



January 31, 2017

Honourable Don Morgan, Q.C.
Minister of Education
Room 361, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Minister Morgan:

I am writing you to provide you with written comments from the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) regarding *The K-12 Education Governance Review*. Our comments below will follow the presentation provided to the Advisory Panel on January 26, 2017.

Very little information has been made available to the public on the actual impacts of the 2006 amalgamation of school boards. Until such information becomes available, we are unable to comment on the specifics of the models or options provided by Mr. Perrins in his report released December 21, 2016. There were, however, consistent elements between the models and options that the Board does feel comfortable commenting on at this time.

SARM is a strong supporter of municipal autonomy and believes amalgamation should only be voluntary. School divisions are in part funded by local tax dollars. Therefore, local ratepayers should have the opportunity to help direct how those funding dollars are best utilized via locally elected School Boards.

In the 2016 school board elections, there was significant interest in candidates to run for their local school board. This demonstrates the value parents and members of public place on locally elected school boards. We join Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) and the school boards in supporting elected school boards as the only effective way to represent the local voice.

With decision-making under all models being taken further away from the locals, past experience leads us to assume that further rural school closures would be inevitable. A school closure in rural Saskatchewan ultimately eliminates nearby communities.

Many children in rural areas already have long bus commutes to school. This makes for long days for young children, impacting their education and wellbeing; it not only takes time away from families, but also for the time kids have to be kids. Furthermore, there are safety concerns for children on long bus routes every day.

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Any lengthening of bus routes will no doubt exacerbate these problems and result in the relocation of existing families to other areas and limit the number those choosing to move to rural Saskatchewan.

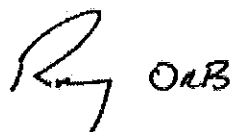
We are also concerned that moving decision-making out of rural Saskatchewan and into urban centres will deteriorate the quality of education in rural schools. Rural students have a higher on-time (3 years after entering grade 10) rate than not only urban students, but also higher than the provincial average. We do not want to see the success of rural students diminish due to structural changes in the public school system.

SARM does support the notion of implementing an Education Quality Council that reports to the Deputy Minister of Education, as outlined in Perrins' Report. Regardless of the structure of the school division, it is important to focus on education system performance, particularly student outcomes. We also agree with SSBA and the school boards that more can be done by the school divisions to find sector-wide efficiencies by working together.

SARM looks forward to continued opportunities to consult on K-12 education delivery in rural Saskatchewan. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by 'ORB'.

Ray Orb
President

Cc: K-12 Education Governance Review Advisory Panel