



Saskatoon Public Schools

Inspiring Learning

Nomination

The Board of Trustees of Saskatoon School Division No. 13 is pleased to nominate Ray Morrison for the Saskatchewan Schools Boards Association's Award of Distinction.

The Context

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 (also known as Saskatoon Public Schools or SPS) is the province's largest school division with a projected enrolment in fall 2018 of 25,895 students and an operating budget of about \$250 million. The division operates Saskatoon's 49 public elementary schools and 10 public collegiates, and has one alliance school on the Whitecap Dakota First Nation as well as two associate schools in the city—Saskatoon Christian School and Saskatoon Misbah School. The school system has a complement of 1,807 teaching and 1,037 non-teaching employees.

Operating in a major urban centre brings a unique set of challenges to Saskatoon Public Schools, not the least of which is steady enrolment growth; in the last 10 years, our student numbers have increased by more than 5,000. And they are a diverse group: about 18 per cent of our students self declare their First Nations, Inuit or Métis heritage; about 10 per cent are enrolled in French immersion programs; about 25 per cent speak a language other than English at home; and about 10 per cent receive English as an Additional Language instruction. Division programming also supports a significant number of students with complex and challenging learning needs.

Even with all the growth and diversity in our system, Saskatoon Public Schools has maintained, for more than a dozen years, a steadfast commitment to two strategic priorities: Literacy for Life and Collegiate Renewal.

The Rationale:

Service to education in Saskatoon

Ray Morrison took an interest in education when his children began attending Saskatoon Public Schools. From 1993-2003, he was an active member of his local School Community Council (SCC), using that forum to learn about the education system and to influence it where appropriate. His involvement led to a position on the Saskatoon Public Schools' Citizens Advisory Council, the precursor to the division's current SCC

Assembly, and a spot on the executive of the Saskatchewan Association of School Councils.

In 1998, Ray was part of a group of citizens who began lobbying for construction of a collegiate in the northeast sector of Saskatoon. The school—Centennial Collegiate—was announced in 2003 and opened its doors to students in the fall of 2006.

It was also in 2003 that Ray became one of five new trustees elected to the board of Saskatoon Public Schools. His community service was recognized in 2005 with the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal, and in 2006, Ray was elected chair of the board.

A top priority for the new chair was to refocus trustees on their role as governors of the organization. By encouraging everyone to respect the ‘bright red line’ between governance and operations, Ray helped create the kind of high-functioning board that is key to governance success. His advocacy for independent, third-party internal performance audits also elevated the efficiency and effectiveness of Saskatoon Public Schools.

“To be effective, every organization needs positive leadership and that’s what Ray brings to Saskatoon Public. He has built a sense of teamwork in the board room that is felt throughout the organization. That positive energy has changed the culture and the outlook of the entire school division.”
- **George Rathwell, former Director of Education, SPSD**

Attention to strategic planning and to refining the main learning priorities has marked Ray’s tenure as chair. Major investments in teacher professional development and classroom resources ensure Literacy for Life and Collegiate Renewal remain relevant for our 21st century learners. At the same time, the board has established innovative programming across the system focused on areas of high interest to students, but nothing happens without first considering

“In my view, Ray’s most significant contribution to Saskatoon Public Schools is his ability to keep everyone focused on student learning and achievement. No matter what the circumstance, Ray is always able to bring us back to our primary responsibility, which is lifting our students.”
- **Avon Whittles, former Director of Education, SPSD**

question one for Ray: How will this improve student outcomes? Some highlights include:

- International Bacculaureate programming at two collegiates
- Nêhiyâwiwin Cree Language and Culture Program
- Métis Cultural Program
- Late French Immersion
- Flexible Schedule Blended Learning Program
- iGen
- Science Trek
- Summer Literacy Camps

Ray’s positive influence has made SPS a leader in data-driven, inclusive education in Saskatchewan, and beyond; global thinkers in education including Sir Ken Robinson, Pasi Sahlberg and Dr. Simon Breakspear have all taken an interest in how we do what we do.

Working in Partnership

No school division can operate in isolation. As chair of the board, Ray is tireless in developing relationships that benefit students but also the wider community. Of particular note is his years spent working with leaders of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, an effort that culminated with their on-reserve school becoming part of SPS. That agreement ensures consistency of instruction for students who ultimately transition into our Chief Whitecap School at Grade 5, but it also maintains the rights and jurisdiction of both organizations. The involvement of the federal and provincial government in the negotiations makes the SPS-Whitecap agreement the first of its kind in the country, but Ray will say that without the relationship built over many years, the agreement would never have been signed.

In all relationships, Ray is keenly aware of the imperative for our division to be responsive to the expressed needs of the communities we serve. Among the results is the significant number of child-care spaces available in our schools, the introduction of a Montessori Program at City Park School in fall 2016, locating the Open Door Society in Queen Elizabeth School and the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program at Nutana Collegiate.

One example where Ray's leadership has created far-reaching benefits is the Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centre at Mount Royal Collegiate. SPS partnered with six other organizations and raised \$23 million to create market-driven entry-level skills training in a variety of fields for vulnerable youth and adults.

The school board is refreshing its partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. while continuing to advance initiatives with, among others, the Saskatoon Police Service, Saskatoon Fire Department, local health authorities and the Saskatoon Industry-Education Council.

Ray would argue that the most important relationship our board has, beyond with our Director of Education, is with our teachers, the people who do the day-to-day work that ensures the best possible outcome for every one of our students. As board chair, he has led efforts to ensure our teachers have the resources, supports and professional development they need to fulfill the board's vision and achieve its goals.

"When it comes to educating our children, Ray understands Saskatoon Public needs partners and champions from outside the division; he not only encouraged that but actively pursued it. I think his ability to have open dialogue is the biggest asset he brings to relationships."

- Felix Thomas, former Chief, Saskatoon Tribal Council

"Ray understands that the board's job is to fuel, not hinder, teachers, and to protect them from the noise that happens around the education sector. Change happens at the speed of trust, and Ray is an example of that; we may disagree sometimes but we always default back to what's best for students."

- John McGettigan, President, Saskatoon Teachers' Association

Facilities for Learning

Since being elected to the school board in 2003, Ray has rarely gone anywhere without a hardhat, safety vest and steel-toed boots in the trunk of his car. In addition to his laser focus on ensuring our buildings provide the best possible environment for learning, Ray has led the board through a number of major projects:

- Construction of two collegiates built in tandem
- Rebuilding of WP Bate School
- Rebuilding of Buena Vista School
- Construction of Willowgrove School
- Major renovation of Nutana Collegiate
- Construction of four P3 schools
- Repurposing project for City Park School

It is a point of pride for Ray and all his board colleagues that our division operates and maintains eight schools that are over 100 years old, buildings that serve as important touchstones in our inner-city communities.

On the Provincial Front

As a trustee, Ray places a high priority on representing Saskatoon Public Schools in the broader provincial context. A regular attendee at, and contributor to, Saskatchewan School Board Association meetings, he is a strong advocate for the needs of our division but also for the greater good within the entire provincial education sector. This was made evident through his involvement in four particular projects:

- Development of the Education Sector Strategic Plan
- Member of the Joint Committee - Understanding and Exploration of Teacher time and Workload Intensification
- Membership on the Joint Task Force on Teacher Time
- Chair of the Education Governance Advisory Panel

"Ray's total commitment to education was evident in his contributions to the development of the Education Sector Strategic Plan, particularly his ability to see beyond his own division to the very diverse circumstances faced by other school boards in this province. It is that kind of global thinking that makes his involvement in education so valuable."

- Hon. Don Morgan, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and former Minister of Education

"In our work together on the provincial governance review panel, Ray was totally unbiased as chair; his focus was on getting the very best responses possible from everyone we met with. On the other hand, he was a very vocal advocate for the needs of Saskatoon Public as a member of the SSBA, and that helped us move forward and set direction as a provincial body."

- Janet Foord, former President, SSBA and member of the Education Governance Advisory Panel

As chair of the province’s largest school division, Ray makes a point of building strong working relationships across the education sector, in particular with whoever is serving as Minister of Education in the provincial government (there have been seven different ministers during his tenure on the board). Whether he is speaking to the media or speaking to the minister, Ray’s message is always direct and consistent: education in this province needs adequate and sustainable funding in order to meet the needs of all students. Here is what one former education minister observed: “One of things I admire most about Ray is his honesty; he’s a man who will always tell you what you need to hear, not necessarily what you want to hear.”

Beyond our Borders

Ray’s leadership of Saskatoon Public Schools and his perspective on education as a whole have earned him a number of speaking invitations. He has made two presentations to the annual uLead conference, one about engaging First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and the other about citizenship education with David Arnot, chief commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. Ray has also been a speaker at three Canadian School Boards Association conferences, presenting on how to build high-functioning boards and, along with Chief Darcy Bear, about the SPS-Whitecap agreement.

“Ray has given tirelessly of his time and energy as an advocate for students not only in Saskatoon but across the province. His dedication, his tenacity, and his willingness to ask tough questions have served students, employees, constituents, his fellow trustees and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association extremely well.”
- Julie MacRae, former Deputy Minister of Education

In Summary

Over his years as a Saskatoon Public Schools trustee, and particularly in his role as chair of the board, Ray Morrison has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to education in our division, and in the entire province—a commitment to always doing what is best for students; a commitment to supporting their teachers; a commitment to strong partnerships that benefit communities; a commitment to a united provincial voice; and a commitment to being honest about what is needed to achieve our goals within the shifting landscape of Saskatchewan education. We believe Ray is a most worthy candidate for the SSBA Award of Distinction.

Respectfully submitted by his board colleagues Holly Kelleher, Vernon Linklater, Donna Banks, Cameron Scott, Kathleen Brannen, Ross Tait, Suzanne Zwarych, Charmaine Bellamy and Colleen MacPherson.