



“Student First”

A discussion paper to ensure enhanced Student Achievement in Saskatchewan

Introduction

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce members believe that the issues and opportunities regarding enhancements in the Pre-K to 12 system should be addressed as part of the Saskatchewan Chamber's efforts to ensure the province is ready for growth. Clearly, the Pre-K to 12 education system is a broad and complex sector, but without making a significant change our population risks being left even further behind other Canadian jurisdictions in terms of measured student achievement.

We hear from businesses regularly about the challenges they face with workers who may have a Grade 12 diploma but do not have the academic capacity to do basic tasks. SIAST and the Regional Colleges have a large and growing adult education section which serves both typical adult education students and those who have a high school diploma but are looking to upgrade their skills. The challenges profiled in the Ministry of Education's own Student Achievement Annual Report give great cause for concern.

While the indicators identify specific challenges in some northern schools and for aboriginal students, there are significant issues with the overall system. Nevertheless, where a drive for education by the student is matched with strong family support and a strong school environment, the current system serves the student well. The challenges come about when one element is missing. The Saskatchewan Chamber has heard the philosophy that student achievement is based on “10% Student, 40% Teacher/School and 50% Family/Community.” When one of these elements is out of place, the issues mount and the student suffers.

Saskatchewan schools are in the midst of a curriculum review that will eventually encompass the entire Pre-K to Grade 12 system. The Ministry of Education's ongoing curriculum renewal acknowledges a “growing body of evidence illustrates that Saskatchewan student are not achieving the desired learning outcomes, particularly First Nations and Métis students”¹ and is aimed at addressing this concern.

Saskatchewan is adopting a curriculum framework similar to other provinces who participate in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP) and Pan-Canadian Protocol.² The new curriculum is considered “outcomes-based,” focused on achieving higher level outcomes for each grade through greater coherence and rigour within and across areas of study. The renewed curriculum emphasizes what students will know and do at the end of a grade.³

The question is what is the most effective role of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce to add value to this issue/process?

¹ Curriculum and E-Learning Branch. "Curriculum and E-Learning Spring 2010." 2010. Ministry of Education. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=522,523,127,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=14609&File name=currelearnbranchnewsletter.pdf>>.

² Prairie South School Division. Curriculum Renewal in Saskatchewan. 18 October 2011. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.prairiesouth.ca/staff/curriculum-a-learning/curriculum.html>>.

³ Thurgood Sagal, Dr. Jane. "Curriculum Renewal." January 2010. Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/curriculumrenewal2010>>.

Background

Saskatchewan schools are in the midst of a curriculum change that will eventually encompass the entire Pre-K to Grade 12 system. Since the introduction of *Directions: The Final Report* in 1983, which set the overall vision for Saskatchewan's education system, the curriculum has been updated to varying degrees approximately every seven years. Prior to the current renewal, the last examination of Saskatchewan's curriculum, known as the Actualization of Core Curriculum, occurred in 1999.⁴ However, a growing body of evidence illustrating that Saskatchewan students are not achieving the desired learning outcomes, particularly First Nations and Métis students, has pushed the Ministry of Education towards change.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 found that Saskatchewan students performed below the Canadian average in the key core domains of reading, math and science.⁵ The province ranked 7th, 6th and 7th respectively. Furthermore, the 2007 Pan-Canadian Assessment Program found that 14% of Saskatchewan students perform below the acceptable reading level. Saskatchewan also had the lowest percentage of highly proficient readers among Canadian provinces (9%).⁶

Saskatchewan's Aboriginal student outcomes are even more concerning. According to the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, roughly 70% of First Nations people living in urban areas in Saskatchewan aged 16 or over scored below the desired literacy threshold for coping with the increasing skill demands of a knowledge society. The rate among non-Aboriginal Saskatchewan residents was 40% and the overall Canadian rate was 48%.⁷ In addition, across Canada the proportion of young Aboriginal adults who had not completed high school was more the 2.5 times higher than among the non-Aboriginal population.⁸

"To prepare for curriculum renewal, Saskatchewan embarked upon a review of Canadian and international jurisdictions to determine how current research is reflected in curricula. The review also focused on challenges such as students not achieving at desired levels, some teachers feeling overwhelmed by a large number of learning objectives, and curriculum documents that were large and difficult to navigate."⁹

⁴ Curriculum and Instruction Branch Saskatchewan. Next Steps. 1999. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/corecurr/steps.html#development>>.

⁵ Knighton, Tamara, Pierre Brochu and Tomasz Gluszynski. "Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study - The Performance of Canada's Youth in Reading, Mathematics and Science." December 2010. Council of Ministers of Education Canada. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-590-x/81-590-x2010001-eng.pdf>>.

⁶ Council of Ministers of Education Canada. "PCAP-13 2007: Contextual report on Student Achievement in Reading." 2009. Pan-Canadian Assessment Program. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/213/PCAP-Contextual-Report-Final.pdf>>.

⁷ Statistics Canada. "International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey." 9 November 2005. The Daily. 1 November 2011 <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/051109/dq051109a-eng.htm>>.

⁸ Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency- Summary Report on Learning in Canada*, (Canada: 2007).

⁹ Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. "Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes." October 2010. 2010 Saskatchewan Curriculum. 01 November 2011

<<http://education.gov.sk.ca/adx.aspx/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=127,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=17263&Filename=Renewed+Curricula-+Understanding+Outcomes.pdf>>.

Current Situation

Saskatchewan is adopting a curriculum framework similar to other provinces who participate in the Western and North Canadian Protocol (WNCP) and Pan-Canadian Protocol.¹⁰ The new curriculum is considered “outcomes-based,” focusing on achieving higher level outcomes for each grade through coherence and rigour within and across areas of study. The renewed curriculum emphasizes what students will know and do at the end of a grade.¹¹ The foundational vision for Saskatchewan’s Pre-K to12 education system is based on *Directions: The Final Report* which was issued 1983. The *Directions* vision will continue to be the basis for a renewed pre-K to12 curriculum.

The curriculum renewal was launched as a 5-year plan to institute outcome-based curricula in all 7 required areas of study from K-9 with a number being available at the secondary level. 2008-09 was the first transition for the new curriculum, beginning with grades 6-9. 2009-10 was the transition year for grades 1-5, and by 2010-11 the Ministry aimed to have all K-9 teachers using the renewed curriculum in all areas of study.¹²

The renewed curriculum for secondary education is also well underway. A new curriculum for many of the 20-level courses was implemented in 2011-2012, with the majority of the new curriculum for 30-level courses currently under development.¹³ The Ministry believes the full impact of the renewed curriculum will start to be felt as students exit the 2012-13 school year and start entering post-secondary institutions and workplaces.

At the beginning of each curriculum renewal project, a reference committee was established with approximately half of the members of the committee being exemplary practicing classroom teachers who are selected in part by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Additional committee members can include representatives from post-secondary education, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan), and Ministry of Education personnel.¹⁴ Once a revised curriculum has been developed into a fairly solid draft, it is vetted through groups of teachers that are located through the school divisions. This usually happens formally twice for each curricula, although it can occur more frequently.¹⁵

Among the stakeholders invited to review and provide feedback on some of the new curriculum have been First Nations and Métis representatives. This is because the renewed curriculum will

¹⁰ Prairie South School Division. Curriculum Renewal in Saskatchewan. 18 October 2011. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.prairiesouth.ca/staff/curriculum-a-learning/curriculum.html>>

¹¹ Thurgood Sagal, Dr. Jane. "Curriculum Renewal." January 2010. Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/curriculumrenewal2010>>.

¹² Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. Introduction of Outcomes-based Curricula. 2008. 1 November 2011
<<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/aspx/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=2440>>.

¹³ Curriculum and E-Learning Branch. "Curriculum and E-Learning Spring 2010." 2010. Ministry of Education. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/aspx/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=522,523,127,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=14609&File name=currelearnbranchnewsletter.pdf>>.

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Craswell, Gerry. Director, Learning Program - English, Student Achievement and Supports Branch - Ministry of Education 01 November 2011.

have a greater emphasis on centralizing First Nations, Métis and Inuit content, perspectives, and ways of knowing.¹⁶

In situations where there is significant content change in a renewed curriculum, a group of teachers pilot the course in their classroom for a year. These teachers can then provide feedback and input to the curriculum writers in order to strengthen the document prior to finalization.¹⁷

While the move to outcomes-based education seems to enjoy a high level of support, the Ministry's implementation of the new curriculum has been heavily criticized. Concerns have been raised over the Ministry's ability to provide sufficient resources or the ability to train teachers on so many new curricula in such a short time span.¹⁸

The outcomes-based system will require a significant shift in the mind-set and skills of Saskatchewan's teachers because the system itself will no longer specify or require any particular style of teaching or learning. Instead it will require that students demonstrate that they have learned the required skills and content. It is important that teachers are properly resourced and trained to ensure a successful implementation of this fundamental change.

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce has been urging the Ministry of Education to take action on Pre-K to 12 student achievement for several years as the province's scores on international and nation assessments have continued to drop. As such, the organization is pleased that aggressive and significant action has finally been taken. The Chamber is hopeful that its long-standing concerns regarding the structure and mentality of Saskatchewan's education system will finally be addressed once the renewed curriculum is fully implemented.

Outcomes Desired by the Chamber

1. Higher Achievement Outcomes

On pan-Canada and international assessments, Saskatchewan students should rank among the top provinces in the areas of reading, science and mathematics. There should also be a smoother transition with regard to learning processes and knowledge expectations for students moving from grade 12 to post-secondary education.

Immediate Action: The Ministry of Education should set specific and aggressive goals on where the 2012 PISA scores will rank Saskatchewan. The Ministry should also introduce measures to monitor the success of students transitioning between secondary and post-secondary institutions to ensure that the renewed curriculum is facilitating smoother transitions.

¹⁶ Thurgood Sagal, Dr. Jane. "Curriculum Renewal." January 2010. Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/curriculumrenewal2010>>.

¹⁷ Craswell, Gerry. Director, Learning Program - English, Student Achievement and Supports Branch - Ministry of Education 01 November 2011.

¹⁸ Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Elections and Resolutions Information. March 2011. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.stf.sk.ca/portal.jsp?Sy3uQUnbK9L2RmSZs02CjV+Oqh1Nw+R5YETJ247vz0GVpg6sTIIDw/Q==F>>.



2. Additional Measurement of Outcomes

Students in Saskatchewan participate infrequently in long-term standardized assessments such as the provincial Assessment for Learning, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA).¹⁹ These assessment opportunities are limited however, and outside of them the K-12 system tends to resist objective performance measurements. This makes evidence-based management of school system programs difficult. The shortage of information available on a student's landmarks and milestones creates a barrier to parents and stakeholders seeking to understand, compare, participate and support. More information on student achievement should be provided to community stakeholders.

Immediate Action: The Ministry of Education should establish internal assessment and reporting processes to ensure Saskatchewan students are progressing toward greater success on the infrequent nation and international achievement assessments.

3. Greater Integration Between the Education System, Homes and Communities

A "culture of learning" can only take root if parents who want to be involved, are involved. However, as the SSTA Research Centre's 1994 report *Extending the Learning Community: Involving Parents and Families in Schools* noted, a substantial barrier to parent involvement is the firmly rooted belief that education is best run by professionals rather than as a democratic process that involves all parties with a vested interest.²⁰ This attitude within the teaching profession, school divisions and Ministry needs to change.

4. Greater Transparency

The school system tends to question rather than welcome outside inputs. It can appear to hoard even routine information, communicating in a guarded and muted tone that frustrates outsiders. Greater transparency is needed to facilitate community engagement and strengthen stakeholder support for the renewed curriculum.

Immediate Action: School Boards must immediately start communications to parents, students and the community on all issues of student achievement. Offer clearer explanations for changes to the system and curriculum and also report school specific results of assessments.

5. Increased Professionalism and Autonomy for Teachers

The main decisions about our schools are driven more and more from a centrally driven bureaucratic hierarchy, with classroom teachers often suggesting their experience is that of a cog called upon to implement frequently changing "innovations" imposed from the top-down. It should be made a high priority to unleash the professionalism of our teachers. Teachers should be mandated to adopt or create school programs that demonstrably foster learning and build skills, and which can be measured so that they can be managed. The curriculum renewal consultations and the establishment of outcomes-

¹⁹ Saskatchewan School Boards Association. Key Issues and Cautions related to Large Scale Student Achievement Evaluations. 2009. 31 October 2011 <http://www.sakschoolboards.ca/index.php?id=CM_UnderstandingTerms>.

²⁰ Mills, Sheryl. "Extending the Learning Community: Involving Parents and Families in Schools." 1994. Saskatchewan School Boards Association. 01 November 2011 <<http://www.sakschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/ParentPartnership/94-09.htm#bi>>.

based education offers a strong foundation to start capitalizing on the individual intelligence and professionalism of Saskatchewan's front-line teachers.

Immediate Action: In accordance with the aims of outcomes-based education, teachers should be allowed to engage the students in a manner that respects the curriculum but fits the class and the teacher. However, with this flexibility required achievement standards will have to be upheld and teachers who do not achieve the mandatory standard must be attended to.

6. Choice

Not all students learn the same way and not all families believe a traditional school is the right model for their children. Therefore a broader acceptance by the government and traditional educational organizations to private, virtual or other new format schools must be realized.

Immediate Action: Ministry of Education must train educators and/or proponents of newer teaching methods to ensure, where feasible, that new processes can easily co-exist as part of the new Saskatchewan focus on student outcomes.

7. Stable Public Funding

There is a public interest in education because being able to associate (as neighbours, fellow citizens, peers, employees) with knowledgeable and skilled persons is a common benefit. Education is termed a public good, so the issue is not how to reduce public funding, but how to flow dollars to schools in ways that foster engagement, satisfaction and quality results.

Future Actions

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce recognizes that business is considered a second-tier stakeholders in education. The first-tier stakeholders are the students and their families. However, as one of the primary 'customers' of Saskatchewan's Pre-K to12 education system, it is important that the business community's concerns are addressed. The Pre-K to12 education system must provide young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to allow them to actively participate in the workforce and enhance Saskatchewan's economic competitiveness.

The status quo was not acceptable and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is optimistic that the renewed curriculum will offer a positive change. The organization will continue to monitor the implementation and outcomes of the ongoing curriculum renewal. With this aim in mind, the Chamber will formally request the establishment of an annual meeting with the Ministry of Education with an intention to be updated on the curriculum changes and their results.

Works Cited

- Council of Ministers of Education Canada. "PCAP-13 2007: Contextual report on Student Achievement in Reading." 2009. Pan-Canadian Assessment Program. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/213/PCAP-Contextual-Report-Final.pdf>>.
- Craswell, Gerry. Director, Learning Program - English, Student Achievement and Supports Branch - Ministry of Education 01 November 2011.
- Curriculum and E-Learning Branch. "Curriculum and E-Learning Spring 2010." 2010. Ministry of Education. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=522,523,127,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=14609&Filename=currelearnbranchnewsletter.pdf>>.
- Curriculum and Instruction Branch Saskatchewan. Next Steps. 1999. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/corecurr/steps.html#development>>.
- Knighton, Tamara, Pierre Brochu and Tomasz Gluszynski. "Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study - The Performance of Canada's Youth in Reading, Mathematics and Science." December 2010. Council of Ministers of Education Canada. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-590-x/81-590-x2010001-eng.pdf>>.
- Mills, Sheryl. "Extending the Learning Community: Involving Parents and Families in Schools." 1994. Saskatchewan School Boards Association. 01 November 2011
<<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/ParentPartnership/94-09.htm#bi>>.
- Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. Introduction of Outcomes-based Curricula. 2008. 1 November 2011
<<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=2440>>.
- Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. "Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes." October 2010. 2010 Saskatchewan Curriculum. 01 November 2011
<<http://education.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=127,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=17263&Filename=Renewed+Curricula+Understanding+Outcomes.pdf>>.
- Prairie South School Division. Curriculum Renewal in Saskatchewan. 18 October 2011. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.prairiesouth.ca/staff/curriculum-a-learning/curriculum.html>>.
- Saskatchewan School Boards Association. Key Issues and Cautions related to Large Scale Student Achievement Evaluations. 2009. 31 October 2011
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/index.php?id=CM_UnderstandingTerms>.
- Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Elections and Resolutions Information. March 2011. 31 October 2011
<<http://www.stf.sk.ca/portal.jsp?Sy3uQUnbK9L2RmSZs02CjV+Oqh1Nw+R5YETJ247vz0GVpg6sTIIDw/Q==F>>.
- Statistics Canada. "International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey." 9 November 2005. The Daily. 1 November 2011 <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/051109/dq051109a-eng.htm>>.
- Thurgood Sagal, Dr. Jane. "Curriculum Renewal." January 2010. Ministry of Education Saskatchewan. 31 October 2011 <<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/curriculumrenewal2010>>.