

## OVERVIEW

### BILL 64 & THE K-12 EDUCATION REVIEW

#### INTRODUCTION

In January 2019, the Pallister government announced a review of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 public education system. The clear goals were to reduce democracy and public participation in education governance and to reduce taxes and the public education budget. The review was conducted to hide a power grab against Manitoba's public education advocates.

The K-12 Education Review, also called the Better Education Starts Today (BEST) report, was released on March 15, 2021. The report contains recommendations in 10 areas, called "imperatives" in the report. These imperatives contain positive goals, but the report and the implementing legislation use these goals to move education policy backwards.

Bill 64, *The Education Modernization Act* that accompanies the review, would reduce local democracy and public participation, make it harder for parents, students and communities to be heard, make it harder for schools to work together to innovate in education, cause chaos for education workers and their unions, and continue cuts to the provincial education budget.

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF BILL 64

- English School Divisions and School Trustees are being eliminated and are scheduled to be gone by July 1, 2022. The Education Property Tax that provides 42% of education funding will be phased out gradually.
- The Francophone School Division will retain its existing status as a School Division with elected School Trustees.
- Government is creating The Provincial Education Authority (PEA) to be responsible for the delivery of K-12 education in Manitoba.
- The PEA will be governed by a board of between 6 and 11 government-selected appointees.
- The legislation also creates 15 regional organizations referred to as "regional catchment areas" (RCA). Each RCA will be responsible for facilitating the administration of the education system in their areas.
- Each RCA will be administered by an appointed "Director of Education."
- In place of elected school trustees, the legislation claims to get community involvement through school community councils (SCC).

- Each SCC will appoint a single representative to sit on a Provincial Advisory Council (PAC) – a board that exists to provide direct feedback from parents to the Minister of Education. Like the SCCs, the PAC is advisory in nature only.
- The PEA will be responsible for collective bargaining, human resources, information technology (IT), remote learning, procurement, and capital planning; the RCA will do more of the direct administering of the system.
- Once the School Divisions are dissolved, all employees of school divisions will become employees of the Provincial Education Authority. (Exception: Francophone School Division)
- The legislation is silent on collective bargaining and appropriate bargaining units for support staff. (With the one exception that it bars Principals and Vice Principals from continuing to be members of the teachers’ union, a move that raises concerns about a misplaced new business-management approach to education.)
- Preliminary discussion with government officials indicates that government intends for the Manitoba Labour Board to deal with any potential intermingling through the standard labour board process. This could result in representation votes run by the Labour Board, but there is no clarity on this yet.
- The Manitoba School Board Association is being repurposed into a pension and benefit provider for all non-teaching staff.
- The PEA is responsible for establishing a pension plan(s) for employees and officers of the authority who are not covered by the Teachers’ Pensions Act. The legislation provides the option of establishing a pension on its own, have employees participate in an existing municipal pension plan, or enter into an agreement with a life insurance company to provide a pension or other benefits.
- More conversations with government are needed – but it appears the legislation was drafted as to allow the continuation of the various existing pension plans – at least for the time being. In the one meeting granted by government representatives, they indicated that the issue of pensions in the sector would be settled at the bargaining table.

Regardless of what the K-12 review has spelled out, the intention of the legislation is to completely eliminate school taxes over the next 10 years. That is 42% of all education spending right now. There is no reliable commitment from government to backfill that huge funding gap. Instead, tax cuts continue to be a priority. When you cut education funding, that really means you are cutting education and programs for students and cutting jobs for workers.



You can read about the work of the Commission [here](#).

You can read the B.E.S.T. report for yourself [here](#).

Bill 64 can be found [here](#).

## **CONCLUSION**

The Commission that conducted the education review was chaired by a Conservative former education minister (Clayton Manness) and led by a consultant who made recommendations in 2018 to dismantle school divisions in Nova Scotia. The Commission showed no obvious cultural or political diversity or expertise. The consultant, Avis Glaze, certainly has that expertise and experience. She is an anti-racism advocate in education, but the K-12 report and the related legislation now proposed as Bill 64, does not appear to meaningfully advance this cause.

Full responsibility for the plan coming from the report lies with the Pallister government. The proposed legislation deals with almost none of the recommendations, and goes farther, eliminating English-language school divisions altogether and setting a course to eliminate the education property tax, which currently makes up 42% of education funding.

The report mentions poverty, but the legislation fails to do so and entirely misses the opportunity to build universal education programs like public Nursery. The review should have been a chance to make education better, to lift up under-resourced and under-served communities, but it is not.

The provincial government does not prioritize equality and equity. Instead, the government has relied on superficial, narrow consultations and analysis of longstanding problems, without the necessary connections to evidence, funding needs, and the interconnected social and economic issues that affect students' outcomes. The day-to-day tasks of providing public input into the education system are moved from School Trustees to

The government's plan was a done deal before the Commission was even formed: cut education, cut taxes, make it harder for families, communities and education advocates to be heard.