The Manitoba K–S4 Education Agenda for Student Success (2002–06)

Making room on the agenda for the Agenda

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“Beyond Political Rhetoric: Multiple Perspectives on Manitoba’s K–S4 Education Agenda for Student Success”

This paper is the opinion of the author only and does not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Manitoba
The *Manitoba K–S4 Education Agenda for Student Success* was a policy initiative developed and launched amidst a swirl of other highly publicized and highly political issues faced by the Department of Education and Training. Initially contemplated as a 6–8 month project, the Agenda took two years to complete in face of competition from other legislative and emergent issues demanding the time, energy, and resources of the Minister and bureaucratic staff.

In July 2000, Education and Training Minister Drew Caldwell first communicated six priorities toward maximizing student success. Those priorities were:

1. Improve outcomes especially for less successful learners;
2. Strengthen links among schools, families and communities;
3. Strengthen school planning and reporting;
4. Improve professional learning opportunities for educators;
5. Strengthen pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work; and
6. Link policy and practice to research and evidence.

Over the course of the next two years, a discussion paper was released and several regional meetings and provincial conferences held with members of the education community, general public, business, and community groups. The purpose of such consultation was to build consensus on the content and direction of the *Agenda*, as well as to publicize and share initiatives taking place in schools around the province in furtherance of the goal of promoting student success. In August 2002, the *Agenda* was formally released by Minister Caldwell and outlined the six priorities as well as specific action plans to be followed between 2002–2006.

During the July 2000 to August 2002 period, three major issues dominated the Department’s attention: changes to the legislative framework for teacher collective bargaining, the adult education funding controversy and termination of The Morris-
This paper will attempt to place the development of the Agenda within the context of that tumultuous two-year period. While intervening events did not derail the process for completion of the Agenda, they did significantly delay its development by interrupting the focus and direction of senior management, and draining staff resources and time available to devote to it. There were too many complex issues occurring simultaneously, not enough analytical capacity dedicated to each issue in adequate fashion, all of which demanded time, and together they generated considerable political and media attention evoking highly charged emotions and debate.

This paper will discuss policy-making within public organizations, and briefly review the collective bargaining, adult education funding, and school division/district controversies. The development of public policy can be the result of careful thinking and analysis, but is also often reactive and ad hoc. It is shaped by political considerations, but also limited by human capacities. It is subject to unforeseen events that can change political priorities or institutional focus. The nature of public organizations themselves create greater goal ambiguity, goal multiplicity, and conflict. Constraints and influences brought to bear by the courts, legislatures, the media, interest groups, and public opinion all create a lens, often blurred, through which policies and policy alternatives are examined. And all help shape eventual policy outcomes.

**Limitations of the paper –**

While the author holds an upper-level administrative position within the Department of Education and Youth, and has been afforded the opportunity to observe
and participate in some of the issues detailed in the paper, some of the conclusions offered herein are speculative in nature. The author has not been privy to the types of discussions held at the Caucus or Cabinet level, nor was the previous Minister or his political aides interviewed for this paper.

**Policy-making in public organizations**

Development of the *Agenda* was an exercise in leadership by senior Department management, creating a team which could carry it along, generating a sense of momentum to propel it forward in the face of other pressing issues, all the while managing a multitude of other issues which threatened to crowd on top of it. This is very much typical of the environment in which policy is developed within public organizations, and was certainly true in creating the *Agenda* between 2000–2002 in the Department of Education and Training.

Policy-making in public organizations is subject to pressures distinct from those of bureaucracies in the private sector. Hal Rainey argues that these include environmental factors such as elaborate and formal legal constraints, as well as the influence of external political constituencies. There are greater expectations of transparency and accountability due to the scope and impact of government decisions upon the public. Public organizations are frequently given vague and multiple goals, often conflicting, and driven by competing demands. There is also a lesser degree of decision-making autonomy and flexibility for public sector managers, relative to their private sector counterparts, due to institutional constraints and external influences.\(^1\) The difficulty for public sector managers is compounded by the impact of technology and the

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demand for an immediate response by government to emerging issues, the presence of
the media to report critically on government’s actions (or inaction), the insolubility of
many of the problems government is expected to remedy, and a cynical public which
expresses little faith in government’s capacity to manage effectively. It means, as
James Q. Wilson suggests, making one’s way “in a world of settled institutions designed
to allow imperfect people to used flawed procedures to cope with insoluble problems.”

Government’s policy development capacity is also severely constrained due to
lack of staff and time. The Provincial Auditor’s Office (PAO) noted in November, 2001
that among the keys to good policy-making are the time to conduct research, fact-
gathering, access to valid and reliable data, and fostering of linkages to other
jurisdictions and to external contacts including stakeholders and client groups.
Research and planning branches are, typically, among the first casualties in
government staff reduction exercises. The risks in reducing policy capacity are several
and include the risk of poor advice being provided to senior managers, inadequate
evidence upon which to base decisions and a poor allocation of resources which can
result. Decision-making can be untimely and made in the absence of knowledge of
stakeholder preferences.

The Provincial Auditor suggested that the Manitoba government lacked the ability
to monitor policies in place to determine how successful those policies were in meeting
objectives or outcomes. Government needed a more “rigorous articulation of policy
outcomes . . . to guide the policy development process.” Improvements were needed

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2 James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It (New York:
3 Office of the Provincial Auditor, “A Review of the Policy Development Capacity Within Government
4 Ibid., p. 55.
to interdepartmental policy coordination and in policy evaluation. The provincial
government also needs adequate human resources to meet policy demands, something
which senior managers across departments indicated was a pressing problem. The
PAO stated that central government, as opposed to individual departments, needed to
spearhead the process for renewal in the policy development area.

All of these policy “adversities” present a challenge to politicians and public
sector managers on a daily basis. Yehezkel Dror has noted that governments face
issues today which “make traditional policy paradigms, policy assumptions, policy
habits, policy “grammars”, and grand policies increasingly doubtful.”\(^5\) Significant
economic downturns have defied traditional fiscal remedies; problems in relations
between rich and poor nations have escalated; and international debt problems impact
upon national financial institutions. There has been an escalation in the proliferation of
weapons of mass destruction, developed by unstable or hostile regimes, or placed in
the hands of groups promoting terror or destabilization. The implications of new
technologies and the inability of governments to develop legislative and policy
frameworks to keep pace has also been problematic. Western democracies have seen
an erosion in their base of political support because of a declining level of public trust,
the fragmentation of political support with the emergence of single-interest groups and
the growing inability of political parties to accommodate increasingly diverse interests.

In combination, all have intensified the difficulties of policy-making within public
organizations. Problems are complex, often intractable, typically beyond local scope,

and sometimes exceeding the limits of human capacities to resolve. These policy predicaments can have immense consequences:

The negative effects of suddenly and visibly misleading policy compasses, or the absence of any relevant compasses on policymaking patterns, must be added, such as retreat into dogma, search for “strong leaders,” and, sometimes, most dangerous of all, looking for scapegoats and enemies to blame. Positive feedback between decreasing problem-handling capacity, more disconsensus, increasing mass Angst, less trust in government and, as a combined result, further reduced problem-handling ability can easily produce predicament escalation and spirals of declining policymaking qualities.6

The Agenda was developed in the face of some of this adversity. As Ben Levin7 has stated, education reform initiatives face significant challenges as they move from conceptualization to implementation. Among these is the fact that governments do not completely control their own agendas. While governments come to office with a set of policy commitments, there is no automatic linkage between well-defined political goals or preferences and actual policy outcomes. Governments are interested in obtaining and keeping power, which means accomplishing some goals which will satisfy enough voters to sustain them at election. They are constantly balancing the often competing demands of various groups trying to influence the public agenda, sometimes creating “winners” and “losers”, alienating some and temporarily appeasing others. In the 2000–2002 Manitoba context, it could be argued that the changes to teacher collective bargaining were a reflection of the government’s ideological disposition in the labour relations arena, and fulfillment of a commitment to an important constituency (Manitoba Teachers’ Society). School division/district amalgamation was seen as a political

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6 Ibid., p. 35.
“winner” by government because there appeared to be general public support for a policy thrust which would reduce the number of school boards, redirect resources away from administration and toward classroom supports, and provide students with greater access to program choices.

While teacher collective bargaining changes and the school division/district amalgamation initiatives were, to greater or lesser degrees, managed issues, unanticipated developments frequently dominate and alter government’s agenda. As Dror has sagely put it, there is a “high objective probability of low-probability events occurring frequently. In subjective terms, surprise dominates.” The adult education funding controversy, and dismissal of The Morris-Macdonald School Division No. 19 Board of Trustees, would certainly qualify in this regard. Concerns expressed over ballooning costs, and allegations about inflated enrollments and dubious educational quality in one adult learning centre, mushroomed into a system-wide examination of adult education, a probe by the Provincial Auditor into the administrative practices of a school division, and the eventual termination of a school board. It dominated news headlines and became the focus of interest in the provincial Legislature for several weeks. It involved money, charges of scandal, concerns over lack of accountability, and the debate over local autonomy versus central control – most of the necessary ingredients to create an issue which would divert government’s attention from other matters of public importance.

Levin has also stressed the point that time is at a premium, particularly at the Ministerial and senior bureaucratic levels. Time is perhaps the scarcest commodity Ministers and senior managers possess. In a Cabinet system of government, Ministers

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are responsible for attending to the needs of their local constituencies, managing the operations of their respective departments, and collectively participating in decisions which government makes as a whole. Ministers and senior bureaucrats work under crushing time pressures and are required to make decisions under compressed timelines. “Issues crowd in on one another, each one requiring attention and analysis but with key decision-makers not having time to give enough attention to any of them.”

It is an ongoing struggle to move forward with government’s priorities while simultaneously responding to the myriad of issues which end up on the desk on a daily basis.

Developing the *Agenda*, while concurrently managing other planned activities like collective bargaining changes and school division/district amalgamation, and unanticipated issues such as a probe into adult education funding, became a major exercise in prioritization of time. As the driving force behind the *Agenda*, Deputy Minister Levin was, as he would probably acknowledge, a very strict time manager. Serving as Deputy Minister for both the Department of Education and Youth as well as the Department of Advanced Education, he needed to do so out of necessity. It was important to develop a team that would spearhead the project, that he limit himself to involvement at strategic points in the process to ensure the project retained a sense of coherency, and not allow himself to get drawn into interminable meetings on other matters where his participation was not absolutely essential.

Part of the success in putting the *Agenda* together, too, was that it was an initiative which flew “below the radar”. Minister Caldwell, while supportive in broad brush terms, left the fine detail for staff to develop. The Deputy Minister was

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empowered to establish the team which would create and support the initiative from conceptualization to implementation. The Agenda did not attract much media interest, and although through its two-year development there were several opportunities for interested stakeholders to review and provide feedback, it did not generate a negative or controversial reaction which would provoke any kind of political response or intervention. This was important because, to a significant degree, it allowed staff the time for reflection and analysis within a relatively “calm” setting to articulate the government’s vision for education.

Twenty-seven “actions” were identified to support the six priority areas. Each action required development of a charter or work plan, and that process was led by a group leader supported by three or four staff drawn from Branches across the Department. This approach lent itself to the sharing of cross-Branch perspectives. Group leaders would meet periodically to review their charters and to provide progress updates.

Group leaders also had access to feedback from external organizations through the regional meetings and provincial conferences. These sessions generated “buy-in” by outside groups and allowed for a sharing of best practices and information as to what activities were occurring in schools which supported the six priority areas.

Senior staff, typically at the Assistant Deputy Minister level, would also have an opportunity to review the action areas and provide direction as to which actions would assume greater or lesser importance in terms of being addressed first. The Deputy Minister would also provide input where there were unresolved issues.

This type of team structure did not lend itself to expedited decision-making. Twenty-seven actions led by 15 or so group leaders supported by staff from across
several Branches required considerable coordination. The process was helped, however, because the six priorities were accepted by team leaders and members and the supporting actions were seen as “do-able” and tangible initiatives. As Wilson suggests, organizational success can be achieved when members share and endorse a sense of mission, and where senior leaders state general objectives and have confidence that subordinates will understand the appropriate ways of achieving them.\(^\text{10}\)

That the project was not completed as rapidly as hoped is not surprising given the team structure, the need for coordination of efforts, and the enormity and complexity of the three issues competing simultaneously for the attention and resources of the Department’s political and bureaucratic leadership. Each of these issues generated considerable controversy and public attention, often precipitating a “crisis management” response. The following is a brief overview of each of these issues to provide both a context, and a flavour, to the 2000–2002 period in which the Agenda was developed.

**Bill 42**

One of the first pieces of education legislation introduced by the New Democratic Party administration was Bill 42 in June 2000. Bill 42 proposed a number of amendments to The Public Schools Act related to the collective bargaining process between teachers and employer school boards. While retaining the no strike, no lock-out provisions of the Act, the Bill transferred statutory responsibility for collective bargaining to The Labour Relations Act and restored most aspects of open-scope bargaining that had been removed under the previous Progressive Conservative government’s Bill 72 legislation in 1996.

\(^{10}\) Wilson, op. cit., p. 370.
In 1996, several changes to the collective bargaining scheme outlined in Part VIII of The Public Schools Act were tabled in the Legislature. Bill 72 provided for conciliation/arbitration, as well as same party mediation-arbitration, as a means of third party resolution of outstanding bargaining disputes. The Bill also removed a number of items from an arbitrator’s jurisdiction: the selection, appointment, assignment and transfer of teachers and principals; the method for evaluating the performance of teachers and principals; the size of classes in schools; and the scheduling of recesses and the mid-day break. These items were viewed by the government and by trustees as basic management functions and, while school boards would be required to act reasonably and in good faith in administering policies and practices around these items, they fell within the school board’s exclusive purview to manage and would be negotiable but not arbitrable.

Further, in making an award, an arbitrator was required to consider a school division’s ability to pay based on its current revenues; the nature and types of services that might have to be reduced in light of an award if current revenues were not increased; the current economic situation in Manitoba and the school division; a comparison between the terms and conditions of employment of the teachers in the school division and those of teachers in other divisions, and of comparable employees in public and private sectors; and the school division’s need to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

The Bill was immediately criticised by the then-Opposition NDP as an attack on teachers, and a commitment was given to repeal the legislation if the NDP was successful in attaining office. In June 2000, when introducing Bill 42, Education and Training Minister Drew Caldwell described the previous legislation as a plan “designed
to disadvantage teachers” and to “single out teachers’ salaries as a cause of local property tax increases.”11 The purpose of Bill 42, he declared, was to “create a more balanced framework that is fair to both teachers and school boards – and to allow everyone to focus on the task of providing quality education” in a stable environment not disrupted by strikes or lockouts.12

Bill 42 restored the aspects of open-scope bargaining removed under Bill 72 with the exception of class size and composition. That item remained beyond the jurisdiction of an arbitrator pending the creation and report of a commission to examine whether a provincial policy on class size and composition was desirable. In any event, the moratorium on class size and composition as an arbitrable item would be lifted within six months of the commission’s report being tabled in the Legislature unless legislation to the contrary was subsequently introduced. With the commission completing and tabling its report, the moratorium on class size and composition as an item eligible for arbitration was lifted as of November 7, 2002.

As expected, the debate over the merits and demerits of Bill 42 was polarized to a significant degree. School boards and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) adopted the position that since teachers’ salaries and benefits constituted a large portion of overall operating costs (approximately 55%), it was critical that boards be able to keep a number of items related to working conditions off of the arbitration table. This would enable boards to contain costs which might otherwise rise rapidly and have to be met through increases in local property taxes.13 Trustees also feared that by

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11 Hansard, p. 3371, June 29, 2000
removing the provisions contained in Bill 72 outlining the factors that an arbitrator was required to consider, including a division’s ability to pay, would be a signal that those items were no longer to be considered and actually ignored by an arbitrator. MAST launched a $60,000 print ad campaign to communicate its concerns over Bill 42 across the province, a decision which was seen as confrontational by the Minister and by some individual school boards.

The Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS), for its part, argued that it was incorrect to argue a correlation between restoration of open-scope bargaining with “exorbitant” increases in local property taxes to cover higher wage settlements. The Society’s position was that restoration of open scope bargaining, and placing collective bargaining under the umbrella of The Labour Relations Act, allowed teachers to bargain like any other employee group. Further, increases in property taxes were connected to the previous administration’s freezes and reductions in provincial funding support to public schools, not with increases in rates of teacher compensation.

Minister Caldwell agreed, for the most part, with the MTS position stating that Bill 42 restored a system of collective bargaining that had worked well for more than forty years, and that there was no evidence to support the contention that teacher settlements prior to Bill 72 had been excessive or unmanageable. Bill 72 was, in the Minister’s view, an ideological attack on teachers and, while property taxes had indeed increased during the 1990s, “the explosion in local property taxes which occurred under the Tory watch is directly linked to the dramatic cuts in funding to the public education

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system which was central to the policy of the previous administration.”16 The Minister also expressed his confidence that arbitrators, even in the absence of legislation explicitly laying out the factors to be considered in making an award, would consider ability to pay, comparability, general economic conditions, and fairness in making their judgments.

After several weeks of debate, Bill 42 was proclaimed on August 18, 2000.

**Adult education funding and Morris-Macdonald School Division No. 19**

Unlike the controversy around Bill 42 and teacher collective bargaining, the political maelstrom which engulfed the Department over adult education funding and the dismissal of a school board was not as a result of a deliberate policy decision manifested in legislative action. It was, rather, the culmination of a series of events which, together, had significant political and media saliency, and consumed enormous amounts of political and bureaucratic time and energy.

Between the 1997–98 and 2000–01 school years, an explosion in enrollments and associated costs occurred in adult learning centres (ALCs). Structured as off-site classroom locations, where adults could return to receive a senior years education in a non-traditional school setting, ALCs grew almost exponentially in a four-year period. The school division driving this growth was The Morris-Macdonald School Division No. 19. It established twelve public/private partnership with locations inside and outside its boundaries. Typically, the ALC would register its students through a sponsoring divisional high school17, and the school would claim the students on its September 30

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17 In order to be able to award credits for courses, the principal of a high school was required to attest to successful completion, with the credit issued under the auspices of the school.
enrollment report. The school division would receive the per pupil grant from the province (pro-rated on the basis of percentage of time attended), deduct an administration fee per pupil, and remit the balance to the ALC to be used toward its operating budget.

In four years, the number of full-time equivalent ALC students in Morris-Macdonald S.D. rose from 47.5 in 1997–98 to 4,099.3 in 2000–01. Funding provided by the Department was $349,100 in that first year and jumped to $10,902,800.18 By the first year, the ALC student population comprised 69.5% of the total overall enrolment of the school division, as well as 60% of the total ALC enrolment in the province.19

The Department became alarmed at the cost explosion related to ALC operations. As an example of these escalating costs, in Morris-Macdonald S.D. alone funding rose almost $8 million in one year.20 It created expenditure levels significantly beyond what had been budgeted, and encouraged the Department to control expenditure levels by moving from per pupil funding to funding based on actual program costs.

Concern was further fuelled by newspaper reports in early 2000 that provincial funding was being used by the school division to give its senior administrators cash bonuses based on ALC enrolments.21 Subsequent investigation revealed that divisional administrators (superintendent, secretary-treasurer, principals, vice-principals, and ALC

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19 Ibid., p. 58.
20 $2,588,300 in 1998–99 to $10,801,500 in 1999–00. Ibid., p. 50.
directors) received a total of $447,800 in administrative allowances between 1998–99 and 2000–01 based on the number of adult students enrolled.\textsuperscript{22}

Departmental anxiety was heightened when allegations regarding overstated student enrolment figures, lack of educational quality, and poor administrative practices at the ALC called “Classroom 56” (African Immigrant Program) were brought to the attention of staff. On March 29, 2001, the Deputy Minister requested that the Provincial Auditor’s Office (PAO) conduct an investigation into the Program. As a consequence of that investigation, the PAO determined that it would also be appropriate to review Morris-Macdonald School Division’s involvement in adult learning centres since 1997–98.

Upon concluding its investigation, the PAO issued its findings in September 2001. Among its findings it determined that:

- Enrolment figures provided to the school division by the African Immigrant Program were significantly overstated, and the division received between $488,900 and $613,300 in over-funding. Further, the enrolment numbers were such that “MMSD knew, or should have known, were significantly overstated.”\textsuperscript{23}
- That the Program used non-certified individuals as instructors, did not provide adequate facilities, nor had materials (textbooks, supplies, curriculum documents) in place to meet instructional requirements.
- The school division overbilled the Department by approximately $371,000 by using overstated enrolment figures related to other ALC operations.
- The school division did not provide an appropriate level of management, monitoring and quality assurance for the African Immigrant Program and other ALCs.
- The Department lacked an appropriate legislative and policy framework regarding ALC operations, which may have contributed to their expansion and increase in costs of programming.

Upon release of the PAO report, Education Minister Caldwell set a 30-day deadline for the school division to respond and to address how it would reimburse the

\textsuperscript{22} Office of the Provincial Auditor, op. cit., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 9.
province for funding based on inflated enrolments. The chair and vice-chair of the school board resigned the day the report was made public. On November 9, 2001, dissatisfied with the division’s response to the report, the Lieutenant Governor in Council exercised its authority under subsection 28(1) of *The Public Schools Act* and dissolved the school board. For the first time since the establishment of school divisions in 1959, an Official Trustee was appointed to oversee the operation of a school division in place of an elected board. Alex Krawec, former Mayor of Stonewall and a long-time educator and administrator, agreed to serve as Official Trustee.24

The Morris-Macdonald scandal generated significant political controversy, considerable media coverage, and redirected substantial amounts of political and bureaucratic energy in dealing with the matter. Later revelations of inflated adult education enrolments in the Agassiz School Division stirred heated debate in the Legislature with Opposition calls for the Minister’s resignation. A challenge launched by a coalition of citizens from the former Morris-Macdonald School Division against property tax increases levied by the former Official Trustee to enable repayment of monies overcharged against the province, is currently before the courts.

**School division/district amalgamation** –

In September 1999, the NDP led by Gary Doer defeated the incumbent Progressive Conservative government of Gary Filmon. Although not an election issue, it did not take long before the new Minister of Education and Training, Drew Caldwell, began expressing an interest in resurrecting the notion of school division/district

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amalgamation which had been advocated by the Norrie Commission in 1994. In June 2000, the Minister indicated that it was the government’s desire to have fewer school divisions/districts in operation by the October 2002 round of trustee elections and that, while voluntary amalgamation was the preferred approach, “stronger measures would be taken if necessary to effect this change.”

On September 25, 2000, the Minister wrote to all school boards regarding the amalgamation question. While the preference toward voluntary amalgamation was expressed, school divisions were given a strong indication that it would be prudent to begin a dialogue with possible partners in order to see where “amalgamation or recombination would result in gains in efficiency or quality of education.” School divisions were urged to consider program and geographic synergies, current and projected enrolments, and local taxation base. The $50 per pupil amalgamation grant, initially offered by the previous government and to be used to help defray related one-time costs (eg. staff redeployment, technology upgrades, divisional reorganization), was again made available. Up to $10,000 to each group of divisions exploring amalgamation was offered to assist in covering travel and research costs.

The response of school divisions to the Minister’s musings and urgings was, predictably, lukewarm and, in some cases, hostile. A number of school board officials expressed little interest in amalgamation, citing it as “offensive” or a poor solution to a

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25 The Manitoba School Divisions/Districts Boundaries Review Commission, headed by former City of Winnipeg Mayor Bill Norrie, recommended that over a three-year period the number of school divisions/districts be reduced from 57 to 22.
problem that might better be addressed through changes in the provincial public school 

funding formula.\textsuperscript{28}

With some exceptions, little significant movement occurred around the province. Some school divisions had, for programmatic or taxation reasons, chosen not to pursue amalgamation. Others, one suspects, did not take the Minister’s pronouncements seriously: after several years of talk and veiled “threats” from successive governments, this was just another public relations exercise which would, in the end, see the status quo prevail.

By mid-2001, the government was deliberating as to the course of action to be taken. School boards, through MAST, continued to lobby against amalgamation but were equally anxious to have a decision on the matter so that they could move the issue off of the agenda, or begin planning for division reorganization.\textsuperscript{29}

On November 8, 2001, Minister Caldwell announced his decision: the number of school divisions across the province would be reduced from 54 to 37. In addition, administrative cost caps would be imposed on all school divisions (amalgamating and non-amalgamating); a 3-year moratorium on school closures in amalgamating divisions would be instituted; and the number of trustees on each board (with the exception of Frontier S.D. and Division scolaire franco-manitobaine) would be reduced from a maximum of 11 to a maximum of 9, resulting in the elimination of over 130 trustee positions across the province.

Once the decision was communicated, work at the administrative level within the Department, and certainly for school divisions, accelerated. Although trustees and


provincial politicians would continue to spar over the wisdom of amalgamation, administrators began to tackle the many (and sometimes seemingly insurmountable) problems associated with amalgamation. In December 2001, the Department, in collaboration with MAST, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, and Manitoba Association of School Business Officials, produced the School Division and District Amalgamation Resource Manual. The document was to provide assistance to the field in dealing with critical timelines, issues around governance, board policies and procedures, establishment of an administrative structure and the hiring of personnel, leadership during a time of transition, finance and collective agreements, operational matters (facilities, transportation), and dispute resolution.

In addition, Department staff was also working to address concerns raised by divisions being split in multiple directions. In Duck Mountain School Division, opposition to having Pine River School join with Swan Valley School Division while the high school in Ethelbert (which drew students from Pine River) was to join the newly established Mountain View School Division, was being expressed. At the same time, the splitting of Transcona-Springfield School Division was creating a political storm. Problems emerged with respect to how the proposed boundary line of the new River East Transcona School Division would be drawn since, initially at least, part of the assessment base from the Rural Municipality of Springfield would fall within River East Transcona and not the combined Springfield/Agassiz (later Sunrise) School Division. Several parents from the Springfield community also voiced their opposition to the splitting of the division, arguing that it would jeopardize their children’s access to French immersion and vocational/industrial programming in Transcona schools.
While the Pine River situation was resolved when it was determined that this community should become part of Mountain View School Division, the Transcona-Springfield controversy would eventually wind up in the Court of Queen’s Bench.\textsuperscript{30} Concerns about access to programming were mitigated to some degree by the signing of shared services agreements between River East, Transcona-Springfield, and Agassiz school boards, as well as a provincial promise of funding for school bus transportation for Springfield students to Transcona schools for a period of three years. Provisions contained within Bill 14 (\textit{The Public Schools Modernization Act}) also provided assurances of access to Transcona schools by Springfield students for at least three years following amalgamation.

Difficulties were also encountered with respect to the inclusion of Pine Falls and Whiteshell School Districts with the amalgamated Springfield/Agassiz school division. Problems related to conferring of municipal status (in order to assess lands for the purposes of property taxation), and funding by Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd., scuttled the amalgamation attempt and both districts were left to continue operating. Work on resolution of outstanding issues continues, with the intention being to have the school districts brought into Sunrise in the near future.

Aside from these special policy considerations, Department staff worked with legal counsel to prepare the necessary legislative foundations for amalgamation. Regulations outlining the appropriate steps for the October 2002 trustee elections were written and passed. At the same time, work was underway to develop Bill 14. The major features of the Bill included giving the Minister authority to make ancillary

\textsuperscript{30} The suit filed by the Springfield Schools Parents Council, trying to block dismantling of the division, was dismissed by Mr. Justice Kaufmann on June 17, 2002.
regulations necessary to implement amalgamation (establishment of interim boards, naming of trustees, dissolution of former boards, etc.); capping the number of trustees a school board could have; redefining the powers of the provincial Board of Reference; legislating a three-year moratorium on school closures in amalgamated divisions; allowing the Minister to set prescribed limits on allowable divisional administration costs; requiring divisions to hold public consultations prior to finalization of their annual budget; and giving the Minister the power, for a limited period of time, to review and direct amalgamating school boards to amend their budgets.

Bill 14 was introduced in the Legislature in early May 2002, and after an initial delay by the Opposition, was debated and received Third Reading in early July 2002. Only July 19, 2002, the new school divisions were formally created and the remaining non-amalgamated divisions reconfirmed. The most significant reconfiguration of school division/district boundaries since 1959 had been achieved, with 38 divisions/districts in place to provide Grades K–S4 education to Manitoba’s approximately 190,000 school children.

The K-S4 Agenda was developed during a period when the Department of Education and Training was engaged on a number of policy and legislative fronts. Changes to teacher collective bargaining arrangements, or to school division/district boundaries would have, each on their own, been a fairly ambitious project to tackle within a government’s term of office. To do both within three years escalated the pace of activity within the Department and stretched thin its capacity to manage those activities in an effective fashion. Layer on the adult education funding controversy, which drew away the time and attention of senior managers, and it produced an
environment where progress on other initiatives such as the Agenda was slowed significantly.

**Summary**

The development of the Agenda was not, nor could it be, entirely insulated from external events. Initially contemplated as a 6 to 8 month project, it eventually took more than two years to complete. The attentions of the Deputy Minister and senior staff were frequently redirected to other issues, notably adult education funding and amalgamation. These drained away time, exacerbated government’s already limited policy development capacity, and scattered energies away from the Agenda initiative.

It was completed, however, because some of the elements for a successful organization were present: senior managers who were able to instill a clear sense of mission, attract talented members of a team who were able to “buy in” to that sense of mission, and to cultivate support for that mission both inside and outside of government. Its leadership understood the culture of the organization and its strengths and limitations, knew and understood what were the essential and marginal constraints being faced, and placed authority at the appropriate levels within the team.31

It required supportive, but not necessarily activist, Ministerial direction, determined leadership at the most senior bureaucratic levels, creation of a team to carry it through, and the articulation of priorities for maximizing student success which could garner general consensus and support, in order for the Agenda to materialize and become the Department’s key strategy document for improving the K–S4 education system in Manitoba.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


