



Talking about School Boards and Communities



Overview

School boards are a long-standing North American institution. They give local communities a say in one of their most important assets: their children's futures. In Manitoba, school boards date back more than a century. In their earliest years, most school boards governed an individual school that served a small geographic area. Consolidations over the years have resulted in fewer school boards, each serving more students over a larger geographic area. Today, the largest of Manitoba's 37 public school boards serves over 30,000 students, while the smallest serves fewer than 1,000.

Each school board governs a specific segment of the public school system. Those segments are called **school divisions** or, less commonly, **school districts**. In most cases, school divisions are geographic regions with discrete physical boundaries. In the case of the Division scolaire franco manitobaine, the school board governs all schools that serve a specific linguistic segment of the population, in all regions of the province.

School trustees are the individuals elected to serve on school boards. School trustees must be Canadian citizens, aged 18 years or older, and actual residents of the division they wish to serve. Elections are held every four years, at the same time as elections for municipal office. Individual trustees have no authority to act on their own; all decisions must be made in open public meetings by way of a motion adopted by a majority of the school trustees voting on the matter. The power of individual trustees lies in their ability to engage in debate, influence opinion, and ultimately vote on the matter.

Key Points

- School trustees are members of the communities they serve.
- School board governance is responsive and accountable, with regular elections, legally required consultations (e.g. on proposed budgets), standardized, transparent and accessible financial management and reporting (e.g. FRAME reports), and regularly scheduled, open meetings.
- School boards are grassroots, democratic institutions that spring from local communities. They give those communities the ability to shape schools in ways that respond to local needs and wishes concerning their children's education.
- All schools in Manitoba offer their students a solid core education that is based on minimum requirements identified by the province. Beyond this core, programming from school to school and division to division varies widely because of decisions made by school boards (e.g. optional courses of study, enhanced early years programming, etc.).

School Boards and Communities



Q&A

Aren't school boards out of date, a throwback to the days of the one room schoolhouse?

Actually, school boards are more relevant today than ever. When our society was more homogeneous and our student population less diverse, schools across the province looked a lot alike. The curriculum was standardized, students were streamed according to ability, and special needs students were rarely found in public schools. Today, schools are places that help vulnerable students succeed, that help preserve community language and culture, and that work with business and other organizations as full partners in community development.

Schools can do this because school boards are able to customize programs and implement options that meet local needs. Through school boards, communities have the option of creating their own solutions and own successes in public education. Without school boards, our schools would be facing the challenge of making one-size-fits-all solutions work.

School boards are expensive. Wouldn't we be better off spending that money in the classroom?

In most school divisions in Manitoba, the annual compensation for all school board members combined is less than 1% of the school division's operating budget. Provincially, that number is about 0.5%. So, half a cent on every dollar spent in the public education system in Manitoba is invested in promoting local democracy and community voice through trustee and school board expenses.

In all but the largest school divisions, the compensation paid to the entire school board is less than the salary paid to one classroom teacher. Even in the largest school divisions, where increased demands on time translate to a larger indemnity (or "salary"), that indemnity is only a fraction of any employee's salary. These dollars would have virtually no impact on the educational experience of students, but they do have a huge impact when it comes to enabling communities to shape their schools to reflect local circumstances and needs.

I don't have any kids in school, so why should I vote in school board elections, or care about what the school board does?

On the most basic level, you should care because school boards spend your money. All Manitobans pay for education, both directly through property taxes, and indirectly through taxes they pay to the province, which support public schools. You owe it to yourself to know how this money is being spent.

You also owe it to yourself and to future generations to know that today's students are receiving a quality of education that will allow them to become successful and productive members of their community, of Canada, and of the world. The issue here is one of public good: a well-educated citizenry contributes to economic prosperity and quality of life for all.

Not all school trustees have kids in school. Many are simply committed community members, who want to ensure the brightest future possible for everyone's kids, and for their own community. They take an interest; you should too.

School Boards and Communities



Q&A

I voted for my trustee because his kids go to the same school as mine do, and I thought I could count on him to do what's right for the school. Sometimes he does, but sometimes I think he's working for some other school.

Almost all school divisions in Manitoba are divided into wards, and trustees are elected by the voters in a specific ward. However, once elected, their responsibility is to all the students of the division, not just those of a particular area or school. Sometimes, this means supporting a decision that is in the best interest of the majority of students and schools, or which will create more equitable opportunities for a specific group of students. Not everyone will support every decision, and you can't assume that the trustee you elected will always agree with or support your point of view. You can and should expect, however, that all trustees are able and willing to explain the basis on which a decision has been made (within the bounds of legally-required confidentiality).

What can my school trustee do for me?

Let's start with what individual trustees cannot do. They cannot promise to do something that requires a decision of the entire board. What they can do, however, is bring the matter before the entire board for a decision, work to ensure the board is aware of your point of view regarding the matter in question, or help you bring the matter before the board yourself as a delegation.



Talking about Student Assessment and Achievement



Overview

The progress of students in Manitoba's K-12 schools is monitored on an ongoing basis. Monitoring falls into two broad categories. **Formative assessments** reveals a student's individual strengths and weaknesses, and helps educators develop a roadmap to improved learning outcomes. **Summative assessments** focus on how well a student has mastered particular skills or knowledge at a given moment of time. Simply put, formative assessment is forward looking, while summative assessment is backwards looking. Both are important.

In Manitoba, **teachers** administer regular tests to determine how well students understand the material they have covered. Test results are shared with parents, and teachers use the results to assess their own teaching practices. Some divisions also require that students write **divisional exams** in particular subjects or grades. Students also take part in **provincial assessments**. These include Grade 3 reading and numeracy assessments, middle years assessments of math, reading comprehension, writing and engagement, and Grade 12 provincial exams in language arts and math. The Grade 12 provincial tests count towards 20 to 30% of a student's final grade.

Students may also participate in national or international assessment programs. The primary national program is the **Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)**. The **Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)** is sponsored by the Organization for Educational Cooperation and Development (OECD). Both PCAP and PISA assessments test a small sample of students in specific subjects and specific grades. These assessments are not conducted annually, but on a multi-year cycle.

Key Points

- The progress of students at all levels in Manitoba's K-12 classrooms is assessed continually, to determine how well students have mastered material covered, and to develop a roadmap to improved future learning outcomes.
- Assessment in Manitoba schools is largely teacher and classroom based. Teachers are in the best position to understand their individual students and their learning needs.
- Standardized provincial assessment programs determine student progress towards required learning outcomes at key junctures. The results of standardized provincial assessments may also shape revisions to provincial curricula and learning resources.
- Provincial, national and international assessment results show that Manitoba students are achieving at a high level, and that their level of achievement is rising year over year.
- School boards monitor student achievement, and allocate resources in accordance with identified goals and needs. Research shows that effective school boards can lead to improved student achievement.

Student Assessment and Achievement



Q&A

Sometimes I hear that kids today are so smart, and other times I hear that standards have been slipping for decades. What's the real story?

Kids today are smart, and in so many ways. They achieve at high levels in academic subjects, they are developing technical and vocational skills, they know how to work as a part of a team, they are creative, and they are empathetic with a highly developed sense of social justice. Collectively, these are some of the traits that have been identified as essential to 21st century learning. Sometimes, when people talk about falling standards, they have fallen victim to what Jamie Vollmer, a one-time critic turned champion of public education, has dubbed “nostesia.” Nostesia is a dangerous combination of nostalgia and amnesia. Victims of nostesia long for the good old days, while at the same time forgetting some of the key features of that time, such as complacency that many children simply wouldn't graduate from high school. Today, the expectation is that all children can achieve at high levels, and that the role of the school is to provide the supports needed to make that happen.

How well do Manitoba's students perform on national and international tests?

Very well, actually.

The results of Manitoba's students on tests such as PCAP and PISA are often used to compare Manitoba's students with those in other provinces. Rank-ordering the test results is an easy way to try to extract some meaning from these results, but it is far from the most useful. Each province in Canada is different, with different levels of affluence and poverty, and varying degrees of diversity within their populations. Socio-economic status (SES), for example, can influence score outcomes by a factor of up to 40%, and Manitoba has a relatively high number of students from families with a low SES.

Much more useful than rank-ordering the results among provinces is to look at what they can tell us about how many students are meeting or exceeding expectations in the subjects tested, and how results are trending over time. Across the province and across subjects tested, more than 80% of Manitoba's students regularly meet or exceed expectations in math, science, reading and writing. This number does not vary significantly from results in other provinces. Furthermore, over the last several testing cycles, their results have shown steady improvement, meaning that what our schools are doing is working.

Wouldn't kids do better on these tests if schools spent more time teaching the basics—you know, reading, writing and arithmetic?

Kids *might* do better on these tests, but the real question is would they do better in life? One of educators' concerns about standardized testing has always been the temptation to “teach to the test”—that is, to spend a lot of time and energy on material that you know will be the focus of an important assessment. There is no question that traditional core subjects such as math, science, and reading are important for our students' futures, but if we focus on those exclusively, we will be depriving our students of the depth and breadth of education that is needed to build strong futures and rewarding lives. They might do marginally better on a test or two, but at what cost?

Student Assessment and Achievement



Q&A

I understand the role teachers have in student success, but do school boards really matter when it comes to how well our kids do in school?

Yes, school boards definitely matter, and the research proves it. One of the most comprehensive studies comes out of Iowa. The Lighthouse Project looked at otherwise-similar school districts with either unusually high or unusually low records on student achievement, and contrasted the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of school board members in the two groups. The examination revealed that school boards in those jurisdictions where students achieved at a higher level:

- have high expectations for student achievement, and defined clear goals towards their vision;
- have strong shared beliefs about what is possible for all students and for their ability to learn;
- work collaboratively with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving goals;
- embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement;
- align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals; and
- lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.

So yes, school boards do matter when it comes to student achievement.



Talking about Education Funding and Spending



Overview

In Manitoba, the funding of public schools is a joint responsibility of the provincial government and locally-elected school boards.

Annually, the province allots **operating funds** to each school division in accordance with a complex formula that takes into account things like overall student numbers, population density, transportation needs, and the number of students with special needs. These funds take the form of either **block grants** (which are generally unrestricted funds) or **categorical grants** (funds which must be used for a specific purpose, and which may require a separate application process). Operating funds are used to support the delivery of programs and services to students. In addition to operating funds, the province provides **capital funding** (funding for school construction and major renovations) through the Public Schools Finance Board, and funds the employers' contribution to the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund, which is the teachers' pension plan.

Annually, each school board sets a budget. Through the budgeting process, the board establishes its priorities in terms of programs and services. As part of the budgeting process, each school board holds public consultation meetings to give community members a chance to share their views on where money should be spent. When the operating funds provided by the province fall short of the budgetary requirement as determined by the school board, the school board raises the additional funds required by levying a tax on property called the **special levy**.

Key Points

- On a province-wide basis, the provincial government provides school divisions with approximately 64% of the funds required to operate public schools, although this percentage can vary widely from division to division. This compares to the 80% of operating costs that the province covered in the early 1980s.
- The provincial government sometimes mandates new courses, programs and services. These new mandates may come with some additional provincial funding, but that is not always the case. Even when there is new funding, it rarely covers all implementation costs, leaving school boards to fund the difference.
- No program is funded 100% by provincial operating grants, not even those thought of as core curriculum.

Education Funding and Spending



Q&A

The provincial government gives school boards most of the money they need to run the schools, and increases that funding each year. Why do my property taxes keep increasing?

In total, the provincial government provides 64% of the operating funds needed to run public schools. The amount of provincial funding varies from one school division to another. Some divisions receive less than 50% of their operating revenues from the provincial government. A 3% increase in provincial operating grants does not equal a 3% increase in operating revenues unless there is a corresponding increase in the special levy. As well, increases in provincial funding often come in the form of categorical grants targeted at specific programs or circumstances. This money cannot be used to offset general “cost of living” increases that schools are facing.

Manitoba’s school-aged population is shrinking, so why are education costs increasing?

Actually, student numbers in Manitoba are growing. While there may have been more school-aged kids during the peak baby-boom years than there are now, provincial student enrolment has been increasing annually since 2010, and the rate of growth has accelerated in recent years.

Some areas of the province are facing declining enrolment, however, and the impact of that decline is often higher rather than lower per-pupil costs. For example, when a school division’s student population declines by 30, that decline is spread across schools and grades—it doesn’t translate immediately into a reduction in the number of classrooms and teachers. A legislated moratorium on school closings can add to this problem, as the ability of school boards to consolidate schools and programs to achieve cost-savings and efficiencies has been severely restricted. A sparser student population also adds directly to costs such as transportation, as fewer students are transported on longer bus routes.

Beyond numbers, the makeup of our student population is also changing. The number of students with special needs, as a percentage of the population, is increasing. These students’ may require medical, behavioural or emotional supports, one-on-one learning assistance, or structural modifications. Schools are also seeing a huge influx of newcomer students. Some of these student require English or French as an additional language supports, while other require intense remediation to help them fill gaps created by interruptions in their education. School boards have a moral and legal obligation to ensure all students succeed. Fulfilling that obligation comes with a cost, and provincial funding pays that cost only in part.

Why do school divisions spend so much money on administration? Shouldn’t they be spending it in the classroom?

Public schools are no different from any other business in that there are necessary administrative functions—employees have to be paid, resources have to allocated, and programs have to be supported. What is different in our public schools is that those administrative costs are capped by law, to a maximum of 5%. Our public school system spends significantly less on administration as a percentage of overall operating costs than do municipal governments, where that number frequently tops 10%.

Education Funding and Spending



Q&A

I wouldn't mind paying my school taxes if I thought the money was needed, but don't school boards have big surpluses that they could be spending instead of raising taxes?

Most school divisions do have some surplus money, or a financial reserve. Maintaining such a reserve makes good financial sense, and is recommended by the independent auditors that review school division finances each year. Some of these funds are earmarked for specific projects, such as new classroom equipment which may be funded from several years' budgets. Some may be held to pay for anticipated expenses, such as retroactive salary adjustments where employee contracts have expired, and some money is needed to make sure school boards can pay for those unexpected expenses, such as utility increases. When reserves are used to offset tax increases, any reprieve is short-lived. A revenue shortfall that is made up from reserves one year will have to be recovered from regular revenue sources in subsequent years.

Why don't school divisions control spending instead of always looking for more money?

School divisions work hard to control spending, but they have to weigh any cuts in spending against the possible negative impact on students. Education is a labour intensive enterprise, with 85% of operating costs attributable to salaries and benefits. Most of these salaries and benefits are for employees such as teachers, classroom assistants, bus drivers, and custodians—employees that have an immediate and direct impact on students' learning and school experience. In order to realize significant cost savings, school boards would need to increase class size, cut programs, or consolidate facilities in order to allow them to reduce their payrolls. Community consultations on school board budgets, which are required each year by law, have shown repeatedly that rather than wanting fewer services to save money, most community members are looking to schools to do more. Doing more comes with a cost.

My municipal taxes are staying pretty much constant, while my school taxes keep increasing. Why the difference?

It's misleading to look at tax rates in isolation. In the city of Winnipeg, for instance, property tax rates remained virtually unchanged for many years. But property taxes accounted for as little as 43% of the city's revenue during that time. Municipalities also have access to revenues generated by user fees for goods and services, licensing and permit fees, and a portion of provincial VLT revenues. Revenue from these other sources has increased significantly as fees have been steadily hiked. Schools boards do not have access to alternate sources of revenue such as these—their only sources are provincial grants and the special levy.

The no-tax-increase policy some municipalities adopted created an infrastructure deficit. Addressing that deficit will require several years of regular and significant property tax increases, but it can be corrected. When we talk about road repairs, postponement may be an option, but it's not an option when we are talking about kids' futures.





Talking about School Division Amalgamation



Overview

Manitoba currently has 310 elected school trustees serving on 37 school boards across the province. Fifty-four of these trustees serve on the six school boards that are wholly or largely located within the geographic boundaries of the city of Winnipeg—Winnipeg, St. James-Assiniboia, Pembina Trails, Louis Riel, River East Transcona, and Seven Oaks.

Over the past 60 years, the number of school divisions and districts has been slashed from around 2000 to fewer than 40 as improvements in transportation and communications have made larger geographic jurisdictions viable. These reductions came about largely as the result of government initiated reviews in the mid-1940s and late 1950s. By the time of the last major review of school division boundaries (the 1994 School Divisions/Districts Boundaries Review Commission, headed by William Norrie), there were 57 school divisions and districts in Manitoba, with 10 of these in Winnipeg. The government of the day never acted on the 1994 boundaries commission recommendations, which would have seen the number of school divisions in Manitoba drop to 21, with four in Winnipeg. However, the number was reduced to 55 provincially and nine in Winnipeg in 1998, with the school-board initiated amalgamations of the Norwood and St. Boniface and Tiger Hills and Pembina Valley school divisions. That number was further reduced to the current 37 in 2002, as the result of provincially mandated amalgamations.

Since 2002, the question of further amalgamations has been raised from time to time, but no action has been taken. Successive provincial administrations have voiced their support for voluntary school division amalgamations, and have encouraged school boards to consider mergers as a way of generating savings.

Key Points

- Education is a classroom-based, labour intensive endeavour. The majority of public school dollars are spent on direct (e.g. teacher and educational assistant salaries, classroom supplies) or indirect (e.g. transportation, building maintenance) services to students. The cost of providing these services is not dependent on the size of the jurisdiction, particularly when school boards are prevented by law from consolidating or closing schools in an effort to realize savings and enhance educational programming.
- Larger administrative units do not necessarily translate into lower administrative costs. Administrative costs, as a percentage of operating budget, show little variance from school division to school division across Manitoba, and are capped at a maximum of 5%. While each school division may have only one individual designated as superintendent or secretary-treasurer, the size and complexity of larger jurisdictions require the employment of additional levels of administrative staff. The argument that a reduction in the number of school divisions automatically translates to a corresponding reduction in the number of administrators is overly simplistic.
- School division amalgamation is a costly process. One-time costs relate to the integration of different technology and information systems. Ongoing costs relate to the harmonization of wages, benefits and working conditions for employees previously covered by separate collective agreements, and the standardization of student programs and services across the new division. Experience following the 2002 amalgamations has shown that the up-front costs alone for large divisions can total millions of dollars.

School Division Amalgamation

Key Points

- Amalgamation is a complicated, time-consuming and disruptive process that diverts schools' focus from where it rightly belongs—students and their learning—to the logistical concerns of merging two systems and cultures.
- Students in Manitoba are not prevented from attending schools outside their home school division. Schools of choice legislation means that students are able to attend any school in the province, providing that space is available at the receiving school. The “space available” provision is no different than that which applies when a student wants to attend other than his or her designated school within a school division.
- Many of the diverse programs in Manitoba's schools exist because of the initiative of individual school boards. For example, a wide variety of languages are taught in schools across Manitoba, including Hebrew, Ukrainian, German, Spanish, and Cree. Were it not for the initiative of the boards of smaller school divisions responding to needs identified by a segment of their community, many of these opportunities might not be available.
- With fewer trustees representing larger constituencies, community voices (especially minority voices) may have to work harder to be heard.



School Division Amalgamation



Q&A

Cities like Calgary and Edmonton each have a single, large school division, and they seem to work just fine. Why won't one big school division work in Winnipeg?

The question isn't really whether or not one big school division would work in Winnipeg; the question is whether the benefits of creating that division would outweigh the disruption and costs associated with the process. In some large cities, the municipal and school division boundaries have always been co-terminus; as the city has grown, so has the school division, and it has continued to function smoothly. That's not the case in Winnipeg. The six school divisions that fall primarily within the city boundaries are remnants from the days when Winnipeg as we now know it was a collection of separate cities such as St. James, St. Vital and St. Boniface. When these separate municipal jurisdictions merged—a process that had its own challenges—the school divisions were left intact. The creation of a single large school division in Winnipeg would require the merging of these six jurisdictions, with all the associated costs and disruptions. The end result would be a single school division governed by a single school board, but that doesn't automatically translate to a better education for students.

There are new residential developments in Winnipeg with no schools, and older areas of the city with schools that are sitting half empty. If Winnipeg had a single school board, couldn't we make better use of the available space?

Some school divisions are experiencing uneven population growth, with fewer students in some areas and new residential development in others creating a demand for additional classroom space. In Winnipeg, for example, several school divisions have seen large residential developments over the past several years, and new schools that have been built are quickly at or over capacity.

Generally, there is already sufficient capacity within Winnipeg's school divisions to accommodate all students, without needing to look across divisional boundaries for empty classrooms. The challenge is that communities want or expect that their children will be able to attend a school close to home, rather than riding a bus to a different neighbourhood. Whether Winnipeg has one school division or six, current residential growth patterns will continue to pose a challenge when it comes to making efficient use of existing school space.

Wouldn't bigger school divisions mean more choices for students?

Not necessarily. It's nice to think that every program that is currently being offered in a school in Winnipeg or another region of the province would be offered in every school in an enlarged school division, but that's unlikely. Many of the unique or specialized programs that are currently being offered are funded through the special levy—the local education property tax—rather than by funding provided by the provincial government. The nursery school program offered by The Winnipeg School Division is a good example of this. The school board has been able to offer this program because its community supports and is willing to pay for it. Expansion of such a program to other areas of the city would require expanded support and expanded funding—and the availability of that support and funding is not a given.

Also, don't overlook the role that school boards had in the first place in providing the wide range of optional programming that is currently available. Some of the most innovative programming originates in the smallest school divisions, from boards that are closely tied to their communities and who understand what is important to a community when it comes to educating its children. When we reduce the number of school boards, we increase the distance between school boards and their communities, and run the risk of losing out on some good ideas.

School Division Amalgamation



Q&A

Wouldn't we eliminate a lot of unnecessary duplication if we had fewer school divisions?

School division staffing is tied to student numbers. Some things are obvious—the number of teachers, the number of custodians, and the number of buses and drivers all depend on how many students are attending classes in how many schools, and how those students get to those schools. Other things aren't as obvious. For example, the divisional superintendent has a responsibility for hiring, supervising and evaluating professional staff. In a smaller division, one individual might be able to take on that role fully, along with fulfilling all the other duties associated with the job. A large school division with many more teachers may assign that role to an assistant superintendent, while other assistants take on other “superintendent” responsibilities, such as curriculum development or student services. The same thing happens in areas such as transportation and human resources—in smaller school divisions, one person may be able to do the same job that requires a team or department in a larger division. On the surface, larger school divisions might reduce what appears to be duplication by reducing the number of individuals with similar titles, but that doesn't mean that larger school divisions create efficiencies in the area of staffing and administration costs.



Talking about Becoming a School Trustee



Overview

In Manitoba, **310 school trustees** serve on **37 school boards**. School trustees are elected officials, comparable in many ways to municipal councillors. School board elections are held **every four years**, at the same time as municipal elections. The next scheduled election will be held in October 2018. In addition to regularly scheduled elections which are held province-wide, a school division may hold a **by-election** to fill any vacancy which arises on the board between elections.

In order to run for the position of school trustee, an individual must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen, and actually live within the geographic boundaries of the school division. He or she must be **nominated** by having a certain number of electors (a maximum of 25) sign nomination papers. These nomination papers must then be returned to the designated place (usually the school board or a municipal office) by the deadline indicated (which will be several weeks before the actual election date).

From time to time, only one individual is nominated for a particular seat on a school board. When that happens, that individual is **acclaimed** to the position. In rare instances, there are no nominations for a seat. When that happens, one of the first responsibilities of the new school board is to **appoint** someone to fill the vacancy. Whether elected, acclaimed or appointed, all trustees are equals at the school board table.

Key Points

- School trustees are members and representatives of the communities in which they live. School trustees are not professional educators.
- Almost without exception, anyone who is a Canadian citizen, 18 years of age or older, and actually residing within the geographic boundaries of the school division, can serve as a school trustee. The few exceptions that do exist include elected officials of another level of government, and students in regular attendance at a school within the same division.
- School trustees must be able to commit a significant amount of time to fulfill their responsibilities, which go far beyond regular monthly or bi-monthly meetings, and must be prepared to invest the time required to learn about their new responsibilities.
- School board election procedures and aspects of school trustee conduct (such as provisions for dealing with conflict of interest situations) are covered in provincial legislation.

Becoming a School Trustee



Q&A

Do I have to know a lot about education to serve as a school trustee?

No, but you do need to have a genuine interest in children and education. As a school board member, your job is not to run the schools or teach the children, any more than it is to drive the school bus or tend the boiler. The school board employs highly qualified individuals to fulfill each of those roles. Your job is to engage and understand the community that you represent so that you can make policy decisions and set a budget that enables all employees to do their jobs in a manner that responds to student needs and community priorities.

I know I have to live in the school division to run for trustee, but I want to run in a different ward from where I live. Can I do that?

The residency requirement for school trustee is that you live within the geographic boundaries of the *school division*. This means that you can run in any ward, not just the one where you live. But be careful! In order to run, you need to have nomination papers signed by a certain number of electors (either 25 individuals or 1% of the electorate of the ward, whichever is less). For your nomination to be valid, the people that sign your nomination papers must reside in the ward in which you intend to run.

I'm an employee in the same school division where I live. Can I still run for school trustee?

Working for a school division doesn't prevent you from serving as a school trustee in that same division, but you do have to make some special arrangements. Before you can assume your seat, you have to take a leave of absence from your job. The leave is unpaid, must be granted by the division upon request, and will last for a period of time not exceeding five years. To learn more, contact your school board office.

I'm worried about the time commitment that comes with serving on a school board. Exactly how big a job would I be taking on?

The workload varies with the time of the year, and it can be very demanding. As well as regular board meetings (usually once or twice each month), there will be committee meetings, meetings with other organizations or other levels of government, and school and community events that you are expected to attend. Most of these meetings require a significant amount of preparation to enable you to participate actively, so you also need to factor in time taken to read and understand agendas and supplementary material. If you have serious concerns about your ability to dedicate the necessary time to the position, you may want to reconsider your decision to run. If you are elected trustee and are subsequently unable to attend three consecutive meetings, you may be forced to resign, which may mean that the division will be required to conduct a by-election.

Becoming a School Trustee



Q&A

From time to time, I hear about conflict of interest on school boards. What is conflict of interest, and could a conflict of interest stop me from running for school trustee?

A conflict of interest situation can arise when a trustee's personal life and public life overlap. For example, a trustee may own a business that sells something that the school division wants to buy. That trustee would stand to benefit personally if the school division decided to make its purchase from the trustee's business. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, the trustee must not participate in any discussions or vote on this matter, and must not even be present when those discussions take place. This is an example of a pecuniary (or financial) conflict of interest, and provincial legislation clearly outlines procedures for avoiding such conflicts at the board table, as well as remedies in law should conflict of interest provisions be ignored.

But there are other types of conflict of interest, ones that don't involve pecuniary interests, that aren't covered by legislation. Employment decisions that affect family members and disciplinary actions involving students are two of the most common areas of potential non-pecuniary conflict of interest. All school boards are required to have formal codes of conduct that provide direction, should trustees find themselves in these types of situations. The underlying principle is always the same: where trustees' personal interests or affiliations have the potential to bias their judgement about an issue, they must remove themselves from all related decision-making processes.

So, while conflict of interest would not normally prevent you from becoming a school trustee, it may impact your ability to participate in certain board deliberations and decisions.

How can I learn more about school board elections?

For an overview of school board elections (as well as information about school boards and school trustees in general), visit the website of The Manitoba School Boards Association (www.mbschoolboards.ca), where you will find the publication *School Boards and Trusteeship in Manitoba*. Detailed information about the conduct of school board elections is contained in provincial legislation (*The Public Schools Act* and *The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*).

If I'm elected as school trustee, how will I learn about the job?

After each election, school divisions work with newly elected school trustees to orientate them to their new role. As well, in the weeks following each election, The Manitoba School Boards Association offers training sessions designed to immerse new trustees in their role.



mbschoolboards.ca