larger School Units Act* was passed. Those who tried to circulate a petition against the formation of larger school units failed to gather 15% of the names in the area and therefore, no votes were held on the issue. The act allowed for the establishment of larger school units which would include approximately 80 of the former school districts. Years later, W. S. Lloyd made the following comments during an interview:

What we needed was an educational area with an adequate financial base and an adequate population base. We wanted enough to permit the possibility of planning and putting into operation a program that covered grades one to twelve, with a broadening of the offerings at the high school level. It was claimed by us that it was better to distribute educational costs and educational benefits...We were asking for changes in education that the small school district just couldn't supply. The larger unit would use the resources of money, the resources of staff and the resources of the local leadership as well. (W. S. Lloyd as quoted in Lloyd, 1979, p. 69)

The arguments that he made in favour of school division restructuring are surprisingly similar to points made by proponents of the Education Equity Initiative in the province today.

History of School Division Amalgamation in Saskatchewan (1990-2003)

Both the Langlois & Scharf *School Finance and Governance Review* of 1991 and the *Task Force of Educational Governance Report* commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA) in 1993 called for a reduction in the number of school divisions in

the province. The first amalgamation of school divisions following the publishing of these two reports took place on January 1, 1994. “Four small school divisions (Balcarres, Grenfell, Wolseley and Valleyview) amalgamated to form the Scenic Valley School Division. All four of the smaller divisions disestablished and joined to create the new division” (Saskatchewan Education, 1997, p. 11). Additionally in 1994, Saskatchewan Education supported three pilot projects in which school divisions agreed to experiment with sharing administrative services. “On January 1, 1997, Blaine Lake School Division disestablished. A portion of the school division joined the Battlefords School Division while the remainder amalgamated with the Saskatchewan Valley School Division” (Saskatchewan Education, 1997, p. 11). Several other boards voluntarily agreed to amalgamate between 1997 and 2002.

At that time, Saskatchewan Education was concerned that the move to larger school divisions was progressing too slowly and decided to offer an incentive for boards that were willing to amalgamate. Restructuring Bulletin No. 10 prepared in 2002 offers a monetary incentive for boards that are willing to engage in amalgamation:

- ❖ Saskatchewan Education will provide one-time special grants to eligible school divisions in recognition and support of amalgamation/restructuring initiatives. This policy is in effect only for those amalgamation/restructuring initiatives completed by the October 2003 Local Elections.
 1. Consideration Support - \$7500
 2. Amalgamation/Restructuring Transition Assistance – maximum \$450,000
 3. Early Commitment Support - \$15,000
- ❖ Amalgamation and restructuring are the only initiatives for which school divisions can request Restructuring Financial Supports.

- ❖ Restructuring Supports are only available to school divisions in existence as of January 1, 2002. (Saskatchewan Education, February 2002, p. 1)

Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education

With the incentive, the government had set “a goal of reducing the number of school divisions by 25 per cent (25 school divisions) prior to the board elections in October 2003” (Education Equity Task Force, 2004, p. 9). Although many school divisions co-operated by the end of the period the number of school divisions had been reduced by only 18 percent. By January of 2004, the number of school divisions in the province had been reduced to 81 but the incentives had failed to inspire sufficient change. On May 2nd, 2003, Saskatchewan Learning struck the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education to review educational funding in the province. The commission led by Ray Boughen surveyed and consulted people across the province as well as gathered technical data and considered prior research. Their mandate was to find the appropriate balance between provincial and school board contributions to K-12 education funding, to find the appropriate balance between property tax and other forms of taxation, and to assess the impact that the differences between school divisions was having on both students and ratepayers. Among other things, their final report concluded that there were inequities among school divisions for both ratepayers and students, that Saskatchewan needed to reduce the reliance on property taxes to fund education, and that although it was still appropriate to use a grant system to improve equity that the current Foundational Operating Grant needed to achieve greater simplicity, transparency, and cost validation. Based on those conclusions, the commission recommended that Saskatchewan start by shifting some of the burden for financing education from property taxes to sales taxes. The commission suggested that between 2004 and 2009 the province should be able to change from a system where 60% of the funding for

education was raised through local property tax to a system where 80% of educational funding was supplied by the province. Additionally, they recognized that simply changing the taxation system and reworking the Foundational Operating Grant would not fully achieve equity for students and ratepayers. As a result, they recommended forming a task force that would be assigned the task of redrawing the school division boundaries to allow for regional tax pooling (Boughen, 2003). These were far reaching changes with significant political implications and the government would need to decide which of the recommendations they would follow.

The Process

On May 13, 2004 Saskatchewan Learning Minister, Andrew Thompson, made public the provincial government's response to *Finding the Balance: The Final Report from the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education* led by Ray Boughen. In his address, Minister Thompson outlined three phases to the new Education Equity Initiative:

- ❖ Establish a three-member Education Equity Task Force to recommend new division boundaries based on specified criteria;
- ❖ Direct Saskatchewan Learning to work with its stakeholders to develop a new system of school operating grants that is simpler, fairer and more transparent;
- ❖ Dedicate 30 per cent of new and ongoing compensation on equalization received from natural resource revenues from Ottawa to property tax relief, to shift the balance off education property tax. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004)

While the response to the commission from the Department of Learning included only a few of the recommendations, for students, parents, school division employees and board members in

rural Saskatchewan, it was significant that the response included the announcement of a task force to recommend changes to the school division boundaries.

The Goals of the Restructuring Initiative

Minister Thompson's announcement carried with it a message of hope. Restructuring would:

- ❖ provide administrative and governance savings, which would strengthen resources available in a new larger school division and their capacity for providing high quality learning opportunities and supports.
- ❖ increase equity in educational opportunities for students by using any savings to improve and broaden programs and services for all students.
- ❖ allow for the regional pooling of property tax resources that will improve the equity for all property taxpayers in Saskatchewan. (M. Lipp, personal communication, July 27, 2004, p. 2)

With these goals in mind, Saskatchewan Learning, the educational partners in the province, school division administration and boards of education undertook the task of restructuring the organizational boundaries of school divisions in Saskatchewan.

Education Equity Task Force

The establishment of the Education Equity Task Force made up of Fred Herron, Shirley Batters and Al Klassen formally marked the beginning of the restructuring of education in rural Saskatchewan. They were charged with the task of redrawing the school division boundaries given the following criteria:

- ❖ There must be no more than 40 school divisions, including minority faith and Francophone boards.

- ❖ Each new school division will be in a range of assessment per student such that it will qualify for a grant, thus eliminating zero grant boards.
- ❖ The enrollment minimum for school divisions outside the North, Lloydminster, and the separate school system is to be 5,000 students.
- ❖ There should be amalgamations of whole school divisions except in unusual circumstances.
- ❖ New public school division boundaries will be contiguous (adjoining).
- ❖ Previous voluntary amalgamations should be represented whenever possible.
- ❖ The three northern school divisions and the two Lloydminster school divisions will remain the same. (Education Equity Task Force, November 2004, p. 4)

The task force began their work by collecting all of the details about the existing school divisions including enrollment, mill rates, assessment per student and grant information. Once they had compiled accurate data about the existing school divisions they were ready to start thinking about how the boundaries could be redrawn to match the criteria. On August 3, 2004 the task force released a preliminary map (See Appendix A), an illustration of how the boundaries might look in the future. The preliminary map would serve as a starting point for dialogue between the task force and the educational stakeholders.

From this point, the task force met with the Board of Education in each school division in the province and with each of the provincial educational stakeholder organizations. Additionally, they met with the Catholic Section of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, First Nations representatives, some local boards of trustees, and one parent group. In all they held 81 consultation meetings across the province. They also accepted briefs and written submissions for

consideration during their deliberations. As a result of their consultations, the task force took into consideration both trading patterns and Health District boundaries where possible.

When the new map (See Appendix D) was released on November 12, 2004, it included 12 restructured school divisions that ranged in size from 5,143 students to 9,566 students. Using the 2004 assessments and granting formulas, each of the new school divisions qualified for a grant. Therefore, zero grant boards had been eliminated. The task force also recommended that each of the school divisions should have 10 subdivisions with one board member for each subdivision. The vision created by the Education Equity Task Force suggested that the number of school divisions in the province be reduced from 81 to 28.

The final report of the Education Equity Task Force also became a medium for communication as the task force reported the opinions that they heard from Board of Education members and Directors of Education throughout the province. The task force had listened and then honored the people by sharing their opinions in the final report.

Voluntary Amalgamation of Separate School Boards

Neither the *School Finance and Governance Review* by Langlois & Scharf in 1991 nor the *Task Force of Educational Governance Report* (SSTA, 1993) included recommendations for Catholic separate school boards. However, as discussions of restructuring continued within the public education sector throughout the early 1990's, the Saskatchewan separate school boards realized independently that the recommendations from these reports also had implications within their system. In 1994, the SSTA published, *Catholic Education...Search for Truth Formation in Faith*, a report that focused on alternatives for the organization of Catholic education in the province.

The first move towards amalgamating separate school boards was in 1997 when the separate school divisions in Unity and Wilkie disestablished and joined with the separate school division in North Battleford to become North West Regional Roman Catholic Separate School Division. Also in 1997, the separate school division in Mankota amalgamated with the public school division of Wood River to form Golden Prairie School Division and the separate school division in Shaunavon entered into a shared services agreement with Moose Jaw R.C.S.S.D. #22. This agreement between the communities of Shaunavon and Moose Jaw was significant because it was actually a precursor to the amalgamation of Shaunavon, Swift Current, and Moose Jaw into Holy Trinity R.C.S.S.D. #22 (Noonan, 1998, pp. 73-74).

Discussions that took place between separate school division officials in Saskatchewan and their Alberta counterparts proved to be “pivotal in deciding to amalgamate voluntarily” (interview participant). In Alberta, the separate school divisions had been mandated to reorganize at the same time as the public divisions and the leaders of the separate school system in Alberta recommended strongly that separate school division leaders in Saskatchewan take control of the process and make it work. So, when the members of the Education Equity Task Force met with the Catholic Section of the SSBA in the fall of 2004, separate school divisions had already been reduced from 21 to 14. The Catholic school divisions agreed that they would further reduce the number of separate school divisions. By the time the public school division restructuring was official on January 1, 2006, the number of Catholic school divisions had been reduced from 14 to 8.

Restructuring Coordinating Committee

The Restructuring Coordinating Committee (RCC) was re-established (former RCC established during voluntary amalgamation) to provide support for the restructuring initiative.

This committee would include representation from each of the major education stakeholders in the province:

- ❖ Saskatchewan School Boards Association
- ❖ Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation
- ❖ League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents
- ❖ Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials
- ❖ Saskatchewan Association of School Councils
- ❖ Unions representing support staff:
 - Canadian Union of Public Employees
 - Service Employees International Union

The restructuring committee provided advice to the Minister and the Deputy Minister of Learning and a continuing forum for educational partners to share their concerns. It also acted as a resource to resolve issues and to provide support as the school divisions worked through the challenges of adapting to the new boundaries. The vast complexity of the task necessitated that the RCC needed to discuss a broad spectrum of issues. They met regularly and reported back to the Ministry following each meeting. As a way to communicate their recommendations they created thirteen bulletins that detailed many of the processes that school divisions would need to act out to achieve the restructuring initiative. These bulletins were delivered to the Department of Learning and with minimal revisions were published as directives for Directors of Education, Business Officials, and School Boards to act upon.

In addition to meeting as a large group, the RCC was divided into six sub-committees. The sub committees provided a way for the committee to break down the issues into manageable

chunks so that they could deal with specific areas and concerns. The following chart describes the way that the issues were divided between the six sub-committees:

Sub-Committee Name	Duties
Governance and Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative Amendments • Aboriginal Representation on Boards • Strategic Timelines • Protocol for School Closures • Representation of Catholic Boards on Comprehensive Boards
School Division Operations and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop organization and operations models • HR and personnel issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Out of Scope ○ Office Personnel ○ Agreements ○ Policy Consolidation • Facilitators • Professional Development/Board Training
Financial and Administrative Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assets and Liabilities • Transition Costs • Records Retention and Disposal
Local Accountability and Community Involvement/Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Accountability • Community Development • Training and Development
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating Handbook and Policy Bulletins • Providing Stakeholder Information on RCC Progress on Timely Basis • Communications Strategy
Informational Technology Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to Technology Consortium

The thirteen Restructuring Bulletins outline the areas that were addressed by the RCC and the advice that they provided to Saskatchewan Learning about the process that would be required to achieve success in this wide-scale change initiative. Although the actual bulletins are attached to this report as Appendix B at the end of the document, the summaries below outline the information and suggestions that are cited within each bulletin.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 1, February 1, 2005: Guidelines for Roles and Responsibilities of Existing and New Boards of Education in 2005

The new school divisions were established and Boards of Education were elected by June 15, 2005 but did not become operational until January 1, 2006. Until that time, the original school divisions continued to operate under their existing Boards of Education. This first restructuring bulletin sought to explain that the role of the newly elected board of education during the period from their election until December 31, 2005. The role of the newly elected board would be to organize for the beginning of their new school division while the legacy board would be responsible for the operation of the existing school division. The new board needed to hire a Director of Education and a Secretary Treasurer, choose a suitable location for the division office, prepare an interim budget for operations until December 2005, develop a plan for records retention, and a plan for bringing the old school divisions together. The first restructuring bulletin outlines those tasks in a point by point “to-do” list format (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 2, February 16, 2005: Elections for Board Members of the Restructured School Divisions

Bulletin No. 2 stated that the Minister had announced the Election Day of June 15, 2005. It went on to say that although the Education Act stipulates that the Minister can provide an election for the first Board of Education for a new school division, the act would be amended so that board members elected in the June 2005 elections would not be required to run for election again in the regularly scheduled elections in October 2006. Additionally, this bulletin included a chart that outlined all of the important dates for the elections (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 3, May 17, 2005: Records Retention and Disposal Information

A Board of Education is required to preserve all public documents of their division until their disposal is authorized by a resolution of the board and is approved by the Minister of Learning. However, many of the documents must be retained indefinitely and others must be stored for at least ten years. Bulletin No. 3 outlined the guidelines that school divisions should use for dealing with the retention and disposal of records that would become their responsibility as smaller school divisions closed their doors. Financial records, student records and employment records are all important aspects of the history of education in the province. Bulletin No. 3 outlined in detail how different types of records should be handled (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 4, May 17, 2005: Guidelines for the Selection of the Director of Education and the Secretary Treasurer in Restructured School Divisions

The Fourth bulletin outlined the details for the hiring of Directors of Education and Secretary Treasurers (See Appendix B). Boards were given the choice of whether they wanted to hold an internal or an external hiring competition for the position of director. If the board chose to engage in an external hiring procedure the bulletin recommended that they should participate in an interview schedule that would be facilitated provincially by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. The outlined dates provided a crossover between the timeline for hiring the director and the timeline for hiring the Secretary Treasurer and ensured that the Director would be in place by August 15th to assist with interviewing the Secretary Treasurer on August 29th.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 5, May 25, 2005: Land Title Fees

Bulletin No. 5 reminded board members of the sections of the Education Act that direct how land titles and assets are to be transferred from the old school divisions to the new school division. It instructed legacy boards to create a list of assets and liabilities and announced

training for school division officials who would be in-charge of working with the transfer of land titles from one school division to the next (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 6, May 25, 2005: Sale/Disposal of Schools

The sixth bulletin outlined the guidelines to be used when selling schools. Generally, the bulletin explains that any money made from the sale of schools will be applied to the next capital project in the school division (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 7, May 25, 2005: Partnership/Tuition Agreements during Restructuring

Bulletin No. 7 (See Appendix B) outlined that new Boards of Education would be required to honor any partnerships and tuition agreements that were held by the previous boards. It also directed existing boards to evaluate and prioritize existing agreements so that new boards would know which agreements needed to be dealt with immediately. Additionally, Bulletin No. 7 stated that agreements that would be split between two new school divisions would be honored in both of the new school divisions.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 8, May 25, 2005: Determining a School Division Office Location

Bulletin No. 8 (See Appendix B) provided guidelines for deciding where to establish the school division office. In addition to outlining a number of criteria for selecting the office, Bulletin No. 8 reminded Boards that they would need to be transparent about the criteria that they had used to make the decision.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 9, May 25, 2005: Initial Meetings of New Boards of Education

The ninth bulletin (See Appendix B) outlined the agenda items for the first meeting and for several meetings following the first one. Like many of the other bulletins, this one sought to make Boards aware of their responsibilities as dictated by the Education Act, 1995.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 10, May 25, 2005: Finding for Capital Projects

This bulletin explained that the Department of Learning would honor all capital project commitments that it had made to school divisions prior to restructuring. Although the Department's share of the cost of the capital project is based on the tax assessment in the school division, the Department agreed to maintain the agreed upon cost sharing percentages until March 31, 2007 at which time a new agreement would be made (See Appendix B).

Restructuring Bulletin No. 11, May 25, 2005: Developing Structures and Agreements to Replace Comprehensive High School Boards of Education

When Bulletin No. 11 (See Appendix B) was published three Comprehensive School Boards of Education existed in the province in Estevan, Melville, and Swift Current. These boards were comprised of representatives of partnering boards that had a stake in the facility. Bulletin No. 11 explained that these boards would cease to exist as of December 31, 2005 but that any tuition agreements that were currently in place to support the operation of the school would remain in effect until the new boards negotiated a new agreement.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 12, May 25, 2005: Guidelines for the Transition of Human Resources in Restructured School Divisions

This bulletin (See Appendix B) cautioned school divisions to pay attention to contracts and agreements and to treat all employees with due process and respect during the upcoming transition. It stressed that Boards needed to anticipate the necessary staff compliment for the new school division as soon as possible. The bulletin also pointed out the importance of open communication between employees and the school division and suggested that Boards invite employees to express their preferences given the situation.

Restructuring Bulletin No. 13, May 25, 2005: Transition Funding for Restructuring School Divisions

Bulletin No. 13 set out three components of the transitional funding that would be available to school divisions. Money would be available for the out-of-cycle elections costs to run the June 15, 2005 election, for expenditures of the new board until December 31, 2005, and for costs associated with the transition for restructured boards after January 1, 2006. This bulletin detailed each of the expenditures that would be covered by the transition funding and explained how Boards could apply to be reimbursed for the costs. Finally, it outlined the maximum amounts that were available for each school division and illustrated how the maximum values had been calculated. On November 25, 2005, Bulletin No. 13(a) was published to assist school divisions in interpreting Bulletin No. 13.

The dynamic array of topics covered in the restructuring bulletins provides some idea of the scope of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee. In addition to these topics, they heard presentations from the Education Equity Task Force, the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, and about the Continuous Improvement Framework.

Orientation for New Boards

On June 23 – 25, 2005 all of the newly elected Boards of Education met in Regina for a three day orientation. This event was supported by Saskatchewan Learning and hosted by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. The agenda addressed many of the issues that would be important for board members to think about as they prepared to accept their new challenge. They discussed legislation; educational financing; partnerships with First Nations and Métis people; and educational partners in the province. Additionally, they were introduced to facilitators, provided by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, who could assist them in

hiring a Director of Education and a Secretary Treasurer; creating a vision for the future of their new school divisions; and understanding the policy governance model for Boards of Education. During this three day orientation, Boards had a chance to meet and talk with several facilitators in order to select one that seemed to be a good match for the new board. A representative from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association described the three day event like this:

We had a provincial convention, if you will, about 10 days after the election, the end of June of '05, which was open to all boards, that talked about the new world that they were going to live in and the types of issues that they would face because of the new student achievement piece that was coming forward. We had a two or three day conference at the University of Regina to give them as board members, in some cases new people, the background and exposure to these issues that were part of this larger event. (interviewee)

The board members that were interviewed in the course of this study reported that this meeting was significant because it was really the first time that they had been together as a board and that the discussion topics and the length of time helped them to begin to build an understanding of who they were as a group.

The Perspectives

Education Equity Task Force

Participants in this study indicated that they were pleased with the process implemented by the Education Equity Task Force and describe the task force as people who listened and reported back information to Saskatchewan Learning. “The process was very well-done. The group listened to the school boards. Overall, they did a very good job of setting the boundaries” (Board member interview). The major educational partners in the province reported that this part

of the process had gone smoothly due to the method that was used to collect the viewpoints and perspectives of the partner organizations and Boards throughout the province. “Whether they liked it at the end of the day or not, they felt heard in the process. That was part of the objective” (Saskatchewan Learning representative).

One director explained that when the mandated amalgamation was announced that his school division realized that it was going to happen and chose to get involved in the discussions with the Education Equity Task Force to make sure that the map was drawn in a way that would meet the needs in the area.

So, when the map was announced, I think people had to really get to work to make sure that the new system that was going to be developed fit the needs of the area. And so when they made a proposal to the Education Equity Task Force, they were very detailed and were very convincing that indeed the map should look different. And so when the final map came out, it matched what we had presented. And it matched what most people would have envisioned...So, I think from that perspective, we were much more ready to accept the change, because we knew it was going to be a positive change. And we were happy that they got the first step right.

Several participants did suggest ways that the final map could have been improved. There seemed to be two common suggestions that surfaced regularly in the data. First, like this director explained, the Education Equity Task Force should have focused on the long term value rather than remaining loyal to past promises that Saskatchewan Learning had made,

I think the only mistake the Department made at the time, is that because we had that one step of voluntary amalgamation and they'd indicated they wouldn't break up anybody

that had voluntarily amalgamated. The reality is that some of the voluntary amalgamations didn't make sense in the larger context.

Secondly, several of the participants agreed with this board member who said, "They could have made the new school divisions smaller. The maps should not have been drawn using only the criteria of a certain number of students and having all Boards grant receiving." Although the Final Report of the Education Equity Task Force explains that the task force did consider trading patterns and Health District boundaries, several people felt that these criteria should have played a larger role in the boundary decisions.

Restructuring Coordinating Committee

The educational partners represented on the Restructuring Coordinating Committee (RCC) reported that the committee provided a forum for their diverse voices and established a collaborative rapport which many of them described as the "Saskatchewan way". One of the RCC members described the collaborative atmosphere like this:

The major outcome for me was that the whole decision around restructuring was embraced as something that we were going to do as a province. Nobody came to the table saying, or acting in a way that would try to scuttle the restructuring plan. Everybody came to the table saying, yes, let's make this work!

There was general agreement among the partners that the work of the committee was successful because the partners shared the belief that restructuring was necessary within the provincial context and because their work was characterized by collaborative efforts between distinct perspectives. "Each of the stakeholder groups got to know more about each other's principles and goals. This enhanced [their] sense of working toward common goals and the worthwhile initiatives having to do with moving K-12 education forward in the 21st century" (RCC

Interviewee). Although each of the partner organizations agreed to work together, they came to the table concerned about the issues that would be encountered by the membership of their organization as restructuring progressed.

For the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA), it was inevitable that restructuring would necessitate major changes for their members and for the organization in general. The restructuring initiative would reduce the number of boards, and therefore, would lead to a decrease in the total number of board members in the province. Furthermore the roles and responsibilities for each of the restructured boards would change significantly within the larger school divisions.

The Association participated on behalf of boards in the processes that the Department established. One of our mandates was to ensure that the essential authorities, jurisdictions, and integrities of boards of education were not damaged or diluted or done away with. The other was to try to imagine on behalf of boards a world, a newly restructured world, that would be advantageous or good for boards of education.” (SSBA representative).

The SSBA expressed that although they appreciated the collaborative nature of the RCC which brought the perspectives of all of the partners to the table, they felt as though some of the partners at the table would be impacted only peripherally by the restructuring initiative and therefore did not require an equal voice in the process.

A great many people were invited to the table to discuss boards of education or the anatomy of boards of education; people who had unique, peculiar or distinct interests. We were there on behalf of boards having the broadest range of interests. Part of it was that during the process participants were asked to identify anything and everything that came

to mind. So a great many issues, concerns, anxieties, goals, objectives, desires were identified. Clearly to have acted on a great number of them...would have either challenged or diminished the authority of boards of education or would have narrowed the capacity or authority of boards in the future in terms of the new world. So, part of what we were trying to do at the outset or during the early stages was trying to keep the process on keel so it wouldn't get carried away with itself. (SSBA representative)

In retrospect, the SSBA reflected that restructuring had a positive outcome for boards and that although their roles and responsibilities had changed their authority and capacity had not been diminished through the process.

From the time that the announcement to restructure was made onward, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS) was concerned mainly with what would happen to their members when the number of school divisions was reduced. How would the province provide for those people who needed to be redeployed? It was important for LEADS to bring this issue to the table and ensure that the RCC addressed it immediately so that they could confirm for their members in the field how restructuring would impact their employment. In the end, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation agreed to suspend 'Article 9: Criteria for the Designation of Out of Scope Personnel', of the *Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement* which limits the number of out of scope personnel that can be employed by any school division. This decision afforded the RCC an opportunity to consider the possibilities of retaining all LEADS members to help school divisions through the transition. After considering the balance between costs that would be required for severance pay for the affected individuals and the costs that would be incurred to ensure employment, the RCC advised Saskatchewan Learning that LEADS members should be given the choice to stay and to be employed for at

least 18 months to help the divisions transition into their new realities. As a result, LEADS members who wished to retire were paid out for the 18 month period. The others were redeployed into a school division office that included all or part their division or to another school division office, if they chose to enter an open competition for a position in another school division. A representative of LEADS explained it this way:

The Restructuring Committee said that [to call everyone's resignation, as had been done in Alberta,] was not a very effective way, not a good way to treat people when there's lots of work to do, and we, in fact, guaranteed everybody's employment for eighteen months. So, from January 1st of '06 to June 30th of 07, all LEADS members and all SASBO members were guaranteed positions in the new divisions, with their salaries being paid for by the restructuring fund. Now the rationale behind it was, if you were to terminate all these people, they likely would have been eligible for either a twelve-month severance, or an eighteen-month severance. So, you pay out the money in one form or another. You could pay it to them through employment, and since there was a lot of work to do, why wouldn't you keep those people on your team?

That decision was a crucial one for the LEADS organization and their membership. By the time the 18 month period was over in June of 2007, school divisions had reduced the numbers of out-of-scope staff in accordance with Article 9 of the Provincial Teachers' Agreement and no LEADS members were forced to resign at that time.

Members of the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials (SASBO) faced similar employment issues as their counterparts in LEADS. Fewer school divisions would require fewer secretary treasurers.

Not too far back we had 89 secretary treasurers and with this last wave of amalgamations it would mean that there would be 28 left standing. That would be our main concern.

(SASBO representative interview)

A large share of the work involved in amalgamation is work that would need to be completed by SASBO members. Like LEADS, SASBO wanted to ensure that school divisions would retain their members to assist with transitions to the new school division and, like LEADS, Saskatchewan Learning agreed to provide funding to school divisions to retain SASBO members through to June of 2007.

Additionally, SASBO volunteered to oversee the board elections that were held on June 15, 2005. Saskatchewan Learning recognized that many of the SASBO members had never lead an election of this magnitude so they agreed to fund a training session for SASBO members throughout the province.

For the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) their chief concerns were the issues that faced teachers across the province. Although many of the research participants in this study talked about their intention to keep restructuring from having an impact on schools, the wide-scale reorganization caused several issues to arise for teachers. A representative of the STF describes some of those concerns below:

Some of the concerns from teachers' points of view were ensuring a smooth transition from the old school divisions to the new school divisions in areas of individual teacher contracts, successor rights relating to local collective bargaining, attending to situations where former school divisions were actually split in pieces and ensuring that teachers were well served in their transitions to their new school division no matter which school division it would be. One situation that I recall had to do with central office personnel in

the old school divisions and how their transitions would occur...both consultants and others that were employed by the old school divisions and particularly the shared services personnel who were shared among school divisions. It was important to make sure that they had an opportunity to participate in the transition. (STF representative interview)

Although restructuring might not seem to have a major impact on teachers, issues of contracts and bargaining with such a large group of employees becomes a major concern of any school division. During the interview phase of the data collection in the fall of 2007, many school division directors and board members mentioned the settling of local agreements with teachers and referred to it as a significant milestone in the restructuring journey.

The main concern for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) was to ensure that all employee groups be treated fairly and reasonably, especially support staff employees who were predominately CUPE members. CUPE and their members faced the reality that in most of the new school divisions several CUPE locals would need to merge and to bargain a common collective agreement with the new school division. It was important to have “support mechanisms in place so that CUPE members felt respected and valued in their roles at the schools and in the communities” (CUPE representative interview). By the spring of 2008, in most of the new school divisions the various local CUPE chapters have been merged and they have forged a common collective agreement with the school division. In many of the new school divisions, CUPE has “achieved equalized wage rates for the same classifications and benefit parity within the boundaries of the new school divisions” (CUPE representative interview). Additionally, many school divisions are working towards standardized job descriptions and working conditions. Several of the Directors, Superintendents, and Board of

Education members who participated in this study noted the challenges that they faced in completing this work in their school divisions.

While the educational partners expressed a positive perspective about the work of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee and reported that everyone had a voice, several people did have somewhat more critical points of view. Interviewees from Saskatchewan Learning and from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association both expressed some concern that perhaps too many people and too many issues were brought to the table. A representative from Saskatchewan Learning described it like this:

The Restructuring Committee got the work done. Was it smooth? No. Could it have been done better? Yes, definitely. One of the fundamental problems was the number of groups represented at the table. There is a collective notion that guides the K-12 system in the province and it is one around collectivity and partnership, which is all good stuff, but doesn't always serve the system well. That's the problem that we got into. The idea was that when we set up the restructuring that everyone should be at the table. The School Boards Association's stake in this and responsibility in this is way different than CUPE, for example but they were all at the table. Although everyone absolutely should have been heard in the process, they shouldn't have been at the same table. The interests were not equitable and were too diverse. We should have structured it differently. We should have used a different approach that recognized the stake that each of the people were bringing with them. Each of them had an important stake that needed to be dealt with through the process but those weren't negotiations that should have been negotiated at that table. There needed to be more clarity around roles and responsibilities.

(Saskatchewan Learning Interviewee)

Several members of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee also suggested that the discussions would have benefited from stronger leadership to reduce the repetitive nature of the debate. One RCC member described the frustration experienced by members of the group, when it felt like too much time was being spent reviewing items that had been discussed at previous meetings.

I went on to say to the chair that in order for us to move ahead, if you're chairing the meetings you have to lead us on and don't worry about anyone thinking, 'Oh here goes Sask Learning telling us what we're doing.' Somebody has to chair this thing and get us to forward think instead of reflecting back. (RCC Interviewee)

Another interviewee reflected that part of the problem came as a result of partner organizations that felt the need to restate their issues at every meeting. He proposed that it would have been better to have a running list of issues that needed to be addressed so that the chair could refer back to the list to assure participants that their message had been recorded and that it would be dealt with and that it would be communicated back to Saskatchewan Learning.

Although respondents in the field rarely reflected on the work of the RCC, board members and directors frequently noted that the Restructuring Bulletins were the guide for the process that was carried out in the school divisions. They appreciated the guidance and understood that following the process outlined in the bulletins would ensure some common elements to the provincial initiative.

Effectiveness of Supports from Saskatchewan Learning

One of the objectives of this study was to assess the effectiveness of supports from Saskatchewan Learning and other provincial organizations in establishing the new school

divisions. In general, participants noted that Saskatchewan Learning had supported the process through the Restructuring Bulletins and with funding.

Many directors and board members that were interviewed pointed out that one of the decisions that had the greatest impact on the success of the new school divisions was the decision to have the boards, directors and secretary treasurers in place for six months prior to the school division becoming operational.

It was so important that for about five or six months the Board members got to know each other. They got to know how people operate, they got to know what thoughts, what perceptions that they were bringing into the amalgamation before they actually began to manage the system. (Director interview)

While it was clear that different divisions handled that six month lead time in different ways, many of the interviewees mentioned the valuable work that they accomplished during that period.

Others expressed their disappointment that the Department of Learning did not provide further leadership during the transition phase to help divisions sort through some of the messiness that they encountered. “There was little guidance overall and so senior administrative staff members had to design within each division a restructuring plan. All of this had to happen while the school division also had to continue to operate” (Director and Superintended survey respondent). One director that was interviewed suggested a specific example of how that provincial leadership might have been applied. In regard to the decision about selecting a central office location he suggested that

[they] could have said, you can put the offices wherever you like them, but within five years you’ll have one centralized office. Because the danger again now is that we will

fight political battles to get our offices in one place, which everyone will tell you makes the most sense.

Many pointed out that the lack of leadership exhibited by Saskatchewan Learning wasn't due to a lack of good intention but rather resulted from a lack of knowledge about what it is like to work in the field or a lack of knowledge about restructuring.

So, you know I'm not saying that they were purposeful in terms of trying to sabotage, or do things wrong. I just don't think that they had the vision and the expertise to understand what the road would be like, going through amalgamation and after amalgamation.

(Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

As a result, many participants noted that the strength of the initiative was that local leaders provided strong leadership and organized successful local restructuring plans.

The Restructuring Management Committee was made up of three members; two regional directors and an executive director. This committee was charged with the responsibility of managing the transitions following the restructuring initiative. Therefore, they were responsible for dispersing the transition funding, and for transitioning comprehensive school agreements, and such. They met with each of the new school divisions and collected their prospective budgets and then made decisions about which costs would be covered and which costs would not be covered. Several participants in this study noted that the transition funding was inadequate. "During the restructuring phase there are added pressures and demands on the system. Consequently, additional human resources and dollars are needed during the initial transition phase which probably lasts for 3 to 5 years." Although it was the fifth most commonly held viewpoint expressed in the survey data, a few people who were interviewed disagreed with this perspective stating that the transition funding covered most of the costs of restructuring. These people

suggested that it was important to define a limitation for the amount that would be spent provincially.

Effectiveness of Supports by Partner Organizations

As a result of a survey question that asked directly about the supports provided by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA), most of the data that was collected about the supports provided by partner organizations referred to the SSBA. Participants commonly cited that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association had supported boards by providing facilitators who were instrumental in establishing the foundational aspects of the school division, hiring a director of education, and learning the roles in the policy governance model. They also mentioned that the SSBA had conducted workshops and provided excellent legal services.

The SSBA established guidelines and conducted workshops for the school community councils. They worked on the Foundation Operating Grant to help make education grant money more equitable. They worked on the contents and some of the administrative details for the Continuous Improvement Framework; and developed and conducted sessions on policy governance for boards of education to help them in being part of a larger system. They assisted in drawing up the legal documents for hiring Directors of Education. They also provided facilitators to help in the selection of the Directors of Education. (Board survey respondent)

While some respondents recognized the hard work of the SSBA, others indicated their belief that the SSBA's concern for protecting the provincial organization rendered the organization less effective in supporting boards through the process. The following comments drawn from the data support this perspective:

- ❖ “They could have focused on assisting the boards right from the outset rather than trying to sell themselves at the first gathering of the boards”(Board survey respondent).
- ❖ “They have been blind, in my opinion, to the needs of boards in the new reality and have focused on their own survival” (Board survey respondent).
- ❖ “I feel that they didn't support the process very well. They appeared to be more concerned about finding their new position in Saskatchewan and less concerned about supporting divisions with an actual leadership role.” (Director interview)

A few participants commented about the other partner organizations. The following comments made by individuals provide some feedback but it is important to understand that these comments are the opinions of one person and not a collective perspective:

- ❖ When asked what went well one director responded that, “the willingness of the STF to adopt a positive approach to amalgamation” and the “networking opportunities provided through LEADS to share our concerns and questions with our colleagues” were two things that went well.
- ❖ Another director expressed a contradictory perspective, “I attribute any success to our own hard work and intelligence. LEADS, SSBA, and SK Learning were NOT helpful. Ironically, SASBO was helpful to me as a director.”

Perspectives from the Field

Although the experiences of the restructuring process varied significantly from one division to another, there were several points that surfaced in the data that appeared to be common perspectives. This section outlines those points of view using quotations from the

surveys, the interviews and the focus group discussion. It was difficult to identify which ideas were more prevalent because the issues that were raised varied with the time period in which the data collection was conducted. Therefore, the views that seemed to be most common in the surveys were different than the views that were most common in the interviews. The most logical explanation is that the two data collection techniques were applied at different times during the restructuring initiative and different issues would be at the forefront in the school divisions at the time. The surveys and focus group discussion took place between April and June of 2007. The interviews were held during the fall and winter of 2007-2008. The following perspectives appear in an order that reflects the frequency with which they were stated in the surveys. Following each perspective are several examples of quotations from survey respondents or interview participants. Each of the perspectives was confirmed several times in the data by a variety of participants.

Success came as the result of strong local leadership and good people working together at the school division level. This concept was a theme that surfaced throughout the data. Even when it wasn't stated explicitly, it was often implied. In many ways, it is a very positive perspective and it shows that people working within the new school divisions believe in their ability to be successful.

- ❖ It may sound immodest but the things that worked well for us were those things that we took complete ownership over and asked neither Saskatchewan Learning nor SSBA for help. Instead we hired independent consultants to help us find our way through the governance question. Then we proceeded with a strategic plan that tried to keep students at the forefront of all our operations. However, you must understand I sat on a board that had already restructured voluntarily several times, and the other

board that restructured with us had done the same. So, many of the pitfalls were well known to us. (Board survey respondent)

- ❖ Having talented people to work with, people who are committed to this work and perhaps most importantly people who are trustworthy with the right intentions, is fundamental to getting this done. (Director and Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ I was pleased that for the most part the board members did not and do not see their role as fighting for local advantage but are concerned for the whole division advantage. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ Strong leadership in our director allowed the growing pains associated with amalgamation to be minimized. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ And given our context in this area, because of the general positive view of it, I think everyone that stepped forward, says, we're stepping forward because we want to make this work, not because we want to show that it can't work. (Director interview)

Everyone needs to understand that change requires time. Many of the participants shared the perspective that although at the time of the surveys and interviews they were well over a year into the process, they felt like they were just getting started. Those who had been through one or more of the voluntary amalgamations recognized that it took a long time for everyone to become comfortable with the new patterns.

- ❖ The restructuring process is only beginning we are almost two years away from the elections and we have much more work to be done. I feel as though we will not have the process completed within the next two years. We need to ensure that we do things right rather than enacting change without a valid reason. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

- ❖ Everyone should have been made aware that this is a 3-4 year process. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ It was too fast. That's the two words to describe it...TOO FAST. There wasn't time for us to get do it right. Too much pressure to hire, to get it done. It would have been better to build some of the board relationships. (Board member interview)
- ❖ So, we've made a conscious decision not to rush those sorts of things. And maybe that goes somewhat against some of the theories, but I think from our perspective, in terms of people handling it, it's been appreciated. And gradually we're getting our logo and our motto, and so on, out there. But it wasn't our first priority. Our first priority was making people feel comfortable, making sure that we were responsive to people's views around the change. So that, in the long term, we will create the culture. We've done that in a gradual manner. (Director interview)

Culture building is hard work. Some people mentioned the difficulty they encountered with “bad partners” and others provided examples of the differences between “legacy boards”. Many of them reflected how difficult it was to bring the people together when the cultures of the old school divisions were so different from each other.

- ❖ The whole concept of reculturing is misunderstood. The fact that most of the literature that was presented to us from Saskatchewan Learning and the SSBA assumed that the term "reculture" is an active verb rather than a description of a state of being that is in a constant flux creates problems as we try to do things to create a culture rather than allow the culture to evolve naturally.
- ❖ Time is required when building new relationships

- ❖ Developing a new culture is a significant undertaking in a large, very diverse new school division. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ There was an underestimation of cultural differences among legacy divisions. ‘The way we do things around here’ or past practices were inhibitors of change. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ In our previous amalgamation I had made the statement that whatever we did on the business side shouldn’t effect what was happening in schools. In this amalgamation I’m not so sure. There was some vagueness to where we were going and we had an inability to communicate due to a lack of resources and a lack. Schools didn’t think of the Board as a good bunch of people who are trying to do good things for kids, they thought that the Board was trying to reduce what they had. As a result this amalgamation filtered back into the schools and caused angst and probably had some impact on students. (Board member interview)

There was too much change all at once. As the restructuring initiative got underway, it became apparent that it would be a good time to make additional changes and Saskatchewan Learning decided to look at a framework for strategic planning and accountability, a new form of local governance, and changes to the fiscal year. A representative from Saskatchewan Learning described it like this, “Other initiatives became attached to the work. As we started to drill down we recognized that this was a very fundamental change that we’re making and we had to ask ourselves what are the other implications of this change? It was clear that we had to do other streams of work to move the agenda along.” For many of the people working in the school divisions, the sheer number of changes became overwhelming.

- ❖ There needed to be more staging, too many things were done at once some things could have waited i.e.: SCCs, the change in the fiscal year. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Interference by Continuous Improvement Framework, School Community Councils, and closure moratoriums should have been avoided so that efforts could be focused. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ How about not launching the CIF, School Community Councils, and a new financial year in the middle of it? There's a limit to how much change you can do at one time.

The newly restructured school divisions are too large. This perspective seemed to be more prevalent in the responses from board members than those from directors and superintendents.

- ❖ They could have made the new school divisions smaller. The maps should not have been drawn using only the criteria of a certain number of students and having all Boards grant receiving. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ Divisions are too big and the decision making is moved too far from the people they serve. People feel closer to their MLA's than they do to their school boards. Our division takes in three complete provincial constituencies and parts of two others. (Board Survey respondent)

The size of the divisions makes it difficult for central office personnel and board members to form connections with people in the schools. Informal discussions with teachers across the province suggested that they feel that they do not have enough contact with school division personnel working in the school division offices. Consequently, directors and superintendents also reported that they are concerned that they are no longer able to be in close contact with teachers and schools.

- ❖ If I could do it all again, I would be careful about making the school divisions so large. It is not a good thing when it takes 4 hours for a return trip to a school in your division, because it makes it almost impossible to be in the schools to any great extent because it is not a good idea to only go to the ones that are close. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ There is a genuine lack of trust with bigger organizations. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ I feel a sense of having lost the ability to build relationships with staff and develop culture. It's less personal in the larger division and I get less time per school. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Finally, I realized, 'You will never get to know them!' That was about month three, it dawned on me, I'll never know everybody the way that I used to. I still grieve that some. But, I set my sights in a more realistic way. My goal was to know every administrator and that happened pretty quickly, you know, that was a group of about eighty of us at that time. (Director interview)

Boards of Education found the shift to a policy governance model to be challenging but rewarding. Both directors and board members talked animatedly about their work in making the shift to the policy governance model. Some school divisions were using the policy governance model before the amalgamation so a few people had some experience with it but many did not. It appears that making the paradigm shift to a new form of governance provided the grounds for important discussions that helped many boards to get to know each other.

- ❖ Some board members have had difficulty accepting their new roles in Policy Governance. Real problems. (Board survey respondent)

- ❖ Working with a Board of Education as we encountered Policy Governance for the first time was a challenge but we have made excellent progress. (Board survey respondent)

It was difficult to have the change take place in the middle of the school year. This item was mentioned primarily by directors and superintendents. They explained that it required some of them to move mid-year and to make the decision about whether to uproot their children mid-way through the school year or to leave the children in their previous school and live away from home until the end of June. This was a difficult choice for many people.

- ❖ The timing of the January 1st conception of the new school divisions was poorly planned as this occurred mid-year. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ The time of the year was problematic. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

It was difficult to clarify roles within the new school division. This perspective was expressed as it related to both board members and school division employees. Board members needed to have their roles clarified as they made the shift to the policy governance model. School division employees simply needed to sort out who was going to do what in the new school divisions. Most of them had come from school divisions where they were required to ‘wear many hats’ and it took a while for them to understand how to clarify the boundaries between their role and someone else’s.

- ❖ Some staff who had been directors previously had a difficult time being second in command in the new divisions. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ Initially we encountered difficulty with role clarification responsibility between senior staff and board. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

The government needed to move forward more aggressively with changes to the Foundational Operating Grant and they needed to change the tax structure to alleviate some of the burden on property taxes. Many participants noted that at least three boards were already getting close to zero grant status once again. They felt like the issue should have been addressed through changes to the other aspects of educational funding.

- ❖ They could have made the changes to the foundation operating grant (FOG) more immediate rather than stretch it over several phases. The plan was to restructure, adjust the FOG, then determine how much more money had to be put into the pot to make things work. As it is several boards are already approaching zero or negative grant status. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ The Foundational Operating Grant is a beautiful mechanism to distribute government grants but it doesn't deal with actual assessment disparities. (SASBO representative interview)
- ❖ Tax equity across the division is disproportionate to the inequity between rural and urban. There is a huge disparity here. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Where the restructuring capacity falls short is that divisions still have high financial constraints which will need to be addressed through a foundational operating grant which creates equity. Equity needs to be defined as meeting the needs of students not as being financially equal for all divisions. Because there are some very large differences between school divisions in Saskatchewan such as numbers of students, geographical sizes and assessment differences, the FOG sometimes doesn't address these inequities as well as it was intended to. Therefore the capacity of the new

divisions are affected and it often creates less capacity for each new division.

(Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

- ❖ One of the things that the Government said was going to be addressed and still hasn't been addressed is the taxation issue; the split of property taxes to government funding. That was one of the things that they said was going to be addressed. The issue is still there and that is causing some rural-urban dissention in my opinion.

(Board member interview)

School divisions are measuring success in different ways. One of the objectives of this study was to identify the objectives of restructuring and the indicators that are being used to measure success. The data suggests that there isn't a provincial strategy for measuring the success of the restructuring initiative. So, Individual school divisions have planned different ways to measure their own success.

- ❖ It is an ongoing thing. We have contracted a SELU to do a survey of how well we are doing regarding the system (Board and Administration). We are also into the assessment initiatives and the benchmarking initiatives. It is too soon to know too much about how good or poorly we are doing on those fronts.
- ❖ The Continuous Improvement Framework has assisted in the monitoring of all initiatives, alignment with divisional and provincial priorities and divisional expenditures. Most of our efforts thus far have been to develop consistent practices and equitable opportunities in our schools. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ We do not have a formal plan to assess the success of restructuring. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

- ❖ We haven't concerned ourselves with the success or failure of restructuring. We restructured. The elected board set goals for the new school division and we have and will be evaluating our success as a board against those goals. I suppose if some of our goals are not fully achieved there will be some who say that restructuring was a failure. But we won't spend too much time blaming restructuring because we realize that our job is to govern the division for improved student results. Restructuring allowed certain efficiencies to be attained which give us more resources to apply to the student achievement goal. (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ We use 360 degree feedback documents to assess stake-holders satisfaction. General areas of feedback are: accessibility, helpfulness, respectfulness. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ I would not say that we are assessing the success of the initiative. It was not our initiative. Boards were just told to do it. If there is to be an assessment of the success, there should have been some areas identified from the beginning that we would be collecting information on and we should have collected some already. (Director or Superintendent comment)

Achieving equity between employees and schools in the new school divisions posed a significant challenge. When school divisions joined together there were marked differences in the way business had been conducted in the old divisions. Each organization had set slightly different priorities and therefore had different strengths and weaknesses that resulted in a complex array of inequities across the division.

- ❖ We are still struggling with our support staff and achieving equity. It is difficult to move forward when the labour relations board is so far behind in dealing with the decisions that are required. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ A major challenge was “the issue of creating equity across school division” (Board survey respondent)
- ❖ As it has been, the school closures that have resulted from board members trying to bring equity have made it very difficult for them to do their job and live in their communities. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Equity was huge in this region and many of these issues are currently being addressed. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

Mistakes made by the legacy boards posed challenges for the new boards. One of the most commonly described errors made by legacy boards was the decision to spend large amounts of money just prior to amalgamation.

- ❖ They did not freeze the spending of the existing Boards. So the existing Boards did something that we call ‘amalgamation proofing’. They emptied their back accounts. They bought stuff. Rather than see the larger school divisions get their hands on it. It was really foolish; really short sighted. In most cases they bought technology and they bought stuff that is probably going to serve us well. But for example, we ended up with three vans. Two went to the high school, one came to the division office, which, creates an equity issue right off the bat. Are we going to buy vans for all of the high schools? (Director interview)

Past experience with voluntary amalgamation helped to make the process go more smoothly.

Respondents often explained that they used the knowledge that they had gained from prior

amalgamations to lead the new organization through restructuring or to avoid common pitfalls that they had experienced the first time.

- ❖ The legacy division from which I came had gone through voluntary amalgamations and restructuring - within the last 10 years - so in this part of the division, our attitude was more one of "been there, done that ... takes lots of work but we can do it (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Having recently completed an amalgamation and all of its associated changes including creating a policy governance board and all new procedures helped the transition to go more smoothly in the new division. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

The provincially facilitated hiring process was difficult and divisive for LEADS members.

More than one respondent used the word 'brutal' to describe the provincial hiring process for directors. While several survey and interview participants commented negatively about the process, others suggested that the conditions of a small pool of known applicants and the common timeframe for the hiring process would have created uncomfortable circumstances no matter how it was organized.

- ❖ The hiring process was badly handled and "brutal". I ended up being offered several jobs but being unsuccessful for a couple I wanted and feeling very much like a "victim" (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ The very uncaring "Director Search" process felt very meat-market-like and it proved to be divisive to some LEADS members. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)

- ❖ It was just the manner in which it was done, the people were hauled into one room and interviewed, and then hauled into another room and interviewed, and it felt very impersonal. (Director interview)
- ❖ You couldn't even feel good about getting the job because you knew the process wasn't as well thought out as it could have been and there were people who had been left with a bad taste in their mouths." (Director interview)

One board member reflected in an interview that the provincial hiring process added additional pressure to boards, too.

We couldn't sit back and take a day or a half a day to reflect on what we heard in the interview because there was this sense of 'oh boy everyone is looking at these same people.' We needed to make a decision quickly. It was a good opportunity to have a number of good people in one location but the ability to reflect and have some measured discussion among board members, who themselves weren't that familiar with each other, to try to find the best fit didn't seem to be there. It was a fairly pressure filled situation. (Board member interview)

The pressure that the board member referred to in the previous statement was probably an unintended consequence of the provincial hiring process. However, it may have been an inevitable outcome of a restructuring process that required all of the school divisions to hire new Directors of Education during the same time period.

It was time for school divisions to be restructured. Most people recognized the need for restructuring to take place. Several board members and school division employees involved in this study reported that they realized that it was time for restructuring to be mandated and as a result they wanted to help to make it successful.

- ❖ It was long overdue.
- ❖ There were too many school divisions. There were too many division offices and too many Directors of Education for a small province. (Director interview)
- ❖ When the Government came down and said ‘we are going to force you to amalgamate’, my view was, ‘Good!’ And anytime I had a chance to speak to people, I said, ‘This is good for education.’ (Director interview)
- ❖ It wasn’t a surprise. People around here viewed it quite positively. I think that helped out with it. And I can’t really remember any sense of anxiety from any perspective, other than people realized that it would be different. And I think people recognized that as soon as they saw the size of the divisions. (Director interview)

Indicators of Success

Many of the people who have participated in this study have stated openly that it was time for the province to undertake the reorganization of school divisions. From that simple perspective, the restructuring initiative has been successful. The number of school divisions in the province has been reduced from 81 in January 2004 to 28 in January 2006. Beyond this simplistic lens there is great complexity and many of the respondents felt that it was too early to fully recognize the successes and/or shortcomings of the initiative.

Three sets of questions on each of the surveys asked respondents to indicate their beliefs about the success and the potential for success of the restructuring initiative in terms of the original objectives: 1. to increase capacity to provide high quality learning programs, 2. to increase equity in educational opportunities for students by using savings to improve programs, and 3. to improve equity for all taxpayers through the regional pooling of taxes. The results of

those items are illustrated in the following graphs. The bulleted item before each graph indicates the exact wording that was used in the item on the survey instrument.

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has increased school division capacity to provide high quality learning programs.

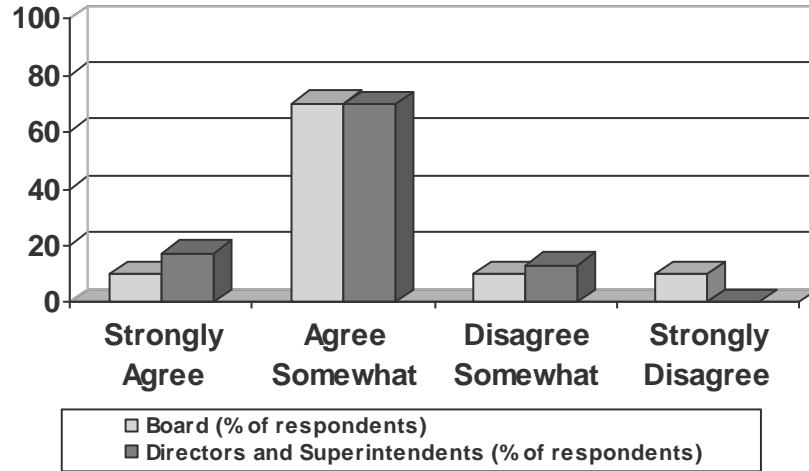


Figure 1: Increased Capacity for Learning Programs

Figure 1 shows that most survey respondents agree, at least somewhat, that the restructuring initiative has increased the capacity that school divisions have to provide high quality programs. This point of view was confirmed by statements made by survey respondents and by interview participants.

The next item required respondents to consider the potential of the restructuring initiative to increase capacity for providing high quality learning programs.

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase school division capacity to provide high quality learning programs.

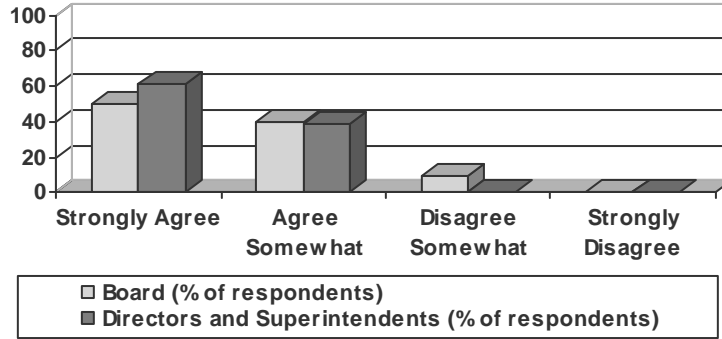


Figure 2: Potential to Increase Capacity for Learning Programs

While the first item reflected that respondents are cautiously optimistic about current programs, the second item shows that they believe that the restructuring initiative has the potential to increase the quality of the learning programs in their school divisions.

The next item referenced the restructuring initiative’s intent to increase student equity within the public school system. Figure 3 shows that respondents agreed somewhat that there had been some growth in the area of student equity.

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has increased student equity in the public school system in Saskatchewan.

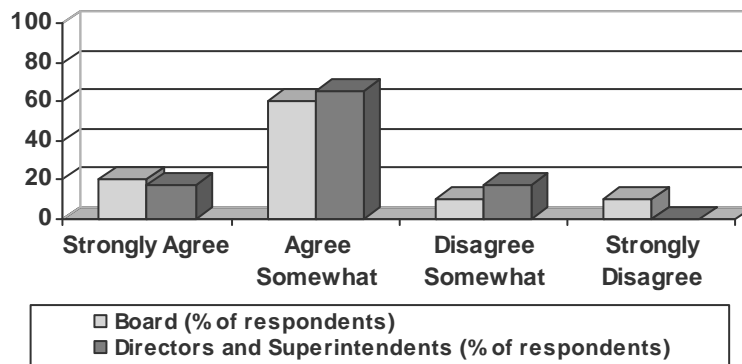


Figure 3: Increased Student Equity

In regard to further potential of the initiative to increase student equity, respondents agree more strongly. Although board members, directors and superintendents will have some perspective on whether or not equity has been increased throughout their school division, it is highly unlikely that many of them would have the knowledge to conclude that student equity has been increased across the province. On the other hand, if equity did indeed increase within most of the divisions, then we could conclude that equity had indeed increased across the province. Therefore, considered collectively, the results illustrated by Figure 3 and Figure 4 could indicate that there is a potential for student equity to increase.

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase student equity in the public school system in Saskatchewan.

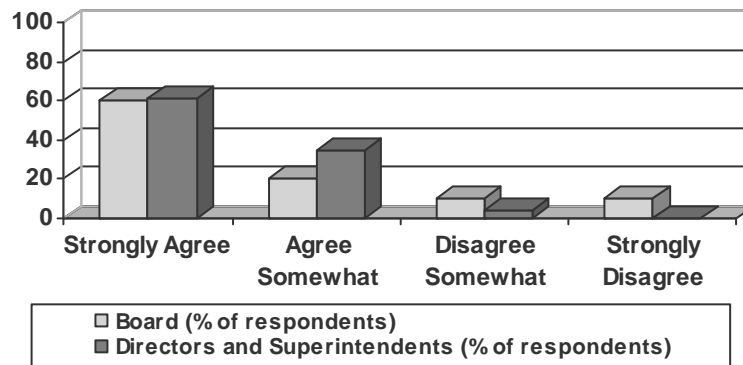


Figure 4: Potential to Increase Student Equity

Figure 5 and Figure 6 illustrate the response to two items that referred to the ability of the restructuring initiative to increase equity among tax payers. These graphs illustrate that many of the respondents believed that the initiative had neither increased equity for taxpayers nor that it had the potential to do so.

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has increased equity for all property tax payers in Saskatchewan as a result of regional tax pooling.

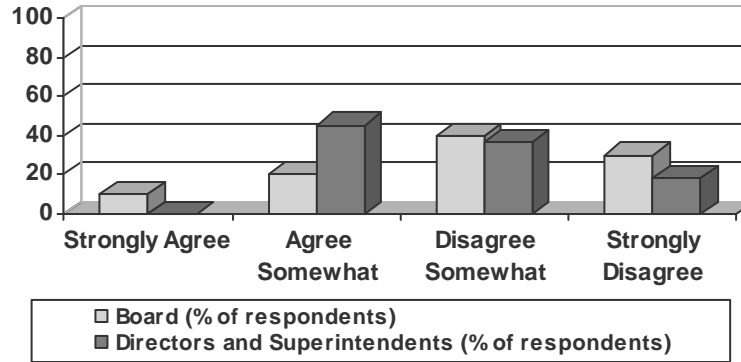


Figure 5: Increased Equity for Taxpayers

- ❖ The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase equity for all property tax payers in Saskatchewan as a result of regional tax pooling.

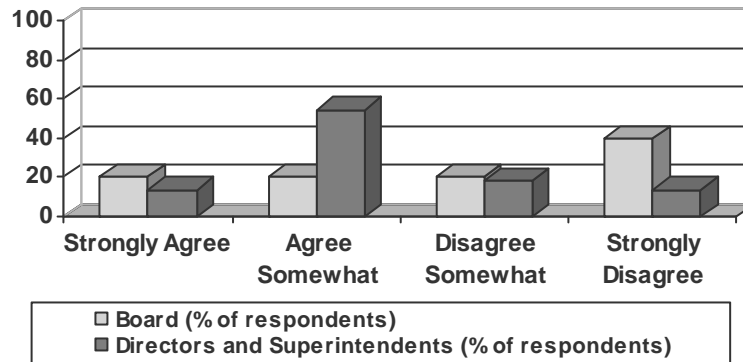


Figure 6: Potential to Increase Equity for Taxpayers

The Final Report of the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education in the Province of Saskatchewan (Boughen, 2003) pointed out that restructuring school divisions, changing the taxation system, and modifying the Foundational Operating Grant would all be necessary to achieve equity for tax payers and for students. However, the items ask only for respondents to consider whether the restructuring initiative has “increased” equity and not

whether it has “achieved” equity. The negative response is surprising but perhaps individual’s desires to achieve equity clouds their perceptions of whether or not restructuring has increased equity. On the other hand, several participants in the study noted that by the spring of 2008 they anticipated that there would be up to three zero grant boards in the province once again. Perhaps, the negative response reflects this perspective.

Throughout the data are a variety of statements that describe the increased capacity that has been realized within school divisions since the new school division boundaries have been established. The following quotations selected from a variety of participants and a variety of surveys and interviews exemplify those positive perspectives:

- ❖ We believe that we’re being able to spend more money per pupil in the classroom. We’ve gotten our facilities in better shape than they have ever been in. Our technology is in better shape that it’s ever been in. Transportation the same. I mean those, in terms of age of school buses and those kinds of things. We’ve been able to really attend to those things partly because of our size and buying power but partly because we have someone now who can look at that as their job, as opposed to one piece of their job. In the old divisions, we sort of ran sort of a Mom and Pop grocery store; one person was doing everything. We didn’t have the expertise or the time to spend on all of the pieces. So, you just kept everything going as opposed to stopping and asking if we are really doing transportation in an efficient fashion? Do we need some software to look at how we’re servicing buses and how we’re routing buses? Now we have that level of expertise. (Director interview)
- ❖ Right now, just as an example of capacity, we have two full-time occupational therapists that we employ. We never had that before. We had contracted say half-

time and you don't get good services that way. We've got a literacy consultant that understands our work. We've got a Superintendent that researches data management. Well, with the Continuous Improvement Framework, and move towards accountability, wow! You think that doesn't help me? I used to do all these things. Oh, yes, we have a lot more capacity and that filters to the schools of course...Educational Psychologists, Speech Pathologists, they're all hired now. I think the capacity has definitely increased. (Director interview)

- ❖ Interviewer: But I'd be interested in knowing whether school base budgets have increased or decreased.

Director: Ours have all increased.

- ❖ There are many wonderful things that our division has the potential to accomplish in the near future and over the long term. These "things" can have a significant impact on our students and other children in the province. And, these opportunities are there because of the restructuring process that we've come through and that we're continuing to work through. I'm pleased to have had an opportunity to be a part of that. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ Being able to be part of creating a new division is positive. I think the educational capacity of the division is larger and over time the student outcomes will improve. The education focus of our division is positive and the change to the policy governance model enables us to focus our attention to the educational tasks in front of us. (Director & Superintendent survey respondent)
- ❖ If people look at it as an opportunity to develop something that is effective, innovative, and efficient, I think that this is an excellent opportunity. It hasn't come

without stresses but we are building something that is going to help students in the long run. We can really make a difference. We have students who want to learn and we need to consider how we can adapt to each one of those students. It has given us more resources to offer an all around learning opportunity for students. (Board member interview)

Conclusions

Saskatchewan has done it. There are now 28 Boards of Education operating in the province. Two years have passed since the 12 restructured school divisions became operational on January 1st of 2006. It has required an incredible amount of work by people with a vast array of roles and responsibilities to make it happen. The data reveals that it has been emotional, exhilarating and exhausting for almost everyone.

This study has chronicled the key decisions and processes from the May 2004 announcement that the Government of Saskatchewan would mandate the provincial restructuring of Saskatchewan school divisions to the formation of the Education Equity Task Force, the board elections in June 2005, and the work of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee. It has identified the goals of increased capacity for high quality learning programs, and increased equity for both students and taxpayers. Although respondents were unaware of any provincial measurement of success, the data suggests that school division personnel and board of education members are starting to see signs of accomplishment especially in the area of increased capacity for high quality learning programs and supports to learning. The study showed that the Education Equity Task force provided a valuable forum for stakeholders to voice their concerns about the restructuring initiative. Despite the fact that a few people represented in this study were critical

of the size of the divisions in the final boundary map drawn up by the Education Equity Task Force, the map has been adopted by the province and now represents the political and organizational boundaries of education in the province. This study documented the work of the interagency Restructuring Coordinating Committee and recorded the perspectives of many members of that group. Overall, the group was satisfied with the outcomes of that process and they felt like the Restructuring Coordinating Committee provided a forum for distinct perspectives to be considered together for the benefit of everyone. Several people noted that the work of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee went slowly and suggested that for the sake of efficiency either the leadership needed to be stronger or some of the issues should not have come to that table. In the end, however, most members of the Restructuring Coordinating Committee and many of the directors, superintendents, and board members in the province agreed that the Restructuring Bulletins provided a valuable guide as they worked through the process of amalgamation. The data pointed out that school divisions felt frustrated with the low level of support that they received from Saskatchewan Learning and the other provincial organizations. Many suggested that no one in the province had experienced change of this magnitude and therefore it was difficult to predict the needs of the school divisions. Furthermore, this study gathered reflections and feedback from school divisions through board of education members, directors, and superintendents. They reported that the restructuring initiative had produced expected challenges that they met through the strength of their local teams and that although it was early in the process they were beginning to see that the initiative had built capacity within school divisions to provide better programs and better supports to learning.

This study was conducted between February 2007 and February 2008. It is a retrospective review of the processes and proceedings that were required to reorganize the rural school

divisions in Saskatchewan and it includes the perspectives of all of the major stakeholders. Saskatchewan Education stands today with 28 school divisions and the people of Saskatchewan continue to expect that the public education system will offer a quality education for every child and youth between the ages of 6 and 22!

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Appendix A – Timeline

January 8, 2004 – Release of *Finding the Balance: The final report of the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education* compiled by Ray Boughen

May 13, 2004 – Government responds to *Finding the Balance: The final report of the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education* and announces restructuring, the formation of the Education Equity Task Force of three people, a moratorium on school closure

May 19, 2004 – Members of the Education Equity Task Force were named

June 24, 2004 - Speech by the Honourable Andrew Thomson, Minister of Learning on behalf of Premier Lorne Calvert to the Special Provincial Assembly of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association Wednesday, June 23, 2004 – This speech included additional information on each of the aspects of the restructuring initiative including a review of the reasons for amalgamation, the creation of the Restructuring Committee, the formation of School Community Councils, and the moratorium on school closures.

June 24, 2004 – First meeting of the re-established Restructuring Committee.

August 3, 2004 – Release of a preliminary map that meets the criteria that was set out of the Education Equity Task Force.

August/September 2004 – Education Equity Task Force meets with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS), the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials (SASBO), the Saskatchewan Association of School Councils (SASC), the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA), the Urban Section of SSBA, and the Catholic Section of SSBA.

August 17, 2004 Through October 22, 2004 – Education Equity Task Force meets with individual boards of education.

November 12, 2004 – Minister Thompson announces the acceptance of the school division boundaries map that was compiled by the Education Equity Task Force.

April 19, 2005 – New school divisions become legal entities.

May 31, 2005 – Craig Melvin and the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel (LAPP) publish their report.

June 15, 2005 – Election for Board of Education members for the new school divisions.

June 23-25, 2005 – Orientation for new boards presented by Saskatchewan School Boards Association supported by Saskatchewan Learning

July 27 & 28, 2005 – Director of Education interviews held at the Travelodge in Regina

July 29, 2005 – Director of Education interviews held at the Quality Inn (Hilton) in Saskatoon

September 26, 2005 – Andrew Thompson releases the report of the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel.

November 23, 2005 – Minister Andrew Thompson released a response to the LAPP report and announced the implementation of School Community Councils to be established in every school.

January 01, 2006 – New school divisions become operational

Appendix B – The Restructuring Bulletins

Restructuring Bulletin # 1:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1550&Filename=EEI_Feb05Bulletin.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 2:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1549&Filename=EEI_Feb16Bulletin.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 3:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1548&Filename=EEI_May17BulletinA.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 4:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1547&Filename=EEI_May17BulletinB.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 5:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1546&Filename=EEI_Bulletin5_LandFees.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 6:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1545&Filename=EEI_Bulletin6_SchoolSales.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 7:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1544&Filename=EEI_Bulletin7_Partnership_Tuition.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 8:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1543&Filename=EEI_Bulletin8_DivOffice_Location.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 9:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1542&Filename=EEI_Bulletin9_Initial_Meetings.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 10:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1541&Filename=EEI_Bulletin10_Capital_Funding.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 11:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1540&Filename=EEI_Bulletin11_Comprehensive.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 12:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1538&Filename=EEI_Bulletin12_HR.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 13:

http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1536&Filename=EEI_Bulletin13_Transition_Funding.pdf

Restructuring Bulletin # 13(a):

<http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=1104,225,134,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1537&Filename=Transition+Funding+Bulletin+13a.pdf>

Appendix C – Director, Superintendent, and Board Member Survey

Section 1 - Assessing the Success of the Restructuring Initiative:

Saskatchewan Learning cited three reasons for initiating the restructuring process in the rural Saskatchewan school divisions.

- ❖ Increased capacity within school divisions to provide high quality learning programs.
- ❖ Increased equity between all students who attend public schools in Saskatchewan
- ❖ Increased equity for all property tax payers in Saskatchewan as a result of regional tax pooling

Use the following scale to express your opinions about whether or not the restructuring initiative has met these goals and/or has the potential to meet these goals.

Strongly Agree - 4

Agree Somewhat - 3

Disagree Somewhat - 2

Strongly Disagree – 1

1. The restructuring initiative has increased school division capacity to provide high quality learning programs.

1-----2-----3-----4

2. The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase school division capacity to provide high quality learning programs.

1-----2-----3-----4

3. The restructuring initiative has increased equity between students who attend public schools in Saskatchewan.

~~1-----2-----3-----4~~

4. The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase equity between students who attend public schools in Saskatchewan.

~~1-----2-----3-----4~~

5. The restructuring initiative has increased equity for all property tax payers in Saskatchewan as a result of regional tax pooling.

~~1-----2-----3-----4~~

6. The restructuring initiative has the potential to increase equity for all property tax payers in Saskatchewan as a result of regional tax pooling.

~~1-----2-----3-----4~~

7. How is your school division assessing the success of the restructuring initiative?

Section 2 - Assessing the Supports Offered to School Divisions:

8. How did Saskatchewan Learning support you in managing the restructuring initiative?

9. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being 'extremely useful' and 1 being 'not at all useful', how would you judge the support that your division received from Saskatchewan Learning?

~~1-----2-----3-----4-----5~~

10. What could Saskatchewan Learning have done differently to support your school division during the restructuring process?

11. How did the Saskatchewan School Boards Association support you in managing the restructuring initiative?

12. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being 'extremely useful' and 1 being 'not at all useful', how would you judge the support that your division received from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association?

~~1-----2-----3-----4-----5~~

13. What could the Saskatchewan School Boards Association have done differently to support your school division during the restructuring process?

Section 3 – Assessing the Restructuring Processes:

14. What things worked well?

15. What things didn't work well?

16. If you were to do it again, what suggestions would you have?

17. What were the major challenges that you encountered?

18. What processes did your school division use to create a connection between the schools and the new organization?

19. How successful do you believe your school division has been in bringing the schools on board and in creating an organizational culture within the new organization?

Section 4 - Understanding the lived experiences of school division leaders (Directors and Superintendents only):

20. Bridges (2003) suggests, that the transitions associated with wide-scale change initiatives are difficult for all people who are impacted by the change because “the starting point for dealing with the transition is not the outcome but the ending that you'll have to make to leave the old situation behind” (p.7). What are some of the transitions that you experienced in leaving your old position behind to join the restructured school division?

21. What made those transitions easier for you?

22. Did you experience any losses as a result of the transitions?

23. Wheatley (2005) says that, “[a]s people are engaged in the difficult and messy processes of participation, they are simultaneously creating the conditions – new relationships, new

insights, greater levels of commitment – that facilitate more rapid and complete implementation”

(p. 89). What are the positive outcomes that you experienced while being involved in the process of creating the new school divisions?

24. Are there particular points in the restructuring process that stand out for you as being significant to your personal transition experiences?

25. Please feel free to make any other comments about the restructuring process.

Appendix D – The Maps

Boundaries Map – January 2004

http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/branches/comm/minister/docs/SD_Pb_SR_Appendix%20A_2004.06.pdf

Preliminary Boundaries Map – Proposed in August 2004

http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/admin/pub_pdf/sd_map_color_aug04.pdf

Boundaries Map – Released in November 2004

http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/branches/comm/minister/docs/EETF_Scen_SD%20Prov_2004.11.04.pdf

Boundaries Map Showing All 28 School Divisions and Regions

http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/branches/comm/minister/docs/EETF_Scen_SD%20Prov_2004.11.04.pdf