



April 18, 2017

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

Dear Minister Morgan,

Recently you made comments in the Legislature suggesting that because RealRenewal members support some school board reforms, our organization is therefore in favour of your intention to remove the powers of electors and their boards from the Education Act. I wish to assure you that nothing could be further than the truth.

RealRenewal's brief to the advisory panel on education governance presented a strong case for continued local decision-making, based on survey comments provided by our membership, as well as members of the general public.

We wrote, "The government has a duty...to seriously engage directly with electors around any measures that would substantially weaken or disenfranchise them of their voting power."

Our brief to the panel noted that the Education Act includes not only the powers of school boards, but also the powers of electors to elect trustees, hold annual and special meetings, be consulted on major decisions such as school closures, and hold trustees to account through the right to petition for their removal.

As well, the Act includes provision for School Community Councils to have a democratic voice and role in decision-making. Your government has expressed a commitment to SCCs, which is appreciated. We urge you to consider that this support in principle must include support in practice, which means SCCs must have a real voice in education under the Act, rather than be powerless entities dealing with equally powerless boards of education that can be shut down through simple regulation changes.

While school parents and community members at times disagree with board decisions, this is not an indication that they would prefer centralized decision-making from the Minister's desk. We have long advocated instead for an independent Education Ombudsman to

consider cases where parents feel they haven't been fairly heard by their school boards. Establishing such an office wouldn't require a substantial financial investment; the cost would be recouped through reduced Ministry staff time spent dealing with local disputes and through reduced legal costs, achieved by offering citizens a review option outside the courts.

We appreciate your government has a difficult financial road ahead. However, it's unclear how Bill 63 will achieve any substantial cost savings. Items you have mentioned, such as sharing transportation costs, could easily be encouraged without expunging the democratic rights of citizens under the Education Act.

In our survey, some respondents did point out that greater cost-sharing and some board reforms could be explored, as listed in our brief to SaskForward. However, these same respondents overwhelmingly voiced strong support for retaining elected boards that are accountable to voters. Many argued that local democracy can actually help the province in times of economic uncertainty, by providing flexible on-the-ground responses to budgetary challenges. Several noted that a return to local mill-rate setting powers would improve this ability even more.

To conclude, the powers and duties of electors must be retained under the Act, as these are important accountability mechanisms to ensure a functioning democracy.

If you choose to retain school boards under the Act – which we understand you are now wisely considering – this must at the same time include retaining the mechanisms that hold them to account, to ensure a balanced system of governance with appropriate checks at the local level.

With this in mind, we urge you to withdraw Bill 63 in its entirety.

Thank you. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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