
RESTRUCTURED SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL DIVISION BOUNDARIES

Report of the Education Equity Task Force to
the Minister of Learning

November 2004

November 10, 2004

Honourable Andrew Thomson
Minister of Learning

Dear Mr. Thomson:

The Education Equity Task Force was established by Minister's Order 026/2004-05 on May 31, 2004. We were given a mandate to prepare and recommend a map of restructured school division boundaries, including subdivisions, through a process of consultation with school division boards and education stakeholders. The map was to be developed in accordance with a set of specific principles and criteria.

Over the last five months the Task Force has met with school divisions, The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, The League of Education Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, The Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, The Saskatchewan Association of School Councils, The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA), The Urban Caucus of the SSBA, The Catholic Section of the SSBA, First Nations representatives, some local boards of trustees, and one parent group. The advice we received was an important consideration in the development of the map.

We are pleased to present the map of restructured Saskatchewan school division boundaries and subdivisions in accordance with our mandate. Thank you for the opportunity to work on this important initiative.

Respectfully submitted,

Education Equity Task Force


Fred W. Herron, Chair


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INTRODUCTION

Over the last five months the Task Force has had the privilege of consulting with school division boards, provincial education stakeholders, First Nations representatives and others directly affected by the development of new boundaries for Saskatchewan school divisions.

Some of these discussions reflected support for the restructuring initiative. Still others strongly supported continuation of voluntary restructuring. In virtually all meetings, board members and stakeholders expressed fervent and vocal support for providing equitable and high quality education programs and services for all Saskatchewan students.

A summary of these discussions has been captured in this report, together with the principles and considerations the Task Force used in developing the new school division boundaries. The restructured school division and sub-division boundaries are presented as well as a summary of the basis for these decisions. The impact these changes have on equity for students and for taxpayers is also presented.

The Task Force is grateful to division boards, their staff, and members of the stakeholder groups for taking the time to discuss this important initiative with us. The Task Force would also like to thank the Department of Learning staff, in particular Sherry Andrushuk, Gerry Sing Chin, Monique Young, Barry Andrie, and the Regional Directors of Education for their support during the consultations and development of the map.

MANDATE AND PROCESS

At the end of May 2004, the Government of Saskatchewan established the Education Equity Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force was to develop a map of school division boundaries, including subdivisions, in consultation with school division boards and education stakeholders.

MANDATE

The Task Force was to prepare a map of restructured school division boundaries. This was to include consultation consisting of formal hearings, by appointment, for educational stakeholders including school division boards and local boards of trustees, advisory councils and other stakeholders as determined by the Education Equity Task Force.

The map was to be developed in accordance with the following principles and criteria, and proposals brought to the Task Force by stakeholders were to include consideration of the principles and criteria.

Principles:

- Equity of access to education programs and services for all students.
- Enhanced and sustained quality of education programming.
- Educational interest of all students reflected in all changes.
- Respect for the constitutional provisions for minority faith separate school divisions.
- Reflect the demographic and geographic realities of the province as well as the normal trading patterns of communities.
- Capacity in each new school division to offer all grades, kindergarten to grade 12, in schools operated by the division.
- A moratorium on school closures during the period of transition from September 1, 2004 to December 31, 2006.

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 enrolment minimum for school divisions outside of the North, Lloydminster and the separate school system is to be 5,000 students.
- There should be amalgamation of whole school divisions, except in unusual circumstances.

- New public school division boundaries will be contiguous (adjoining).
- Previous voluntary amalgamations should be respected whenever possible.
- The three northern school divisions and the two Lloydminster school divisions will remain the same.

Further, the Task Force was to recommend to the Minister sub-division boundaries for board representation within the restructured school divisions that respect:

- Representation by population with a variance of no more than 25 percent and,
- No more than 10 members on each new school division board.

Finally, in terms of its work, the Task Force was to consult with the Catholic Section of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association and the separate school boards on their intentions to proceed with separate school division restructuring initiatives and suggest a goal of seven to ten separate school boards.

The Task Force was to present that map of the restructured public school divisions, including sub-division boundaries, to the Minister of Learning by November 15, 2004.

PROCESS

The Task Force met in late spring and early summer to consult with Department of Learning officials and to prepare maps of existing school divisions (see appendix A for existing school division map) with enrolment, mill rate, assessment per student and grant information by school division. This information was sent to all school divisions and provincial stakeholder organizations at the end of June. The Task Force then developed a preliminary map of restructured school divisions. This map was sent out to school divisions and provincial stakeholder organizations in early August. This information served as the basis of the Task Force presentations during the consultation meetings, and to inform the school divisions of the magnitude of expected change.

The consultation meetings had two purposes. The first was to gather feedback on the preliminary map, and the second was to collect views to aid in the development of the subdivision boundaries. The Task Force met with

1. The provincial education stakeholder organizations – The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA), The League of Education Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS), The Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials (SASBO), The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF), The Saskatchewan Association of School Councils (SASC), The Urban Caucus of the SSBA and The Catholic Section of the SSBA.
2. Saskatchewan School Divisions

3. Local boards of trustees and parent associations with specific issues unique to their school or student needs.
4. Representatives of First Nations Tribal Councils and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

The Task Force also accepted briefs and written submissions for consideration during their deliberations.

During its' consultations, many issues were brought forward to the Task Force, including issues specific to implementing and funding the new divisions. The Task Force brought those issues back to the Department of Learning for consideration.

In total, the Task Force held 81 meetings across the province from late August to early November 2004.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Task Force believes the restructuring initiative and the resulting regional pooling of assessment will secure an effective and sustainable K-12 education system. In this context, effectiveness and sustainability were defined in the following manner.

An effective system is one that is based on the principles of equity for students, equity for taxpayers and autonomy for school division boards.

Equity for students means all students should have access to the same quality of education regardless of the socio-economic status of their family or community, the financial capacity of their school division, and without regard to their race, health status, ethnicity, learning style or other characteristics. This does not mean all students should be treated the same. If high-risk students come to school and are treated the same, they may not achieve results comparable to those of other students. Those students may need specialized programming.

Equity for taxpayers means ratepayers of one school division should not have to pay extraordinarily high property taxes relative to their neighbours because of the financial capacity of their school division, a large population of high risk children, higher transportation costs or other demographic or socio-economic factors.

Autonomy for school divisions means school boards continue to be responsible for delivery of education programs in their own school division. It also means that the community and the ratepayers hold the school division accountable for decisions regarding programs and services for students. It respects a community's ability to determine the level and type of education programs delivered locally. A further important component is fiscal autonomy. This allows boards of education to set a mill rate that will raise sufficient revenue to address unique local needs.

A sustainable system is one that can meet the objectives of equity and autonomy over the longer term.

The current system of financing education is one where the cost is shared between boards of education and the province. The provincial funding for K-12 education in Saskatchewan is distributed through the Foundation Operating Grant. It is designed to take into account the costs of providing education services and a school division's ability to pay. The grant formula is intended to mitigate the variability in a school division's ability to raise revenue, and thus increase the opportunity for equity in students' learning experiences.

A school board raises their revenue through education property tax. How much they are able to raise depends largely on the value of property assessment in the school division. The value of assessment varies considerably among the school divisions depending on many economic and market factors.

The province provides a grant to school divisions. The distribution of this grant is primarily on a per student basis. The distribution also recognizes that assessment varies among school divisions and that the number of students varies among school divisions. The grant tries to equalize both local and provincial funding so that opportunities for students are also equalized.

Two trends have come together in the last few years to reduce the operating grant's ability to equalize funding for education.

The first is the growth in the value of assessment in some school divisions partially because of the 1997 reassessment and partially because of the growth in the resource sector. This has resulted in very high recognized revenues for these divisions.

The second is a decline in enrolment in most school divisions.

Together, this means that some school divisions no longer receive a provincial grant. There are a growing number of these divisions that can spend more on their students from property tax alone, than others can spend with a combination of property tax and provincial grant funding. Some divisions have the ability to spend considerably higher amounts per student than the provincial average of approximately \$8,000 per student. Fundamentally, this is an unfair system for students. The mill rates vary from a low of 6 mills to a high of 23.35 mills. This is also inequitable for property taxpayers.

RESTRUCTURING AND REGIONAL POOLING ARE IMPORTANT STEPS

During the consultations, some school divisions and stakeholders asked the question "Why restructure the school divisions when there are other options to improve equity?" Some also suggested that voluntary restructuring was working and would be far more productive than government mandated restructuring. It is important to note that at the conclusion of the Task Force discussions, many school divisions did support government mandated restructuring as the best option to enhance equity for students and ratepayers, while still preserving local autonomy for school division boards.

Some of the options put forward as alternatives to restructuring were 1) removing school division property taxation authority from part of the assessment, 2) remove school division taxation authority entirely, or 2) fund education completely from general revenues. The Task Force members considered these alternatives in terms of

effectiveness of the system and concluded that the option of removing part of the assessment available to school divisions does reduce the difference in the financial capacity among school divisions. However, it limits the fiscal autonomy of school divisions. The options of a provincial education property tax on all taxable assessment or 100% provincial funding for K-12 education from general revenues provides fiscal equity among school divisions, but completely eliminates any fiscal autonomy for school divisions.

The Task Force believes that the regional pooling of assessment through carefully directed restructuring helps to correct the uneven distribution of wealth among school divisions. This should result in greater equity for students and for ratepayers without a substantial impact on the autonomy of school divisions. Many amalgamated school divisions spoke of the significant advantages to education programming as a result of restructuring.

Some boards suggested that voluntary restructuring was working and there was no need for a government mandated restructuring initiative.

In Saskatchewan, the province and boards of education have worked together for a number of years to voluntarily restructure school divisions. The latest initiative set a goal of reducing the number of school divisions in the province by 25 per cent (25 school divisions) prior to school board elections in October 2003.

At the end of the initiative, the number of school divisions in the province was reduced by 18 per cent (18 school divisions) to 82 (81 by June 2004) school divisions. Even with that latest round of voluntary restructuring, there are still boards with very high assessment per student and very low mill rates compared to other school divisions in the province. There are still about 50 percent of the school divisions with under 1,000 students and about 25 percent with under 500 students. This suggests that voluntary amalgamation has gone as far as it can and that directed restructuring is necessary to ensure an appropriate configuration of school division boundaries that support a sustainable education system and enhances equity for students and ratepayers.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS

The primary focus of the consultations was on new school division boundaries and subdivision representation. During the discussions the Task Force also heard other issues related to restructuring, but outside its' mandate. As indicated in the previous section, the issues outside the mandate of the Task Force were referred to the Department of Learning for further consideration.

The following highlights the results of the consultations into general themes of those concerning boundary decisions, implementation issues, and funding issues.

BOUNDARY DECISIONS

The Task Force considered these issues in developing the boundary and subdivision map.

- 1. Support for Directed Restructuring.** Many school divisions supported the restructuring initiative. Most previously amalgamated school divisions indicated support for further restructuring provided their division remained intact. A number of division boards had members with differing points of view on restructuring. There are a number of boards who strongly supported voluntary restructuring.
- 2. School Division Size.** Some school divisions felt that divisions of 5,000 students in some areas of the province was too large to provide quality programs and services. A few other divisions indicated that a division of 5,000 students was too small given future enrolment projections.
- 3. Board Representation.** School divisions expressed the view that it is important to maintain meaningful representation for all communities in the new school division. Some also indicated a specific desire to guarantee First Nations representation on the new division boards.
- 4. Changing Existing School Division Boundaries.** School divisions put forward the benefits of keeping previously amalgamated school divisions together rather than having them split as proposed in the preliminary map.
- 5. Restructuring Time Frame.** Many school divisions outlined the challenges that would be presented having newly restructured divisions in place by January 1, 2006 unless boards were in place before October 2005. They felt an earlier announcement of a government approved map would make some of these challenges more manageable.
- 6. School Divisions Subject To The Restructuring Initiative.** Many school divisions felt that the restructuring initiative should have applied to all Saskatchewan school divisions.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The Task Force referred these issues to the Department of Learning and discussed them in detail with the Restructuring Co-ordinating Committee.

- 1. Elected Boards or Appointed Interim Boards.** In general, school division boards supported elected boards to manage the transition issues before the formation of the new division on January 1, 2006. Others supported appointed interim boards for this period.
- 2. Partnership Agreements.** School divisions indicated the significance of preserving and enhancing current partnership agreements such as those with Comprehensive School Boards and First Nations.
- 3. Local Relationships and Local Participation.** Many school divisions expressed the importance of the continuation of a strong link between the school community, parents, staff and the board of education.
- 4. Programs and Services for Students.** A number of divisions spoke of the need for new or modified program and service delivery models that would be responsive to the needs of all students and practical for school division staff.
- 5. School Closures.** A few school divisions advised that careful management of school closures would be necessary once the new school divisions were in place and the moratorium on school closures was removed.
- 6. Transition Funding.** The need for transition funding from the provincial government was brought up at virtually every school division meeting. Boards indicated a need for funding for new board elections, to build a new culture and to facilitate and support the new board and division transition processes both before and after January 1, 2006.
- 7. School Division Financial Reserves.** Some school divisions stressed the importance that all school divisions consider the new division structure as they plan their operations for the 2005 year and the amount they choose to finance from their reserves.
- 8. Education Property Taxes.** Restructuring will provide many school divisions with the opportunity to maintain or even reduce their current mill rates; however, others will need to increase their mill rates. Some stated that property tax reform, including property tax relief, should be a priority before restructuring school divisions.
- 9. Review of the Foundation Operating Grant.** A number of school divisions expressed the view that the current Foundation Operating Grant requires review and significant change to reflect taxation fairness.
- 10. Sustainable Provincial Funding.** At every board meeting, members strongly made the point that increased provincial funding of education was necessary, in addition to restructuring, in order to make sure the system remains sustainable.

RESTRUCTURED SCHOOL DIVISION AND SUBDIVISION BOUNDARIES

The Task Force believes the boundaries represent a sustainable configuration for equitable access to quality education programs and services for all Saskatchewan students.

Appendix A displays the existing school division boundary map. Appendix B contains the restructured school division boundary map. Appendix C is the map with sub-division boundaries included for each of the new school divisions. Appendix D includes the enrolment, the estimated Foundation Operating Grant per school division, and estimated assessment per student.

The new school division boundaries meet the principles and criteria of the Task Force mandate:

1. There are 12 restructured school divisions for a total of 34 Saskatchewan school divisions including the minority faith school divisions, Regina, Saskatoon, Lloydminster, Francophone and three Northern school divisions.
2. The restructured school divisions have a range of students from 5,143 to 9,566 students. Each restructured school division has at least 5,000 students.
3. The range of local fiscal capacity, as measured by assessment per student, will be substantially narrowed. All school divisions will now receive a grant.
4. The boundaries of previously amalgamated school divisions have been left intact within the new school division structure.
5. In determining the final boundaries of school divisions, the Task Force attempted to find a balance between the amalgamation of entire school divisions and the need to consider normal trading patterns for communities.
6. The Health District boundaries were considered and respected where possible to ensure the most effective delivery of School^{PLUS} within the restructured divisions.
7. All new public school division boundaries will be contiguous.
8. The three northern school divisions and the Lloydminster school division will remain the same.

9. The Task Force met with The Catholic Section of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. They advised us that, over the last several months, the number of separate school divisions has been reduced from 21 to 14 divisions. The Catholic Section indicated that the number of separate school divisions will be further reduced to 8 or 9 divisions in conjunction with the restructuring of the public school divisions.
10. The restructured school divisions should all have the capacity and opportunity to offer a full range of programs and services to the students in their new division.
11. The educational interest of all students is reflected in these boundary changes and should result in enhanced and sustained quality of education programming and equity of access for all students.
12. Each school division will have 10 subdivisions with one board member for each subdivision. The subdivision boundaries were developed using representation by population with a variance of not more than 25 percent.

APPENDIX A

EXISTING SCHOOL DIVISION BOUNDARY MAP

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL DIVISION BOUNDARY MAP, INCLUDING MAJOR CENTRES

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL DIVISION MAP WITH SUBDIVISION BOUNDARIES AND RATIONALE

METHODOLOGY FOR DETERMINING SUBDIVISION BOUNDARIES

- The voter data was made available from Saskatchewan Health 2003 Data Base. The data was separated into urban voters and voters in rural municipalities.
- Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency provided data showing all yard sites in the province. Voter numbers outside of urban communities were then spread evenly across the rural municipalities.
- The Separate School voter numbers were removed.
- The total number of voters was divided by 10 to arrive at a mean. The 25% variance to determine the range was then calculated.
- First the urban communities which fell within the range were allotted their number of board members. A new mean for rural areas were calculated as well as the 25% variance to determine the range. These calculations are used to create subdivisions outside of the urban communities.
- The 25% variance allows the creation of subdivisions that reflect the geographical features of the province of Saskatchewan. This allows for consideration of rivers, forested area, and existing roads.
- This methodology is consistent with past practices of the Department of Learning's Subdivision Studies that have been used in previous amalgamations.
- These subdivisions are for the first election and can be revised at the request of the new boards of education.

From the [Provincial School Division Boundaries Map](#), please select the "[Division Map](#)" link(s) to view the Division / Subdivision Boundaries.

To view the rationale for establishment of subdivision boundaries, please select the "[Details](#)" link(s).

APPENDIX D

RESTRUCTURED SCHOOL DIVISIONS – ENROLMENT, ESTIMATED FOUNDATION OPERATING GRANT, AND ESTIMATED ASSESSMENT PER STUDENT
