

## Community of Ile-a-la-Crosse Engagement Session

### Preamble

The board of education of the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division hosted a public meeting on Monday, March 18, 2109 for the purpose of collecting information from the students and residents of Ile-a-la-Crosse to help the Ministry of Education plan for the next ten years.

The event was advertised as being one way that the community could represent their unique thoughts and perspectives, those being:

1. the indigenous perspective;
2. the northern perspective; and,
3. the Ile-a-la-Crosse perspective.

The board feels strongly that the above perspectives need to be considered when the ministry begins to develop plans for education in Saskatchewan over the next number of years. At the same time, the board fears that due to the vastness of the north, those views could be under represented. To that end, the information gleaned in Ile-a-la-Crosse is going to be correlated with information from two other sources whenever commonalities are noted. Those other sources of information, gathered in part from the north, representing the Indigenous student and teacher voice, in part, are:

1. The work done by the office of the Advocate for Children and Youth in its report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan (December 5, 2017) entitled: *Shhh...LISTEN!! We Have Something to Say! Youth Voices from the North*, which collected part of its information from the students and residents of Ile-a-la-Crosse; and,
2. The work done by Russ Mirasty and Patricia Prowse (September 2014) in their publication entitled: *Student First Engagement Guide*; which was intended to help the education system meet the targets identified in the *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 And Beyond*. These in-person engagement sessions were conducted in 33 locations across Saskatchewan. Ten of those communities were located in northern Saskatchewan – one of those being Ile-a-la-Crosse. Two of the northern communities were First Nation communities, although it is to be noted that Ile-a-la-Crosse was not represented as being a First Nation community. The Indigenous voice was also heard in six First Nation communities of the remaining twenty-three communities located in southern Saskatchewan.

Both of the above mentioned pieces of work focused on children and students and indirectly on the education and personal lives of those children and students. It is not surprising then that the questions asked during the Student First engagement process and those being asked by the Saskatchewan School Boards' Association (SSBA), are very similar in nature.

The *Student First Engagement Guide* was compiled from information collected by asking three questions:

1. **What is working well?**
2. **What is holding students back** from learning at their best?
3. **What needs to change** to ensure that students can learn at their best?

The SSBA engagement sessions focused on the following four questions:

1. What knowledge, skills and abilities do students need to be prepared for their future life and learning? Why are these important?
2. **What gets in the way** of student success and well-being?
3. **What is working well** now in Saskatchewan's school system that prepares students for their future?
4. **What needs to change** in Saskatchewan's school system to better prepare students for their future?

Although the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth did not ask the same questions due to the focus of their engagement being that of suicide in the north, they did ask questions that paralleled questions number 2 in both of the above.

#### What we heard:

Over 60 members of the community met to discuss the four questions posed by the SSBA. Seven groups spent about 25 minutes on each question with a board member serving as the group's moderator/leader and note taker. Group responses were compiled on chart paper and those responses correlated for presentation in this submission. Submissions were also received from four community members unable to participate in the evening session. A question by question analysis follows, listed in order of frequency.

#### **Question 1: What knowledge, skills, and abilities do students need to be prepared for their future life and learning? Why are these important?**

1. Life skills (traditional) - 7 groups – including:
  - sewing
  - cooking
  - cleaning
  - boat safety
  - first aid
  - safety tickets
  - fire arm safety
  - hunter training
  - outdoor survival
  - land-based learning
  - interactive learning

2. Life skills (contemporary) – 7 groups – including:

- financial literacy/planning
- job readiness
- money management/budgeting/debt/loans
- taxes
- research
- independence

3. Identity knowledge/skills – 5 groups – including:

- language
- culture
- traditions
- residential school/ 60's Scoop knowledge

Mental health knowledge/skills – 4 groups – including:

- coping
- college/university coping/survival skills
- self-awareness/self-discipline/self-esteem/behavior
- goal-setting/commitment
- time management
- independence
- critical thinking
- anger management

5. People skills – 3 groups – including:

- communicating
- relationships
- utilization of community and cultural role models

6. Technological Literacy – 2 groups – including:

- computer skills
- coding
- automation
- animation
- virtual reality

7. One of a kind responses included:

- advanced levels of Math and Science training
- political/world events knowledge
- apprenticeship programs

Much of the above is consistent with what was heard in the Student First engagement sessions, in particular the Engaging the Student/Learner theme which spoke to:

- setting goals
- programming for the future which is relevant
- access to PAA classes – in particular in the north
- culturally responsive connections, activities and spaces – in particular in First Nation communities

In the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth report, the Youth call to Action: Help Us! addresses these concerns saying there is a need for:

- coping skills
- increased mental health resources to meet youth needs
- more and/or different options to enhance youth development, in particular the provision of meaningful and diverse activities for youth
- suicide awareness education
- increased awareness of available supports

## **Question 2: What gets in the way of student success and well-being?**

1. Mental health issues – 6 groups – including:

- depression/anxiety
- suicide
- unsustainable/non-attainable societal/personal expectations
- lack of commitment/dedication/motivation
- negative/poor relationships/ sense of belonging
- lack of confidence/ self-esteem/ self-worth, insecurity/lack of identity
- fear of being misunderstood, judged, ridiculed, criticized
- not being listened to/validated
- peer pressure
- bullying – teachers/staff/peers

2. Addictions issues – 6 groups – including:

- drugs
- alcohol
- gambling
- sex
- gaming
- **belonging to the student and/or family members**

3. Basic needs not being met – 5 groups – including:

- affordable food
- food security
- poverty
- love, belonging, fun, freedom, friendship
- housing
- employment opportunities/jobs
- unsafe/perceived unsafe learning environments

4. Lack of support – 5 groups – including:

- from family
- from home
- financial
- parental supervision
- reliable child care
- teen pregnancy/young people having children

5. Racism/discrimination – 4 groups – including:

- stereotyping
- racial bias
- exclusionary practices
- intergenerational effects of colonization
- attempted assimilation
- hegemonic control

6. One of a kind responses included:

- lack of cultural teaching/learning methods
- attendance
- ineffective teachers
- difficulty communicating with teachers
- lack of counselling/counsellors
- cell phone usage
- being labelled

Feedback from the Student First engagement identified several issues – all of which were also identified in Ile-a-la-Crosse including:

- lack of student engagement – hands-on, interactive and experiential learning worked for them
- 47% cited unavailability of teaching methods that reflect students' learning style
- 55% of students felt that stronger relationships with their teachers would improve their education
- 60% cited stress
- 70% cited distractions from other students
- 81% of educators cited literacy skills below grade level
- 87% cited challenges at home
- 92% of educators cited high absenteeism
- lack of curricular options
- lack of alternative learning environments
- programming needed to focus on skills development – career-oriented skills as well as job search and retention skills
- few visible career opportunities - north
- lack of transitions into the workplace or trades – in particular in the north
- moving to the next grade level when not performing at grade level – the Grade 10 wall
- lack of parental/caregiver engagement
- poor sleep and nutrition
- insufficient mental health supports
- social challenges including teenage pregnancy, family responsibilities and poverty
- bullying – physical, social, and cyber
- starting school without well-developed readiness skills

Feedback from the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth identified the following issues as getting in the way of learning:

- bullying and harassment – both physical and cyber – verbal and social media
- lack of emotional support from families and communities
- problems in the home – poverty, crime and drug abuse
- feeling ignored at school
- personal issues – loss of loved ones/ romantic relationships
- substance abuse – lack of supports for the abuser
- lack of physical safety
- lack of constructive activities – north in particular
- depression, lack of self-esteem, insecurity
- lack of coping skills
- inadequate mental health services

The above factors and/or combinations of those factors, are responsible for the most part for the high incidence of **suicide** among youth – in particular indigenous youth in northern Saskatchewan.

**Question 3: What is working well now in Saskatchewan’s school system that prepares students for their future?**

1. Local initiatives – 7 groups – due to the maintenance of local autonomy
  - cultural arts, crafts and traditions
  - Michif language instruction
  - wilderness camp outings – experiential outdoor education
  - Michif festivals
  - family history
  - survival skills
  - Elders’ programs
  - summer reading program
2. Student First philosophy – 6 groups
  - Following Their Voices
  - relationship building between students and teachers and teachers and the home
  - safe, healthy school environment
  - breakfast/nutrition programs
3. Sports and extra-curricular programs – 6 groups
  - robotics
  - career fairs/guidance
  - ticket certification – WHMIS, Firearm Education etc.
4. Ancillary Programs – 4 groups
  - day care
  - early childhood initiatives
  - ABE 5-10
  - Adult 12
  - Driver’s Education

- in-school University programs from both the U of S and the U of R

Some one of a kind answers included:

- parental involvement
- mental health days
- communication/follow-up from or by teachers
- student summer jobs
- the Entrepreneurship program
- local teachers
- distance/on-line education
- SCC
- Caring teachers

The things that worked well, discovered in the Student First Engagement Guide included:

- teachers promoting engagement using a variety of teaching styles, including hands-on, interactive and experiential learning
- teachers adapting teaching methods to meet students' needs
- positive, accepting, caring, supportive, and welcoming classroom environments
- relevant programming – for the future and to culture – northern perspective
- wide range of extra-curricular programming
- supportive home environments
- supportive/engaged parents/caregivers
- positive student/teacher relationships
- culturally responsive activities and spaces

In the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth engagement document, the following were identified as working well:

- appreciation for and access to the natural environment
- being physically active
- connection to community and culture

**Question 4: What needs to change in Saskatchewan's school system to better prepare students for their future?**

1. More cultural/traditional teachings – 6 groups – including:
  - interactive learning
  - teaching values, respect, and an appreciation for moral and spiritual values
  - more local control
  - follow through on Calls to Action and Reconciliation
  - Elder involvement
2. More relevant programming/curricula – 6 groups – including:
  - life skills such as budgeting and money management
  - individualized programs for students with learning issues
  - field trips
  - work placement programs/ shop and hands-on programs
  - modernized curricula linked to present/future societal needs not past/present

3. Expanded services – 6 groups – including:
  - more social workers
  - availability of an educational psychologist, SLP, and OT
  - community/school liaison workers
  - transportation for adult students
  - student housing in Saskatoon and other communities that provide post-secondary programs including Ile-a-la-Crosse
  - a University of the North with full degree programs
  - expanded mental health resources/services/personnel
4. One of a kind suggestions included:
  - less government interference and more local control
  - more money/funding/resources
  - better parenting and more parental involvement in schools
  - provincial funding for sports
  - longer school year
  - community scholarships
  - no cell phone use in schools
  - better teacher/parent communication
  - better home life
  - more local teachers more E.A.'s

The Student First Engagement Guide identifies the following issues as needing to change to better prepare students for their future:

- fewer challenges to student engagement – distractions, stress, home life etc.
- higher rates of student attendance
- more curricular options and staff trained to present those options
- alternative learning environments – north in particular
- better transitions from high school to post-secondary training and the work place
- more funding for supplies for the trades, accelerated programming and equipment
- interventions to close learning gaps before grade 10 and to keep students in school once grade 10 and the high school credit system is reached
- ensuring schools are safe environments – free from bullying
- providing modern, up to date infrastructure with dedicated space for specialized programming such as PAA
- integrated community supports and services
- access to up to date technology – a northern issue in particular
- teacher coordination of efforts to view the student learning program holistically
- more/better parental involvement/engagement/ support for learning
- transportation barriers – a northern issue

Not surprisingly, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth discovered the following issues as needing to change in order to better prepare students for the future – although most of these issues did not exist solely within the school system:

- stopping bullying and other determinants leading to suicide
- increasing positive emotional support in communities (schools)
- addressing drugs and alcohol use/addictions
- providing safety
- providing meaningful and diverse activities for youth
- ending discrimination

### Conclusion:

What we heard in Ile-a-la-Crosse was echoed in part in both the *Student First Engagement Discussion Guide* (September 2014) and the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth engagement report *Shhh... LISTEN!! We Have Something to Say! Youth Voices From the North* (December 2017). Although the focus of the Advocate's report was on the youth suicide crisis in northern Saskatchewan, every one of the issues identified also exists in Ile-a-la-Crosse to some degree. There was a significant correlation between the views of the residents of Ile-a-la-Crosse and the views of those in the other 32 locations in Saskatchewan where the Student First Engagement was conducted. The correlation of those views grew stronger and more focused when comparing the responses of Ile-a-la-Crosse residents to those of residents in other northern communities. The similarity in the views of respondents in Ile-a-la-Crosse to the views of residents from First Nation communities was not as strong but was still significant in some areas of discussion.

