

FACT vs FICTION

Since the release of the Better Education Starts Today (BEST) strategy and Bill 64, we've seen and heard many misconceptions. To ensure Manitobans have access to the facts, we are continuously responding to commonly asked questions here: bettereducationmb.ca/questions-and-answers/

Below are facts to clarify the most common misconceptions that we've heard.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

FICTION

Bill 64 paves the way for the government to ignore school community consultation when it comes to school closures.

FACT

No schools will be closed as a result of combining existing school divisions into regions. We have committed to building 20 new schools over 10 years. The criteria for school closures remains unchanged as set out in the current Public Schools Act.

POVERTY AND MENTAL HEALTH

FICTION

Bill 64 ignores challenges such as poverty, mental health and additional needs — the things that must be addressed so kids can focus on learning.

The Better Education Starts Today report fails to mention any program to alleviate poverty at the school level.

FACT

Education will continue to work closely with the department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery to build upon enhanced mental health programming introduced during the pandemic, in addition to implementing a new mental health and addictions curriculum.

The BEST strategy will establish a taskforce to work with the Poverty Reduction Strategy, to support the implementation of programs that can better address the challenges faced by some students due to poverty.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

FICTION

Bill 64 creates a blanket policy on the sensitive content clause that will further marginalize the LGBTTOQ+ community.

FACT

Bill 64 supports diversity and inclusion by requiring the Provincial Education Authority to have a Respect for Human Diversity policy that accommodates student activities including "gay-straight alliance" or any other activities that promote a safe and inclusive environment.

Currently schools are required to notify parents when physical/health education curriculum is being delivered that deals primarily and explicitly with human sexuality, substance use and personal safety. If a parent elects to exclude their child from that portion of the course, the student will receive instruction in the potentially sensitive content by way of alternate delivery. Bill 64 does not change this requirement.

TEACHER SUPPORT

FICTION

The new system will create a feeling of isolation for teachers and teachers will be penalized for poor assessment results.

FACT

Teachers have told us they need more supports to meet the needs of their students. The BEST strategy focuses on providing more resources at the classroom level and professional learning and development opportunities for teachers. There are no penalties associated with assessment results.

SCHOOL FUNDING

FICTION

This new centralized governance structure will impact funding for schools.

If Bill 64 passes, education taxes will still be collected, but the Provincial Education Authority will determine how much financial support will be allocated to our local schools.

FACT

The BEST strategy will eliminate inequities resulting from funding imbalances and implement a new funding model that is fair, transparent and sustainable so no matter where you live, your children have access to good education. Education funding is being increased by over \$1.6 billion over the next four years and all savings resulting from changes and system efficiencies will be shifted to classrooms.

As announced in Budget 2021, our government will begin phasing out education property taxes by implementing the \$248 million Education Property Tax Rebate benefiting all 658,000 property taxpayers.

HIRING PRINCIPALS

FICTION

School principals are going to be determined by the cabinet – at the premier’s level.

FACT

Principals will continue to be hired as they always have through a competitive process. Directors of Education (employees of the Provincial Education Authority) will hire any upcoming principal positions across the 15 regions. Existing principal appointments are not affected by these changes.

SPECIAL LOCAL PROGRAMMING

FICTION

The new system will impact the local programs unique to each school division, which help children stay in schools.

FACT

Bill 64 facilitates greater opportunities for parent and community engagement that reflects local needs and concerns. Unique local programming will still be allowed under the new system and principals will work with their regional teams to determine the value and need for special programming.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

FICTION

The amalgamation policy will impact Indigenous education. For many years, Indigenous communities fought for culturally appropriate approaches to learning and now these efforts are threatened by a policy that attempts to apply a single bureaucracy to the entire province.

Bill 64 is a drastic undoing of nearly four decades of work in Indigenous education.

FACT

Providing Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and teachings to all students remains a priority and several of Manitoba’s immediate actions highlight a stronger presence and value on Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

For example:

- The implementation of an Indigenous Inclusion Strategy in partnership with the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council aims to advance reconciliation and close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and strengthen student pathways to success.
- The Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools initiative acknowledges the important role of supporting student and teacher learning, family outreach and curriculum development.
- The new K-12 Curriculum Development Framework will increase the presence of Indigenous perspectives.

The BEST strategy also commits to supporting reconciliation by enhancing all educators and students’ understanding of the Treaties, residential schools and Indigenous peoples’ past and present contributions.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

FICTION

Bill 64 takes control away from parents and educators.

The Bill would replace informal parent councils with School Community Councils, which will result in increased work and decreased representation for parents and caregivers.

FACT

The new governance structure under Bill 64 facilitates increased parent engagement through the development of School Community Councils and a Provincial Advisory Council on Education. Schools will have a parent engagement officer who is designated by the school principal to provide support to the School Community Council. Similar to the current system, there will be an escalation approach for parents who wish to raise concerns about a public school matter.

The Manitoba government will be consulting with parents, caregivers, community members and stakeholders on the School Community Councils. We want to ensure that parents and educators are well supported and can meaningfully contribute to their local school community.

ACCOUNTABILITY

FICTION

Eliminating school boards and elected trustees will increase government control over schools and decrease public accountability.

A provincial entity will become responsible for decisions and funding for all school programs. One decision-making body will control all decisions pertinent to local schools.

FACT

Changes to governance are about ensuring there are more resources for our classrooms and moving away from a top-heavy bureaucracy that is duplicated multiple times across Manitoba. Eliminating school boards and top-heavy administration, and implementing stronger parent and community engagement, will create increased public accountability for determining the supports needed for student participation and success.

Regions will have primary responsibility for the delivery of education. The expectation is that the Director of Education will be the chief executive for the region, similar to the role of a current Superintendent. Principals will report to the Director or appointed designate. Regional office structures will vary according to the needs and geography of individual regions.

DIVERSITY OF VOICES

FICTION

Parents will struggle to have their voices heard when one central politically appointed board is formed.

A central board will make decisions, and marginalized voices will go unheard.

FACT

The Provincial Advisory Council on Education will be made up of one parent representative from each of the 15 regions plus one representative from DSFM. This is an advisory council representing the geographic areas and will represent the diversity of the people of Manitoba and the varied talents, perspectives and ideas of people with different backgrounds and experiences.

With the establishment of School Community Councils at schools, every parent of a student that attends a rural or urban school will become a member of the council.

STUDENT IMPACT

FICTION

These changes will cause uncertainty and disruption for students.

FACT

There will be no major disruptions to everyday life in the classroom.

For students:

- No immediate changes in their everyday school life
- Increased emphasis on mental health and well-being
- Better preparation for whatever path they choose: post-secondary, trades, workforce, entrepreneurship

For parents:

- Their children will go to same school
- No extra expense
- New School Community Councils will provide more meaningful parent engagement
- Their children will be better prepared to compete in a global community

For teachers:

- No staffing impacts at the school level as a result of these changes
- Bargaining will change from school divisions to province-wide, establishing a level playing field
- Professional standards to deliver high-quality learning outcomes

PROVINCIAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY BOARD MEMBERS

FICTION

The Provincial Education Authority will be run by a politically appointed board that serves the interests of the government of the day instead of students and the community.

FACT

Bill 64, The Education Modernization Act, establishes the Authority as a new government entity and sets out requirements for who may be appointed to the board. The Authority will have a board of 6 to 11 members, a majority of whom must be community board members, and a minimum of two parents selected from the Provincial Advisory Council on Education.

When government appoints community board members, we consider the following:

- A candidate's knowledge, skills and expertise in the areas relevant to the needs of the board.
- That the board as a whole has the right range of expertise and experience to carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- That the board as a whole represents the diversity of the people of Manitoba and the varied talents, perspectives and ideas of people with different backgrounds and experiences.

SCHOOL DIVISION PROPERTY

FICTION

All current school division property will become Provincial Education Authority property and communities won't be able to access school facilities to support local needs anymore.

FACT

School properties will continue to be used to support local needs, regardless of ownership.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

FICTION

Bill 64 will remove local jobs and businesses will need to secure contracts from Winnipeg.

FACT

Procurement practices in rural areas will continue where it makes sense so that rural economies do not suffer and jobs are not lost.