



IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Learning 04-0

PROVINCE ANNOUNCES MAP OF NEW SCHOOL DIVISION BOUNDARIES

Learning Minister Andrew Thomson today announced that the government has accepted the Education Equity Task Force's recommendation for new school division boundaries.

"These new boundaries provide us with a strong start in making our school system more sustainable as it faces changing demographics, growing infrastructure and service demands and concerns about growing costs to support the system in the province," Thomson said. "It provides for a more equitable basis for tax reform and allows for school divisions to enhance program offerings."

The new school division boundaries provide for more comparable financial resources among divisions. This is important in calculating grants and establishing more uniform mill rates across the province.

"These changes are necessary as we move forward to provide long-term, sustainable property tax relief," Thomson said. "The work that has been undertaken by SUMA, SARM and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association has been helpful in determining how to address the property tax issues, as has the significant achievement of Premier Calvert in securing new financial resources for the province."

As a result of restructuring, the Task Force has recommended reducing the number of school divisions from 81 to 34. All new school divisions will qualify for government grants under the existing formula and previous amalgamations will be respected in all cases. Each division will have a minimum student population of 5,000 and a relatively equitable assessment per pupil ratio. These changes will allow for the next steps that include amalgamating local agreements, providing tax relief and developing new program offerings in the context of SchoolPLUS.

"The Education Equity Task Force conducted 81 meetings with boards of education and educational stakeholders from across the province and we thank them for their presentations that strongly represented the communities they serve. Our recommendations took into consideration the suggestions and advice given and balances the amalgamation of whole school divisions with the need to consider geography and normal trading patterns for communities," Task Force Chair Fred Herron said. "We strongly believe the educational interest of all students is reflected in our recommendations. They will result in enhanced and sustained quality of education programming and equity of access for all students."

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Thomson noted that past experiences with school division restructuring have resulted in concrete benefits for students and school divisions such as increased variety and stability of student programs, increased purchasing power due to economies of scale, additional supports for special needs students, curriculum development and teacher professional development.

Next steps in the Education Equity Initiative include: delivering the government's commitment to education property tax relief; reviewing the provincial school operating grants system to make it simpler and more transparent; and implementing the new school division boundaries that come into effect January 1st, 2006.

"Now that the new boundaries have been determined, we are looking toward implementation of the new school divisions," Thomson said.

Additional information including the Task Force's Report and final map of school division boundaries can be found online at www.learning.gov.sk.ca/branches/comm/minister/speeches/cfe.shtml.

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