

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Social and Economic Development

Chairperson
Ms. Erna Braun
Constituency of Rossmere

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Monday, June 9, 2008

TIME – 10 a.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mr. Bjornson, Hon. Ms. Oswald

Ms. Braun, Messrs. Cullen, Dewar, Mrs. Driedger, Mr. Jha, Mses. Korzeniowski, Marcelino, Mr. Schuler, Mrs. Stefanson

Substitutions:

Mr. Maloway for Mr. Dewar

APPEARING:

Mr. Rick Borotsik, MLA for Brandon West

WITNESSES:

Bill 28–The Strengthening Local Schools Act (Public Schools Act Amended)

Mr. Larry Oakden, Private Citizen
 Mr. Jason Koscielny, Strathclair Community School Catchment Area Committee
 Ms. Shonda Ashcroft, Birtle and District Community Development Corporation
 Mr. George Marshall, Private Citizen

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

Bill 28–The Strengthening Local Schools Act (Public Schools Act Amended)

Ms. Jill Kosowan, Private Citizen
 Mr. Bill Clark, Rural Municipality of Miniota
 Ms. Tracie Cousins, Miniota Parent Council Advisory
 Ms. Jaime Glenat, Private Citizen
 Mr. Ed Lelond, Private Citizen
 Mr. Robert Dyck, Private Citizen
 Ms. Valerie Weiss, Interlake School Division
 Ms. Jennifer Stefanec, Chapman School Review Committee
 Mr. Charles Morrison, Portage la Prairie School Division

Ms. Kristine K. Barr, Winnipeg School Division

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 2–The Public Schools Amendment Act (Trans Fats and Nutrition)

Bill 24–The Public Schools Amendment Act (Cyber-Bullying and Use of Electronic Devices)

Bill 28–The Strengthening Local Schools Act (Public Schools Act Amended)

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Madam Chairperson: All righty. Good morning. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Committee Substitution

Madam Chairperson: I would like to make the following membership substitutions, effective immediately, for the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development meeting on Monday, June 9, '08: Mr. Maloway will be in for Mr. Dewar. Thank you.

* * *

Madam Chairperson: This meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 2, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Trans Fats and Nutrition); Bill 24, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Cyber-Bullying and Use of Electronic Devices); Bill 28, The Strengthening Local Schools Act (Public Schools Act Amended).

We have a number of presenters registered to speak this morning as follows. Please refer to the presenters list.

Before we proceed with presentations, we do have a number of other items and points of information to consider. First of all, if there is anyone else in the audience who would like to make a presentation, please register with the staff at the entrance of the room. Also, for the information of all presenters, while written versions of presentations are not required, if you're going to accompany your presentation with written materials, we ask that you provide 20 copies. If you need help with photocopying, please speak with our staff.

As well, I would like to inform presenters that, in accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentation with another five minutes allowed for questions from committee members. Also in accordance with our rules, if a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters' list.

Written submissions from the following persons have been received and distributed to committee members: Jill Kosowan on Bill 28, and Bill Clark, reeve of the Rural Municipality of Miniota, on Bill 28. Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the *Hansard* transcript of this meeting? [Agreed] Thank you.

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, we will resume hearing our out-of-town presenters first. The committee will sit until noon as agreed to by the House.

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise the members of the public regarding the process for speaking in committee. The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say the person's name. This is a signal for the *Hansard* recorder to turn the mikes on and off.

Thank you for your patience. We will now proceed with public presentations.

I will now call on Michelle Wasylyshien, Sussex Strategy Group. Michelle Wasylyshien, Sussex Strategy Group. Michelle Wasylyshien will be removed from the list.

**Bill 28—The Strengthening Local Schools Act
(Public Schools Act Amended)**

Madam Chairperson: I will now call on Larry Oakden, private citizen. Is Larry Oakden with us? Yes. Thank you. One moment. We'll wait till some of the material is handed out.

Mr. Oakden, you may start.

Mr. Larry Oakden (Private Citizen): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill. We in Hamiota are somewhat in favour of the moratorium in the fact that it slows down some of the processes that are happening in and around our area as well as

other areas in the province. Anyway, I'll just present this.

Hamiota Education Stakeholders has been in existence since May, 2003. It was created by the town and R.M. of Hamiota and the Hamiota Economic Development Corporation to assist our community schools in preserving and, where possible, enhance education opportunities. Our schools have a better profile and support in the community because of this initiative.

We are an organization that has a keen interest in what the Province of Manitoba is doing about rural depopulation and its effect on our institutions. Make no mistake, it is depopulation that has and will continue to dictate policy on education in rural Manitoba.

From our perspective, Bill 28 is only a Band-Aid solution to the problem and makes no commitment to deal with the real problem when school divisions deal with school closures.

The fundamental question that has to be asked is: What constitutes a school closure? In the opinion of the Hamiota and Area Education Stakeholders there are three things that are relevant: Student enrolment numbers; cost per student to operate the school; quality of education being provided. Enrolment is straightforward and, certainly, if nothing else, is a warning mechanism to determine if a school warrants a review. We say review and not closure.

Cost per student should be simple math, much like the enrolment numbers. Some school divisions have a problem coming up with a formula that makes sense, and maybe this is where the Province needs to have a standard for coming up with these numbers. At the very least, if there is a disagreement between the community and school division on costs, there should be a third party available to mediate the problem. Let's face it, if the cost to run a school is the same as the rest of the school division, what would be the urgency to close it if things remained equal?

Quality of education is probably the most important factor for anyone with children, but if you had to determine how a school performed based on information that is available to you today, you would not have much to go on. We have ratings and classifications for roads. Hospitals are accredited, and we even have panels that tell us where and how to put up signs, but there is no one that evaluates the

performance of a school or the type of education that children are being provided.

Hamiota and area has been very happy with our education system and the results we have achieved, but if we weren't happy or were suspect of the quality of education in our community, who would we turn to and how would we gauge its performance?

* (10:10)

If you want to go one step further, every elected body in the province is accountable to an Ombudsman except school divisions. If the Province wants to be transparent in all areas of government, perhaps they should take a look at how they oversee the education of our children. We are all aware that the purpose of the Ombudsman is not to declare government at fault in all cases, but to provide unbiased third-party opinions in disputes. The public has the right to access such an opinion if there is a dispute with a school division.

Bill 28 looks good and sounds good, if your school is being considered for closure, but Manitoba needs to look at the cause of these proposed closures and what a child requires to succeed in life. Otherwise, this is just a temporary reprieve that will lead to further disappointment. It's nice to convince people you wear a cape and can leap over tall buildings but, how do you land?

In Hamiota and area, 85 percent of all graduates go on to post-secondary education. Lots of areas don't. Why not, and what is the government doing about it?

Bill 28 showed the people of Manitoba that we got your attention. Now, show us you genuinely want to see the education of our children as a priority.

Does this government have what it takes to make the education system accountable to the people who are paying for it? Get off the property tax debate and how the taxes are generated are being frozen, and look at the operation of the schools and the product for the price we pay. The tax debate is no more than a shell game anyway.

The cost of education goes up like everything else, and there's only one taxpayer. It's an insult when politicians think we don't know the difference.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Are there any questions?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Oakden, thank you for coming here. I know that you made a special effort to drive quite a number of hours to get here. I do appreciate the fact that you're passionate about this particular issue and your community of Hamiota. For those who don't know it, it is a very vibrant community, very exciting and, certainly, a very strong school division and education system.

One question—you are, as I understand, the mayor of Hamiota, Mr. Oakden. If you had some buildings in Hamiota under your care and those buildings were not of any useful purpose, would you feel a little aggrieved if the Province suggested that you had to keep those buildings open and have them remain open, even though perhaps they didn't, at that point in time, serve your purposes as Mayor of Hamiota?

Mr. Oakden: Yes, we would. That would be very difficult to try to maintain a building that, yes, the government says that you have to keep it open, even though it's our responsibility.

Mr. Borotsik: In fairness, that was somewhat of a difficult question. I do know that the education system and, certainly, the schools in Hamiota are a different thing than a derelict building in the town of Hamiota.

As I said, your presentation was very well received. Is there or has there been the proposal to have school closure in the town of Hamiota, with the school division?

Mr. Oakden: Not at this point in time, a direct closure. We're battling with the Park West School Division at this point in time, in the fact that they want to move all of the high schools into two super schools—one in Shoal Lake, one in Russell.

It's just speculation at this point in time, but amalgamation, I believe, has cropped up as a word that might take our elementary school and move it into our high school, thereby allowing the division to move our high school students out of our community. That would be a sad day for Hamiota.

Madam Chairperson: Any further questions?

Seeing none, thank you for coming a distance to present this morning.

Mr. Oakden: Thank you, once again, for the opportunity.

Madam Chairperson: I will now call on Jason Koscielny, Strathclair Community School Catchment Area Committee. I hope I'm pronouncing your last name correctly.

Mr. Jason Koscielny (Strathclair Community School Catchment Area Committee): It's close. You get points for effort.

Madam Chairperson: What's the correct pronunciation?

Mr. Koscielny: Kos-cell-nee.

Madam Chairperson: Kos-cell-nee.

Do you have materials to distribute?

Mr. Koscielny: I do have the 20 copies, yes.

Madam Chairperson: You may present.

Mr. Koscielny: Thank you.

Good morning, Madam Chair, members of this committee. The Strathclair stakeholders committee wishes to commend you on introducing this legislation. We now feel that our voices have been heard in western Manitoba. For approximately two years, we, in the Park West School Division, have been struggling against the monster known as restructuring. This presentation will explain how Bill 28 benefits our school, our community and, most importantly, our children.

Some background regarding our school in Strathclair is as follows. Over the years, rural population has declined and, with that, so, too, have the number of schools in rural Manitoba. This has been the case in the Strathclair area as well. School closures and amalgamations are well-known realities in Strathclair catchment area. In the '70s, Newdale School closed its doors for the last time; Elphinstone soon followed. Students from these communities were moved to another school and many of them coming to Strathclair. The people of Newdale entered into this arrangement with the understanding that they would not be travelling further than Strathclair for their children to obtain their education.

Fast forwarding to a community meeting in 2007 when the Park West School Division came forward with a draft plan to have the high school in Strathclair closed by 2009-10 school year. After many attempts to determine what direction the board was going, attending many board meetings, which were held mostly in camera, and many community meetings in which the majority of communities

spoke with the same voice, the Park West School Division failed to listen to its constituents.

In March 2008, against the wishes of the people they represent, the Park West School Division Board passed a motion to move Strathclair high school to Shoal Lake, and Shoal Lake K to 8s to Strathclair in 2009. We do not understand the benefits of this decision because our enrolment has remained constant since the late 1980s, averaging approximately 182 students, K to 12. We have struggled with this decision because we do not believe that the Park West School Division has exhausted all other avenues before this course of action. There has not been a clear economic benefit for this decision nor have there been any clear benefits for the children and their education.

Just a side note. There was a DVD recorded at the community meetings in March 2008 of all the responses to the restructuring meetings, and if the committee would so like, we can get a copy for them to review and that would give you a sense of what all the communities in the Park West School Division were thinking at the time that this has gone through.

We have put forth, as parents and community groups, ideas for alternative education delivery that is Web based, IITV, to create a broader option of learning without having to congregate large numbers of students in one central place. Currently, Shoal Lake and Strathclair schools run an intercampus busing system, which has been in operation for many years. At its inception, this intercampus system was described by previous governments as bold and innovative. Building on this system would be another means of adding to the efficiencies of course deliveries in both schools.

We are in a unique position in Strathclair in that we have an extremely successful partnership with the Keeseekoowenin First Nation. The high school students from Keesee are utilizing Strathclair high school with great success. They are graduating more students than ever before. This partnership has added to the stability of our enrolment as well as the cultural enrichment of our communities. We are meeting a direct need for Keesee students, and moving our high school further afield could disrupt this successful partnership.

The transportation issue in our division is huge. Now that the cost of fuel is on a steady rise, we feel that minimizing transportation will have huge benefits. Park West School Division has the second largest land area in Manitoba. The proposed plan to

have two high schools service this area from Riding Mountain National Park to approximately Provincial Trunk Highway 25, the Saskatchewan border to east of Newdale, does not seem logical.

Bill 28 will allow us to put logic and student needs first and give us more time to help the Park West School Division explore more sound economic and logical decisions.

* (10:20)

Bill 28's proposed 60-minute maximum bus ride will greatly enhance our student's healthy lifestyle and quality of life. We currently have students on the bus for greater than 75 minutes one way. Park West School Division states that approximately 7 percent of students ride the bus for more than 60 minutes one way. One student riding the bus for more than one hour is too many. Would you want your young child riding for more than an hour? These children are not rested and are therefore not achieving their full potential in the classroom. As someone who had to ride the bus for more than 60 minutes, I can tell you first-hand that what suffers is any after-school activities and much needed rest and family time.

We hear over and over choices are made for our schools for the quality of education of our students. It's about the kids. We believe that smaller schools provide this quality of education. Communities provide this quality of education. Amalgamation and school closures in rural Manitoba take children and families out of their home communities and do not strengthen communities.

In Strathclair, our rink is adjacent to our school. This provides incredible benefits for the phys ed programs. We have a business community which provides job experience for our students. Strathclair has a strong drama and theatre group as well as a state-of-the-art stage facility which provides excellent access to the arts.

Our parents have also put forth time and effort to create and maintain a vibrant music and band program. All of these add to the quality of education for our students. All of these programs would suffer if the parents had to drive further to participate, volunteer time, and work for these initiatives.

Many of our families have chosen to return or stay in the Strathclair catchment area because of this sense of community. We have chosen to live here because our values lie in the theory that it takes a community to raise a child. Smaller schools are a part of this theory and community. Teachers, bus

drivers, principals, all other staff and volunteers, are on a personal level with students in our school. We believe that this greatly enhances the quality of education and success of our students. Bill 28 helps us continue these successes.

We are greatly disturbed that MAST has spoken out against Bill 28. MAST has stated that the Province is taking away the power of the school board to effectively manage their resources. Possibly if the boards had listened to their constituents, the government would not have to intervene.

In closing we would like to express our support of Bill 28 and look forward to working with the Park West School Division and the Province of Manitoba to achieve the goals we believe are set out in this bill. We hope that the Province has the courage of its convictions to follow through on Bill 28, and we trust that the dollars will flow to make these plans a reality.

We understand change is inevitable, and positive change requires much research, co-operation, and communication.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Are there any questions?

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, Mr. Koscielny, for being here. I know you travelled more than 75 minutes to get here and it wasn't a school bus, I know, but it was an early morning. So thank you. I appreciate, again, your passion and your interest in this particular area. I know the area quite well.

I have two questions, one very briefly. You say you currently have students on the bus for greater than 75 minutes one way at the present time. This bill isn't going to resolve that, I don't suspect. Is there any opportunity of lessening that travel time in some way, shape, or form with the students and the schools that they're attending at the present time?

Mr. Koscielny: We're hoping that it's going to help address it and slow down the process with it. There are a few different options. The school division now is looking at a contractor that makes smaller school buses to make maybe one or two more routes. But, down the line, with the restructuring process, they were looking at busing students further afield, like in the case of the elementary students coming from Shoal Lake to Strathclair and the high school going to Shoal Lake. That would increase on top of the 75 minutes they're currently riding. It would push them

closer—at the school board's own admission—anywhere from two hours to two and half hours on a bus one way, and that's travelling 30 miles. Why? It does not need to happen.

Mr. Borotsik: I don't disagree with that statement, and, certainly, that's one of the areas that should be addressed, there's no question. I don't think any students should have to spend that kind of time on a bus.

The last question, and, certainly, it's a brief one, and it's the second last item on your statement: We trust the dollars will flow to make these plans a reality. Are you saying you trust the provincial government to have those dollars flow to make the plans a reality, or are you looking at additional dollars generated from the school levy on your property taxes?

Mr. Koscielny: Probably a combination of both. In some way, shape, or form, we have to make change to either the funding process so that we look at rural education differently than it's looked at now, because there are inequities between urban and rural education. I believe that the Province has a huge task ahead of it in order to get these funding equities resolved. And there will have to be tax increases. We haven't had a tax increase for quite some time of any substantial value. There has been no massive uprising against a tax increase if you're going to get the end result that you're looking for.

I believe that if you're looking at getting quality education, if you're looking at getting what the people want, and you're going to give them concrete facts and figures and economic sense behind it, if we're choosing to live there, we're probably willing to make that happen, too. But, in the same token, we would like to be on an equal footing with our urban partners in getting the same kind of money available for the education out in the rural areas.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Thank you for being here and making your presentation.

I just want to say that when we first started this process it was a request by the trustees to review the policy guidelines that had been in place since 1982. And as we started to review the guidelines, what became evident to us were the outcomes and the impacts of those closures and reviews for closure that we had on the community. I just wanted to tell you that it was advocacy such as the groups from Strathclair, where I had the opportunity to visit you

this winter, and many other groups and their advocacy that has brought us to this point with this legislation, I wanted to thank you for that advocacy.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, and driving the distance.

I would now like to call on Garry Dalgarno, councillor of Rural Municipality of Strathclair. Garry Dalgarno. Garry Dalgarno will be removed from the list.

I would like now to call on Valerie Weiss, Interlake School Division. Valerie Weiss. Valerie Weiss will be crossed from the list.

Dr. David McAndrew, Western School Division. I would like to call on Dr. David McAndrew. Dr. McAndrew will be stricken from the list.

I will now call on Thomasina Charney, Miniota Archie Community Development Corporation and Rosburn Community Development Corporation. Thomasina Charney. Thomasina Charney will be removed from the list.

I will now call on Ed Lelond, private citizen. Ed Lelond? Ed Lelond will be crossed from the list.

I will now call on Shonda Ashcroft, Birtle and District Community Development Corporation. Do you have materials to distribute?

Ms. Shonda Ashcroft (Birtle and District Community Development Corporation): No, but I will have. I wasn't home or in my office since this was announced. So I was away on the weekend.

Madam Chairperson: If you have materials, the staff can run copies for you, if you like.

Ms. Ashcroft: I'm not sure they can read these notes, but I will be happy to e-mail it to you.

Madam Chairperson: Ms. Ashcroft, if you have your notes e-mailed to our staff here by 5 o'clock this afternoon, they can be included in the *Hansard*.

Ms. Ashcroft: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Will you please start.

Ms. Ashcroft: Good morning, Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, committee members. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today as this bill is of immense importance to our community. I'm here today as a concerned citizen, as the Community Economic Development Officer for the Birtle and District CDC. I'm also a farmer and a parent of would-be young farmers.

I would like to thank the minister for introducing Bill 28. This bill has put a stop to actions being taken by our Park West School Division. It supports some of the sentiments expressed at many public meetings held across our school division recently and will buy some time to address concerns we have with our Park West School Division board of trustees and their proposed plan for restructuring of our school division.

We recognize there are problems in our large rural school divisions, ours which spreads over 7,200 square kilometres. We're facing real issues of expensive transportation and long bus rides, declining population, buildings that were built to accommodate student numbers higher than we have today, and buildings such as ours which had a large addition built during the '70s when schools were not designed as efficiently as those that are built today.

*(10:30)

Our Birtle Collegiate was built to provide an education to a region which has seen many changes. Our school trustees have been proactive in many ways to address the changes in our community, as well as changes in the communities around us. We lost many students when our neighbours to the south, Birdtail Sioux First Nation, built their own school.

Our school has excellent vocational programs and facilities and has provided vocational courses to Birtle Collegiate students as well as students from Franco-Manitoba school division in St. Lazare and to the Frontier School Division students from Birdtail.

We partner with these other schools and school divisions to share staff and facility resources, whenever possible, to best serve the interests of all students. We've partnered with local business to improve vocational opportunities, an initiative which was recognized with the 2008 Capturing Opportunities youth achievement award.

We've made use of available space with a licensed day care in our high school, which gives priority to a student who is a single parent, in an effort to ensure that all students have an opportunity to an education. To complement this effort, course options, such as early childhood development, are offered. We also have a nursery school in our high school and a cafeteria. We are making good use of our facility.

This being said, the plan for restructuring, as proposed by our school division, would have meant four of six high schools would close, including ours

which has the second-highest student population in the division. Some students would be travelling over 60 kilometres, one way, to get to school. This means some students, even elementary students, put in right now nine hours a day, five days a week. Students that are now picked up before 7:30 a.m. would have been picked up even earlier.

We know that, with the proposed restructuring plan, several families and some entire communities would have little choice except to travel to other school divisions for their education, something that appeared to be of no concern to our school board.

We also have evidence that this restructuring plan would have caused a substantial increase in the rate of depopulation, with the result being the demise of vibrant communities.

Public meetings, hosted by Park West School Division, in 2007 were well-attended, and community input clearly determined that the model with only two high schools was not acceptable. Despite this, our school board was bulldozing ahead with this drastic plan. Their plan was announced on March 18, '08. They would make their final decision in June '08, only a three-month span. There is no available evidence that this plan had given proper consideration to the impact it would have on bus travel times, bussing costs, or the benefits of student programming. The welfare of impacted communities was ignored.

It was an unacceptable and unachievable plan for a number of reasons, which I will not go into now but, if you would like, I can give you the copy of our presentation made to the school board in April. The trustees were clearly not listening to their electors. This is why Bill 28 is so important to us.

Bill 28 has forced our school division to stop this plan of action, to slow down and reconsider some other options. It's caused our school board to reconsider policy changes they had introduced for school review.

We're very optimistic about the future of our community and our neighbouring rural Manitoba towns. Our local realtors and town office can tell you we are currently experiencing more people than ever before, considering and choosing to move to a rural community and the lifestyle that it offers.

We have new opportunities developing on our doorstep. This is not the time to be closing schools. Bill 28 has put a stop to the negative impact we had already begun to experience, due to the announced

proposed restructuring plan. We now have time to build on our optimism and new opportunities.

Bill 28 is great for us. However, the changes it mandates will create challenges. The challenges will require increase in funding from the provincial government as well as from our municipal tax base.

We feel it's important that this bill reflects the difference between rural and urban school circumstances. Distance to schools, student population and course options need to be considered. We have some ideas. As a hypothetical example, bussing between schools is not subsidized by the Province. If intercampus bussing programs are solidly substantiated, they should be considered in the government funding formula.

If the expense of building vocational facilities is prohibitive for small schools, buses could take students from schools, that do not have the opportunity for vocational courses but would like that option, and bus those students for half-day sessions to schools where those courses are offered. Schools would have to collaborate programming to accommodate this situation. If it's to everyone's benefit, we hope you will consider the intercampus bussing.

Rural schools require unique and creative ideas to address the challenges. It will require thinking outside the box, open minds and lots of co-operation between trustees, parents, schools, school divisions, communities, and the Province.

Regarding the limit on travel times, as a parent of four students who spent over two hours a day every day on a bus from kindergarten to grade 12, I support the 60-minute limit on travel times. Anything longer puts rural students at a definite disadvantage in a variety of ways. With diesel prices rising at lightning speed and no end in sight, more efficient bussing options will need to be available to school divisions to be able to fund the added buses that will be required to allow for shorter bus routes. Would the solution be to use vans or smaller, more efficient buses with lower capital and operating costs? Additional funding will be required to meet that 60-minute limit.

We have a concern with the wording of Bill 28. We will be looking for clarification of the intent of school consolidation or amalgamation.

In conclusion, please remember small schools in your next budget. Please support rural Manitoba and please pass Bill 28.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Ashcroft.

Do we have any questions?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Thank you for coming this long distance on a wet morning to present. We appreciate all the presenters coming out, taking the opportunity to voice their concerns and what they feel the legislation should or shouldn't be doing. I have one question for you, and you've sort answered it, but we just want to be really clear.

Are low enrolment schools properly funded? Because you're not the only group that's come forward. We've had a lot of groups come forward and say, you know, we would like low enrolment schools stay open. Then we have school boards and taxpayers coming saying, you know we don't want to pay to keep low enrolment schools open. Should not the Province then be funding it properly? My question is, are low enrolment schools properly funded by the Province?

Ms. Ashcroft: I would say, our high school—in our case, I would say no. You look at our school as a school where you have your average cost per student, but not included in that formula are the students that come from St. Lazare and come from Birdtail school division. They use our facility. They exchange some financial resources with those neighbouring divisions, but they are not considered when the division looks at our average cost per student.

In 2007, when the school division did their public meetings, one of the questions asked was would the taxpayers in our area be willing to pay more tax to keep a school in our community, and they said yes. I believe it was 65 or—I can't remember the exact percentage. Most were very willing. I think we all recognize the importance of keeping a school, but there's no doubt our school was built for a large number of students. We aren't actually suffering. We have decreasing enrolment, but we still actually have as many students as two other areas combined, when you put the K-to-12 numbers together, but our building is very big. It was built with a lecture theatre, a gymnasium, a shops room, a foods lab, a number of amenities which we will lose without the school. The whole division will also lose those opportunities.

I think what is a better solution would be to share those facilities with other students who want those course options, but not necessarily bus every student so that a few have those course options. I

know that's kind of digressing from your question, but.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

I've had the opportunity in my tenure as minister to twice visit your community. It's a beautiful community. I was just wondering if you could qualify in any way, shape, or form, what it would mean to the community development corporation and the plans that the community development corporation has, if indeed the schools were to be closed in your community, how you feel that would impact the plans that you have as a community development corporation?

* (10:40)

Ms. Ashcroft: I think it was very clear within three days of the school division coming up with this announcement. I had two families with seven children between them that both said, if this goes through, we will move. They had young children—our numbers aren't anticipated to get below the threshold numbers for probably 10 years, in theory, but, as soon as this plan comes into play, that's going to speed up because these people have young children. They don't really care if the school's there now. They want the school to be there in 10 years so they have already said, if this happens, we will leave.

I had another family with five children coming to look to relocate in our community, and the proposed plan hit the *Brandon Sun*. They are in that reading area. They cancelled their trip. We have the mine expansion right close by. It's within 30 minutes. Then potash expansion in Saskatchewan. Through the new program, the Capturing Opportunities award, was recognized. Our school is partnering with local business to actually build buildings. It's a construction program so those kids are introduced to carpentry—we actually have a journeyman carpenter on staff who is actually also a teacher, which is a bonus. So they are building buildings which will be for sale. Our Co-op store is supplying the materials; they pay the same as they would pay any general contractor. Those kids are being exposed to carpentry, journeyman electrician, and plumbers who come to do the finishing.

Our Co-op is now employing three or four of those students already in the apprenticeship program. Because they now have those skilled people, the skills they have just gained in high school, they have committed to starting and building RTM homes in

our community. I believe they're supposed to be building four this summer. It's created jobs. It's created jobs that are not minimum wage that can allow people to stay in our communities and earn a good living.

There are all sorts of wonderful things happening. Our local businesses see the advantage of keeping those people in our community. It's just another option for kids, so, without our high school, we don't have any of those things. And we know that the people that are there are going to leave; the new people aren't going to come.

Madam Chairperson: One last question, the Honourable Mr. Bjornson.

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, just a comment. You've affirmed essentially what one of the presenters said from rural Manitoba recently, was that license to close a school can be license to close a community, so I really appreciate your advocacy, and coming from rural Manitoba, I recognize the challenges that we have in our rural schools, and it's certainly something that we're aware of as we've brought this legislation forward. So thank you for your advocacy.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, and driving the distance to be here.

Madam Chairperson: On Bill 2, we have Judy Eastman, private citizen. Judy Eastman? Judy Eastman will be struck from the list.

Madam Chairperson: I would now like to call on Robert Dyck, private citizen. Robert Dyck? Robert Dyck will now be struck from the list.

I will now call on David Grant. David Grant? David Grant will now be removed from the list.

I would now like to call on Jaime Glenat, private citizen. Jaime Glenat? Jaime Glenat will be removed from the list.

I will now call on George Marshall, private citizen. Do you have materials to distribute, Mr. Marshall?

Okay. Whenever you're ready, you may start your presentation.

Mr. George Marshall (Private Citizen): Bonjour. Madame la présidente, et la Ministre, et Monsieur le ministre, et les autres, my name is George Marshall.

I appear this morning in support of Bill 28. Let me preface my remarks by saying that—thanking the members present and all those in the large room who are not, regardless of opinion and whatever subject matter, for your dedication to our province and for your service to the people of Manitoba. As someone who's had some political involvement, you guys are awesome.

My name is George Marshall. This morning I appear in support of Bill 28.

First some background, personal, academic, and political: I was born in Winnipeg of Scottish and Icelandic descent. My father and his father before him were shipbuilders at Glasgow on Clyde, Newcastle on Tyne, and at Belfast, where my father was born. My grandfather on my mother's side, I understand, was a sea captain working north out of Iceland. I didn't think anything was north of Iceland. I can say with some truth that, when the Icelandic fishing fleet took on the British navy over fishing rights in the '60s, my family had a stake on both sides.

I hold a Master's degree from the University of Manitoba and an undergraduate Arts degree in political science and economics from the University of Winnipeg. I also earned a certificate in management from U of M, and two certificates in the French language from Collège Universitaire de Saint-Boniface and from Alliance française.

I have 36 years experience in four distinct local government jurisdictions, two city councils and two school boards. I'm a former member of the City of Winnipeg's Executive Policy Committee and a past president and honorary life member of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees. I presently sit as an elected trustee on the River East Transcona School Board.

I do not represent—and I want to emphasize this—I do not represent, nor do I speak for the River East Transcona School Board on this bill. I can speak for my community of Transcona which has elected me to represent local governments, not once, but 12 times. I'm an independent; I do not belong to any political party. I've served seven premiers without fear or favour, four Conservatives, and three New Democrats.

My sole motive is the interests of the people who have elected me to represent them, and, through their bestowed authority, to speak for them on the broader issues. When I address the government it is not

partisan. I am simply addressing the government regardless of party which the people of Manitoba have chosen as their government of the day.

School divisions do not belong to the board chairs, nor to the superintendents, nor to the school boards. The school divisions belong to the people. The school divisions were created by the Province on the premise that the delivery of educational services through a local elected body would be more responsive to and reflective of local community needs.

Some years ago, Maureen Hemphill, then-Minister of Education, introduced the school closure legislation to ensure a two-year study period, and to encourage wide discussion between a school board and its public whenever a school board designated a school for possible closure. Over time, school boards have hijacked the minister's intent and reduced meaningful public input to the legislated need to have three community people elected to a nine member review committee.

The present Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) is so alarmed at the number of schools he will surely lose across the province that he proposes to change the law. It remains to be seen whether school boards, having circumvented the intent of the founding minister, will work now to attempt to dismiss the future intent of the present one. School boards which flaunt their publics flaunt the very reason for their existence, the delivery of educational services which is closer to the people. School boards which continue to ignore their publics run the risk of becoming less relevant, to disappear, perhaps, but more likely become something much less than they presently are. Should this future outcome occur, an objective person could reasonably conclude that school boards will have brought this unintended and unwanted consequence upon themselves.

I lament this turn of events. I regard trusteeship as a noble profession. I regard local autonomy as well and the delivery of educational service through a duly elected school board to be the preferred model of governance. School boards, though, are creatures of the Province, whose delegated responsibility, the education of the young, remains ultimately a provincial responsibility.

* (10:50)

School boards, then, exist by privilege and not by right. Such existence can only be justified by appropriate performance and significant results. This

proposed legislation simply mandates that which the founding legislation intended. This legislation mandates that which the founding legislation left open and in trust to school boards, a wide discussion among its publics, which have since been both offended and ignored. This proposed legislation restores the balance between local control and ministerial oversight.

I conclude that this legislation is in the best interests of the people of Manitoba, and, in particular, that this legislation is in the best interests of the children of Manitoba. This citizen of Manitoba then supports the government's initiative as set out in Bill 28.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

My appendage: My response at the school board meeting of May 6, simply taken as read, except to note that all the benefits listed become dis-benefits, and the caution that I set out for my school board members: If school boards continue to be driven more by their top-down professional advice rather than by the legitimate interests and the genuine aspirations of the communities they represent, then they can reasonably anticipate further legislative constraint.

Whether school boards become a mere shell of their present selves will depend in significant part on the future decisions of school boards. One would do well to remember that school boards were formed in order to bring educational governance closer to the people.

I end with an appreciation for the government's initiative.

All of which is respectfully submitted, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Schuler: Thank you, George, for coming to committee. Nice to see you again.

I have a question for you: We've had presenters come forward, one of them was today—two, actually, who said in their communities there is a desire to see tax increases, I think one was 64 percent in favour, in their community to raise taxes to keep schools open, that there seems to be a willingness to accept that to keep smaller schools open. There would have to be, obviously, there's a cost somewhere. Is it the Province that funds that? Probably one of the difficulties we've had with this legislation, George, is that it mandates, but, as Drew Caldwell always said,

the devil's in the details. There's really no money that comes with it.

Do you think the public is prepared to see tax increases if it means that we keep low enrolment schools open? Do you sense that there's that appetite?

Mr. Marshall: I welcome the question from the honourable member.

Let me respond if I may, Madam Chair, from my notes. Our budget is 85 percent salaries. The public sector has a right to participate in the wealth of the nation. Frozen budgets don't work, especially in the long run. Our budget is within present economic indicators, and the two schools slated for closures both meet their little budgets. Both schools, of course, are present in the budget, and if they do remain open it would not be a new expenditure.

Mr. Schuler: The minister has mandated that school boards may not raise their budgets by a certain percentage. If they do, they're supposed to go into surplus. There was a deal put on the table that I know you're division—our division, I should say; I am a resident of your school division—you know, a lot of controversy on it.

School boards, if they're going to continue with programming at a certain standard or a certain level, will they have to raise taxes to keep low enrolment schools open, to keep the programming where it's at, or do you feel that we could have a tax freeze for 10 years and keep status quo?

Mr. Marshall: That's a fair question. If I may now, I just want to refer to my notes for a moment.

Well, maybe I can paraphrase. I think that the criteria for keeping a school open are the soundness of the building and the viability of the educational program in the building, not the number of spaces in the building. You teach children, not spaces.

I can't speak for all the schools, but I'm a past president of MAST. I have some understanding of the province at large. I do believe that this school, certainly, and these schools are viable in the sense, in terms of delivery of educational services to the children, and they deserve to remain open.

If I can just find this, I'll just be a second, because I wanted to do you people justice.

Well, here, let me give you a somewhat answer. The two schools in question and their families will pay a huge penalty for a fiscal goal, in my view, that

can't be reached. The focus is particularly horrid because no one likes school budgets to go up a percentage or two. But at least it's borne by the whole division. Here, a minority of families, some of the poorest in the division, will pay the sole penalty.

I'm saying the education program in the building is viable. That's one of the criteria. The building is sound. Therefore, it should continue. Within the area of Transcona, within 200 square blocks, there're only two schools: one in the 500 block in the east end, and one in the 500 block in the west end that's going to be closed. There will be one school servicing 200 square blocks. These are the youngest children in the division, starting at five years old.

The educational program is viable. The school is sound. In my view, it shouldn't be closed. But, in the broader perspective, I do think the two criteria you've got to have are that the building is sound and the educational program is viable. That's the bottom line.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Good morning, Mr. Marshall. Welcome to this committee.

You've mentioned two items, education program viability and the soundness of the building. I listened to comments and questions by my colleagues at the table, and they've indicated and they've focussed mostly on the financial aspects of keeping schools open. Judging from your presentation, you seem to focus more on the interests of the children.

I want, if you would, sir, because I believe you were in attendance at the school review meetings at Westview School in particular. You made presentations there. What were your observations from those open houses that were held at the school? What were the parents saying to you, and what was the direction that they were taking? Maybe you can give an impression that you might have formed from those meetings, what parents were saying to members of the school division.

Mr. Marshall: Well, initially, they were going to break into groups and not report back. They got offended by that and we're allowed to report back. I mean, it's their words and not mine. They got the impression it was a done deal, that everything was top down, it was a done deal, and whatever they said wouldn't matter because the decision, for all intents and purposes, from their perspective—I'm speaking from their perspective, and not mine—it was done.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. Our time for questions has expired.

Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Marshall: You're welcome. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: I will now call on Glenn Hollyoake, private citizen. Glenn Hollyoake? Glenn Hollyoake's name will be taken from the list.

I will now call on Tara Mulholland, private citizen. Tara Mulholland? Tara Mulholland's name will be taken from the list.

That concludes the list of presenters that I have before me. Are there any other persons in attendance who wish to make a presentation?

Seeing none, that concludes public presentations.

* (11:00)

In what order does the committee wish to proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of these bills? Numerical? Seeing no response, may we proceed in numerical order? *[Agreed]*

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order. Also, if there's agreement from the committee for the longer bills, I will call clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clauses or clauses where members may have comments, questions, or amendments. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

We will now proceed to clause-by-clause consideration of the bills.

Bill 2—The Public Schools Amendment (Trans Fats & Nutrition)

Madam Chairperson: We will now begin with Bill 2.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 2 have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): No, I don't, Madam Chair, thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): No, thank you. Not at this time.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass; Bill be reported.

**Bill 24—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Cyber-Bullying and Use of Electronic Devices)**

Madam Chairperson: We will proceed with Bill 24.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 24 have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): No, I do not. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Not at this time, thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 and 4—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass; Bill be reported.

**Bill 28—The Strengthening Local Schools Act
(Public Schools Act Amended)**

Madam Chairperson: We shall now deal with Bill 28.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 28 have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I just wanted to say how impressed I was with the quality of presentations that we've received and the number of people that have taken time out of their summer weekend and their Monday morning to be here to present on behalf of their communities on this bill.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Yes, and a lot of individuals came and presented on a Saturday and then again this morning, and because of the time constraints there really wasn't a true 48 hours notice given. So they really put themselves out to make sure that they got here. Saturday was a beautiful day, yet they sat through committee and made sure that their voices were heard, and that's what's very important with this committee system, because otherwise why would we bother having it if nobody showed? So the

fact that we had good presentations, they came out, and on both sides, I think, gave very compelling arguments, and we certainly appreciate their participation.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Schuler.

Shall clauses 1 and 2 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Chairperson: Clause 1—pass.

Mr. Bjornson: I'm proposing to amend Bill 28,

THAT Clause 2 of the Bill be amended by striking out the proposed subsection 41(1.4), dealing with exemptions.

Madam Chairperson: It has been moved by the Honourable Mr. Bjornson

THAT Clause 2 of the Bill be amended by striking out the proposed subsection 41(1.4).

The amendment is in order. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Bjornson: After hearing from many of the presenters that attended today and yesterday regarding this bill, particularly on Saturday we heard from a number of presenters who felt that their voices hadn't been heard through the process, and the exemption clause would have allowed for schools to proceed with consolidations and amalgamations of schools in a couple of small communities, as well as the closure of a couple of schools where people felt that they hadn't been part of a legitimate process, notably Fisher Branch and the Ashern-Moosehorn presentation, but also parents from other communities that have made their voices heard. By eliminating the exemption clause, it means that all schools that were currently slated for closure would have to be approved by the minister for closure and for consolidation, so I think it would be reasonable having their voices and concerns expressed, that no school should be exempt and no school should be allowed to be closed without further discussion with myself as minister.

Mr. Schuler: I've said this before on the record and I'll say it again. I can't believe that the minister would have allowed this issue to proceed this long with so much time and effort and anguish put into it, and here we sit days before the House is supposed to recess and he's amending his own legislation going even further back retroactively. It is terrible

management on behalf of this minister and his premier and his government to have allowed this to go to this extent. I mean, the minister has heard these groups for months already and chose to do nothing. Now we sit in the first full week in June and now he is going to make it retroactive even further back.

Again, it's just further proof that this government is absolute in shambles. Their legislation leaves nothing but chaos and carnage behind. The kind of effort put in by all sides, the kind of anguish that was put in by parents, by community members, and the government is nothing more than a careening car down a hill without brakes and swerving and bumping into stuff and discovering on a Saturday that, all of a sudden, several schools are going to be closed that I guess the minister wasn't aware of.

I'd say to the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), he has all kinds of time and effort to heckle myself, let him be brave enough and put some comments on the record. He will have that opportunity as soon as I'm finished with my comments. I did not heckle the Minister of Education. I'm sure the Member for Transcona will have the common courtesy not to heckle myself, because he will have the time. In fact, the government should rip that duct tape off his mouth and let him speak freely, let him have the opportunity to voice his opinions. We would like to see him have that opportunity.

My comments to this are why is it that we now sit on June 9 and Rip van Winkle, the government wakes up and figures out that they have other problems in other areas. The government knew that this was coming down the pike. They had been given ample, ample notice ahead of time, and today the minister discovers that he has to go even further back retroactively. And, again, it's just further proof this is a terribly confused, terribly disorganized government that is leaving chaos in its wake and very unfortunate that the government and this minister can't get their act together and do this all in a timely fashion instead of waiting for the last possible moment. I mean, really, we are days, we are hours away from the House sitting and now the amendment comes forward. It shows a government that is absolutely and totally disorganized.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Is the committee ready for the—

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I certainly want the opportunity to speak to the minister's proposed amendment. I think the minister has to bear

in mind some of the other presentations we heard. I go back to the presentation we heard from Prairie Spirit School Division on Saturday, and we were specifically talking about the Cypress River school closure there. My comment at that time was that, in view of the legislation as it was on the table, that particular school would close because the school division had already voted on it. Now that whole process is up in the air, and it certainly leaves a lot of questions in that community. It also brings a lot of questions forward to the school division, too, who have spent a considerable amount of time over the last year, year and half, in terms of evaluating their schools and their programs and how they're going to deliver their programs into the future.

* (11:10)

The other thing that really bothers me here is there is mention of these community school programs and mentions of a grant process in Bill 28, but there's not a real significant and concrete statement anywhere that what is the financial obligation on behalf of the Province. The Province here has obviously left the complete control of school closures around the province in the hands of the minister, but what are the ramifications for school divisions who are basically responsible for funding those schools? And the Province really hasn't stepped up to the table and said, okay, if we're going to be responsible for keeping schools open or closing schools, we also are going to be at the table to make sure that we as a Province are going to be there to fund those schools when they're open because we have heard from a significant number of presenters that obviously there will be extra costs incurred by keeping schools open.

Obviously, we as taxpayers then are going to be on the hook, and I think Manitobans and school divisions and all taxpayers around the province want to know exactly who is going to be responsible for those extra costs. And I don't see the minister making any concrete statements to that regard where the Province stands.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Chairperson: The question before the committee is as follows: Moved by the Honourable Minister Bjornson

THAT Clause 2 of the Bill be amended by striking out the proposed subsection 41(1.4).

Amendment—pass.

Clause 2 as amended—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clauses 5 through 8—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill as amended be reported.

* * *

Madam Chairperson: The time being 11:12, what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Rise.

Madam Chairperson: The committee shall rise. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 11:12 a.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS PRESENTED BUT NOT READ

Re: Bill 28

By way of submitting this written presentation I am giving my support for Bill 28. My name is Jill Kosowan and I am a parent of a child who is completing her kindergarten year at Dr. D.W. Penner School. This bill has stopped the possible close of Dr. D.W. Penner, but it also proposes to allow Dr. Penner to become more than a K-6 school. It can become a centre of our small but strong community.

Dr. Penner is across the back lane from my home and what I see when I look out my back window are families walking through the school yard getting fresh air and exercise. I see kids learning to ride their bikes and grandparents with their grandchildren. If Dr. Penner were to close, who would look after the building? Where would these people go for play structures and soccer games?

I realize that due to declining enrolment, and no is disputing that families are not as large as they once were, has led to a lot of empty seats in many schools, but, in order for the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) to reconfigure a school, they didn't have to put it up for review for closure. At the June 19, public meeting of the LRSD I asked Mike Ducharme, then chair of the board of trustees who in front of me consulted with Terry Borys, CEO and superintendent of the board, if the school had to be put up for review in order to be restructured and Terry Borys' answer was no.

Passing Bill 28 will result in the veil of "Up for Review for Closure" to be lifted from Dr. Penner

and, therefore, communities such as Van Hull can be designated to attend Dr. Penner instead of Darwin, as Dr. Penner is closer to home for them. And this will bring our numbers up. The Morrow Avenue Childcare Centre at Dr. Penner can expand and accept children who may be out of catchment for our school, but whose children may then be allowed to stay on as students of Dr. Penner.

Bill 28 will also allow changes to the current guidelines for school closures that I feel are grossly inadequate. The current guidelines are intended to be a minimum requirement for school boards and on the surface it appears that the Louis Riel School Division has followed them, but at what cost? In a recent community newspaper, The Lance, the LRSD took out a full-page ad to inform the community of the reasons for the reviews and what it would mean to the four affected schools.

What isn't commonly known is that this ad cost over \$1,254 to run. The reason I know this is that I called The Lance to enquire about the cost of parents putting an ad in The Lance so that we could explain the deficiencies in the LRSD's statements. As a non-profit group the \$1,254 was less than what the LRSD paid! For me, this is a mismanagement of funds as the LRSD had just done a mass mail out to every house in the entire division to explain their position. If the LRSD is truly concerned about fiscal management, maybe the board should look at why 12 people in positions ranging from the COO and superintendent to the director of facilities are together making \$1.4 million.

It is my opinion that school divisions should not have the power to close schools. I believe that if a school's enrolment is declining, once this downward trend is noticed, an independent committee made up of a local MLA, parents and community members and a member of the Minister of Education's office should be put together to review how this declining enrolment has happened and how it can be remedied.

When the first public meeting of the Dr. Penner review committee was to meet, the board was asked to do a mail out to every home in the catchment area and the request was denied as being too expensive, so myself and several parents organized a door-to-door mail drop using the letter that only parents received from the LRSD and 81 people showed up. I was told this was a higher turnout than the other schools received.

To me, this bill opens the door for different departments in the provincial government to work

together to use the buildings to strengthen communities rather than to have a school board whose mandate is the filling of seats in a school and cannot co-ordinate initiatives with Family Services & Housing (daycares), Competitiveness, Training and Trade (small business classes), Healthy Living (active living, chronic disease education), Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport (St. Vital has large populations of Muslims, and education breeds understanding and tolerance on both sides.)

I ask that you pass this bill into law so that our schools can start to work on expanding the use of these facilities and so that our children can focus on learning what they need to learn, rather than worry about where they are going to go to school two years from now.

Jill Kosowan

* * *

Re: Bill 28

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, honourable members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bill Clark, Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Miniota and I am speaking on behalf of my council and my ratepayers. We are a municipality within the Park West School Division. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views in support of Bill 28, The Strengthening Local Schools Act.

As some of you have possibly been made aware, our parents, our youth and our citizens have serious concerns about the proposed restructuring proposal put forth by the Park West School Division. This proposal calls for the creation of two full-service high schools, a change from the present six high schools. It also proposes that Shoal Lake K to 6 would go to Strathclair and Strathclair 7 to 12 would go to Shoal Lake, as well as the closure of Kenton in 2009 and Miniota in 2011. Their threshold policy for a review of a school closure is set at 14 students per class for grades 9 to 12 and 5 students per class for K to 8.

Municipal councils do not usually get so involved in school board matters, and I would likely not be here today representing the views of my ratepayers if their views were being listened to by the board.

Bill 28 gives everyone the breathing space needed to look at that proposal and hopefully make

some adjustments before irreparable damage is done to our school division and our communities. Rural communities are already feeling the effect of dwindling population and the Park West proposal will only hasten these communities' demise. Bill 28 also gives us some time to see if the proposed Russell-Miniota potash project, which is in the early stages of exploration, will have a positive effect on the growth of our communities.

Park West School Division is a huge division geographically stretching from Inglis, which is north of Russell, to Kenton in the south. It is true our numbers are dwindling and staff cuts have been made in the past. However, in our small schools, parents are very satisfied with the quality of education their children are receiving. There is something to be said for an education received in small rural schools. I received my education in a small school which was located in the town of Isabella. This school had three rooms, Grades 1 to 4, 5 to 8 and 9 to 12. It is from this small school, my community and my parents that I learned my values. My four children have all come through a rural small school, where in K to 8 they were in double graded classrooms.

I am very proud of our four children. Each one has fond school memories from their K to 8 school years in Miniota and then 9 to 12 in Birtle; each one received a strong education and today they have a strong work ethic and are strong citizens giving back to their four different communities. I find it most interesting that our oldest daughter chose for her six-year-old son this past school year a school experience here in Winnipeg where she had him placed in a Grade 1 to 3 classroom instead of a single classroom of Grade 1 students. The city has caught up, so to speak, to the values of the rural way of education.

Back to Bill 28. I must commend the minister for proposing regulations regarding extended travel times on the bus. Twenty-seven presentations were made to the board of trustees of the Park West School Division at a meeting in Birtle on April 21. Each one of these presentations made passionate pleas to the board to slow down with their proposal and consider the extra travel time this plan would cause. As we are one of the largest divisions geographically, transportation times are a huge concern. Already many of our students in our community are on the bus by 7:30 a.m. It is totally unacceptable to add an extra three-quarters of an hour to a student's day, especially K to 5 students.

We would ask the minister to look at the possibility of bringing in a smaller type of bus as other provinces have done with the same safety features as the big yellow bus. These could be used on feeder routes to cut down on time traveled on the bus.

We, as municipal officials and citizens, are well aware that the school system cannot remain status quo forever. However, the people are asking to be heard and have the concerns of their children's education and lives respected. We are asking that you pass Bill 28, so we can have the needed time to really look at and hopefully solve the concerns of rural education. Thank you.

Reeve Bill Clark
R.M. of Miniota

* * *

Re: Bill 28

TO: HONARABLE MR. PETER BJORNSON AND
FELLOW CABINET MEMBERS

FROM: MINIOTA PARENT COUNCIL
ADVISORY

We send our regrets with this presentation that we were unable to present in person as originally planned.

When Bill 28 was announced, our community felt much excitement. It was great news for our area that, like many in rural Manitoba, struggle with declining population and have seen the effects of having a school closed on a community. The proposed moratorium on school closures is allowing our community the chance to try and encourage growth. Without a school open, it makes the challenge that much more difficult. Our Miniota K-8 school is the only open school left in our municipality.

In our school now, we have been double and triple graded. There are advantages to this, and most have come to accept this as long as our school remains open. Our excellent teaching staff in Miniota has proven this can be done with an exceedingly high level of success. Our concern with the proposed moratorium is the school board will "starve" our schools by not allocating a sufficient staff to keep open and as a result, force the community to close themselves. The small school grants will need to be increased in order to allow these schools to remain open. What is stopping the Board from allocating less of their general funds to small schools if they

feel they are getting "extras" and don't feel its fair to the larger schools?

We understand the funding that will accompany Bill 28 will not be in place for this year. This makes it difficult for the schools that now must operate with less teaching staff. Kenton School is facing 1.25 teachers for a K- 5 school. So as much as the Board has kept them open as per your moratorium, they refuse to supply them with an extra .5 teacher as needed. We urge you to change the funding formulas to school based rather than enrollment based. Would you consider having a different funding formula for urban and rural schools? We also would like to see tax dollars follow with the student to their school of choice.

Many of our high school students now are on the bus for longer than 60 minutes, and this has been accepted... However, if it were our elementary and middle year students being on the bus for longer than this, there would be concern. By keeping our K-8 school open in Miniota, this could be prevented. We would love to see all students not face a bus ride of over 60 minutes, but are aware this may be more difficult than it sounds. We do hope the younger children will not be subject to this. Most adults do not chose to drive over 60 minutes to work so it doesn't seem right that we would do it our children.

We realize that the moratorium won't last forever. We encourage you and your office to make every effort to come to recognize that our small, rural schools and communities enjoy a uniqueness which we are proud of. By centralizing rural Manitoba schools we are in danger of losing that. Changing provincial funding to allow our school divisions to be proactive instead of reactive is a positive step.

In closing, we are in support of Bill 28 and the possibilities it may hold. We are optimistic for the future of rural Manitoba. We feel it has given us a breath of fresh air as we have been urging our school board to see the benefits of small schools. We thank you for taking the time to hear and read all the presentations on this matter. Again, we regret not being able to attend with this in person, but should you have any questions or comments, you may contact us at the numbers below.

Thank you
Miniota Parent Council
Tracie Cousins
Laurie Sheane
Tracie Cousins

* * *

Re: Bill 28

Hon. P. Bjornson
Minister of Education
Government of Manitoba
Dear Mr. Bjornson;

As you are likely aware, in May of 2006, the Pembina Trails School Division, PTSD, informed the Chapman School community of their intention to conduct a review of that school for possible closure. The initial intent of this letter was to inform you that the below listed persons elected to represent the parents and community on the Chapman School Review Committee either resigned or suspended participation as of April 14, 2008. The final report submitted by the committee does not include the views of the community and moreover solely represents the views of Pembina Trails School Division, PTSD. In light of your recent announcement regarding a moratorium on school closures we felt compelled to elaborate further regarding the circumstance of our decision to suspend participation.

Those of us that have chosen to suspend participation or resign have done so for many reasons. Our concerns are echoed by many members of our community. The key factors that led us to our decision include the following: Doubts regarding the legitimacy of the review process—a process presented as an open-minded review but which was, in our opinion, a predetermined exercise completed solely for the purpose of satisfying provincial closure guidelines; Inconsistencies and unanswered questions pertaining to a suggestion for a strategic review of the division, our area of the division; Concerns about the formula funding structure and its impact on Chapman and Royal School, the proposed new school for our catchment area.

As community and parent representatives on the review committee we felt it was our duty to assist PTSD, via the trustees on the committee, to develop viable strategies that would help maintain our school and its neighbourhood. It was very disheartening for us to discover that the board did not view this activity as part of their mandate. Every recommendation made to the committee, all of which were brought forth by parents or community members, was dismissed by PTSD. There was a perception by those of us involved and by parents and members of the community that we were being

managed. Crowd control is how one parent perceptively described the situation. Surely, PTSD has failed this community by refusing to accept its role in helping to maintain a vital part of our neighbourhood, its school.

In our opinion, the current review process is flawed and we hope that by calling for this moratorium the government has realized the need to take steps to change this process. Our reasoning for this statement is as follows:

a) Boards close the smallest schools first, in part because their closure will be met with the least resistance. Enrolment in our area is predicted to decline to less than 500 elementary school children. As such, why was PTSD closing a school with a capacity of 225 and keeping two other elementary schools in close proximity open with a combined capacity for 1000 students? When asked if PTSD could provide us with some information on their strategic plan, one that would enable us to explain the board's rationale to our friends and neighbours, we were initially told that the board did not look at it that way and that completing a large scale review of the division, or even our area, would be too difficult.

Subsequently, when other members of the community joined us in a request for the review process to be delayed, while a strategic review that took these factors into consideration was conducted, we were informed that PTSD had done a strategic review. However, no information pertaining to this strategic review, and the board's planning as a result, was ever shared with those of us on the Chapman School Review Committee.

b) The decision to close Chapman School appeared to have already been made as none of the recommendations we brought forth were acceptable. The board did not seem willing to do anything that might improve the school's situation. Community ideas meant to rebuild enrolment were of little interest to PTSD. Even the extreme step of suspension of participation in the process had no effect. Rather than address our concerns PTSD put forth a final report that does not reflect the community's perspective.

One of the key reasons the board cited for the closure of Chapman was the financial inefficiencies of the school, yet this was never clearly or truthfully communicated to our community. There were inconsistencies in the financial analysis presented for our review. Clearly, funding of school boards and the

schools themselves needs to be reviewed. Again, we hope that the government will consider this during the moratorium. Our justification for this statement is as follows:

a) The Chapman community was given two primary reasons for why our school was to be closed, higher than average cost per student, and sagging education quality. These two items are united thru the common thread of money and the funding formula that distributes it.

b) We were never told why there needed to be any school closures. Funding for schools continues to rise as a result of an increase in tax dollars collected from existing neighbourhoods and the development of new neighbourhoods and businesses. Conversely, enrolment decreases. PTSD has fewer students and more money to educate them. In the absence of firm commitments to tax relief, we wonder why there is pressure to close schools.

c) Strategic reorganization ideas geared to overall cost efficiency were refuted by PTSD. After learning about the Public School Finance Board's policy pertaining to the utilization of existing school infrastructure prior to building new schools one of the strategies brought forth to the committee involved a strategic realignment of existing schools. No explanation was ever offered nor was supporting evidence that the board has ever completed a strategic review that looks at schools in this way provided.

d) Chapman school has the highest percentage of students with special educational requirements of any school within PTSD. The financial consequences of this were never identified in the documents provided to the community. Furthermore, this population has selected our school for reasons that were never deemed to be of merit by PTSD.

e) Formula funding of small schools does not work effectively when less students equals less funding for staffing and other resources. This is in part because the workload of staff and the needs of the school and its students for extracurricular activities does not decline as enrolment declines. The funding structure is further complicated when a school like Chapman has many schools of choice students that attend the school from out of catchment. In Chapman's case this is largely because there are three day cares located less than a block from the school.

f) Schools of choice policy has had a significant impact on our community school. The funding school divisions receive for out of catchment-division students that attend day cares in the vicinity of their school of choice should be reviewed, i.e. can children that attend a day care with a catchment area of a school be granted admission to that school as if it were their home catchment area?

Given that declining enrolment is a problem across the province and country, we feel that the government and school boards need to ensure there is a change to funding formula and a long-term plan in place to help support our community schools. It is our opinion that all efforts to support a neighbourhood elementary school should be exhausted by a board before closure is suggested. Had this occurred in our case we would, reluctantly, be willing to support the move for closure of our community school. It is for these reasons that we would like to see school boards revise their funding structure to better accommodate small schools, particularly as enrolment numbers continue to decline and small schools become a better fit for neighbourhoods.

Despite the moratorium imposed on PTSD, as a community we remain concerned about the future of our school. Even after the moratorium was called the PTSD superintendent of education made a recommendation to the board of PTSD that Chapman School be closed. The board is unable to act upon the superintendent's recommendations at this time. However, with few details available regarding the moratorium we are cautious to celebrate the certainty of our community school's future. Based on our experience, unless there are some major changes to the funding structure or enrolment in our area, we are certain that our school will be the first school elected for closure by the PTSD board once the moratorium has been waived. It is for these reasons we ask the ministry to provide more information about how a community ensures its school is designated a community school. Secondly, more information on the process to apply for grants intended for the purpose of maintaining and strengthening community schools would be helpful.

Having participated in good faith in the Chapman School Review Committee discussions we acknowledge the difficulties facing PTSD, however, we feel that the process is inherently flawed. We applaud you in your decision to implement a moratorium on school closures and thereby allow

time to re-examine the role of schools within communities. We hope that some of the concerns we have raised through our experiences with PTSD will help identify areas for improvement of the review process and perhaps in the overall school system. It is our feeling that changes need to be made to school board policies and procedures in order for our community schools to remain viable as enrolment continues to decline. We would be happy to participate in any process that reviews the mechanics of school closure. We look forward to further discussion with the province on this subject. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Randy Aitken
Jaime Glenat
Jaime Glenat

Jennifer Stefanec
Renita Peters, resigned

* * *

Re: Bill 28

We applaud the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth for his courage and foresight on bring forward Bill 28. In the minds of people from small community Manitoba, this piece of legislation is the best news we have had in years, maybe even decades. Although I am a School Trustee, I am speaking today on behalf of myself and fellow citizens that support this legislation.

Losing the statutory Crow benefits for freight rates, losing railroads & grain elevators and watching farms and small towns die has been difficult for rural citizens. With BSE in 2003, it seemed that nothing else could go wrong for farm families For farm families and families an small towns in Park West School Division, there was another surprise, in June 2006, plans were put in place to close schools and transport students even further from home The passing of Bill 28 will relieve a lot of stress for many young farmers and small business owners in small towns.

At all community meetings held about restructuring in Park West School Division these last 2 years, the message from the former Birdtail River School Division was loud and clear No dealt The old Birdtail River School Division had not closed a school in 30 years and was not about to start. The mandated amalgamation in 2002 of Pelly Trail and Birdtail River School Divisions has not worked well and never will. At least for the time being, schools like Kenton an the former Birdtail River Division

can not be closed For this we thank the Minister and urge everyone in the Legislature to support the passing of this bill.

This Bill 28 needed to be developed because of School Boards like Park West, who was going to ramrod an idea through whether people liked it or not I, like many others, became aware of this an the early months of 2005 at our public meeting. These meetings were to spread doom and gloom about declining enrollments and to announce a review policy which would Increase the threshold numbers at which a school would go on review. With declining enrollment being a Provincial wide situation, I wondered why instead of finding ways to close schools we didn't work together to find ways to keep schools open.

Articles have suggested that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth is tinkering with democracy. I would suggest a moratorium on school closure in fact supports democratic rights of Trustees representing small schools. In Park West School Division for example, following amalgamation in 2002, Kenton lost their Trustee. Then in 2006, Park West School Board was set to eliminate two more Trustees leaving more small schools without representation. One of the Trustees to be eliminated was from the area that sends the most tax dollars to Park West School Division.

All schools deserve the democratic right of a vote at a Board table when school closure is the topic. With fewer Trustees and fewer School Divisions, the democratic right of a lot of small schools has been eroded to the point they have no rights at all when planning their future.

Remember when we talk closing a school Closure is Forever, I repeat -----Closure is Forever!

I became a Trustee for Park West School Division in the fall of 2006. My first meeting was In Brandon for all new Trustees. It was a crash course on how to be a Trustee in one afternoon. I went with both ears and eyes wide open. I listen to everything and gathered every bit of information I could.

It dawned on me that unions and associations had someone taking care of them. The problem I immediately realized was that the students had only one trustee for their representation. That is when I became an advocate for small children in small schools in small communities.

During the last Provincial election, I was one of the people that approached Premier Doer with concerns

about inappropriate bus times, especially for small students. I was pleased when he made it a plank in the NDP's election campaign. Appropriate bus times have been an issue overlooked for too long. Bill 28 is moving to correct this, and those of us in rural Manitoba are very thankful.

I attended the National Child Day Forum last Nov. 8 & 9 in Winnipeg. It was here the magic of learning light came on for me. I have never heard so much about the brain or heard so much scientific research on how the brain works.

The keynote speakers Dr. Stuart Shanker and Dr. Rob Santos, made it very clear the direction School Boards should be going in the educating of young students. In the last 15 years advances in the study of the science of the early brain has made huge in-roads into understanding the brain and how it develops in young children. Early years learning is the key to the total education package. The proposal of Kenton community is exactly what both these Doctors are recommending. Why would School Boards want to close small schools, when data is proving that they have a place in the education systems of today?

Passing of Bill 28 will go a long way in recognizing the importance of Early Years learning. This Bill 28 will also give School Boards an opportunity to pause, gather all this new information and proceed in a direction that will benefit children in all schools.

As ordinary citizens we have known that traveling children, especially small children around for long periods of time as we try to fill busses is not been a positive thing to do. We now have the scientific proof that what we are doing with these long rides, is putting their brains to sleep — making it difficult for them to learn. To ensure that we do not create situations where children, especially small children, are on long bus rides we must preserve our small schools closer to the student's homes.

Strengthening local schools by creating early learning centers in community schools and establishing parameters for bussing students will do a lot for education in Manitoba. But we can do more. I propose changes in review guidelines and school of choice.

1. That we allow entire school catchments areas to transfer with their students, their school buildings and their tax assessment to a division of their choice. The legislation that is in place at the moment has not been changed in some time. Right now requests for transfers are done one family at a time. 1/4 sections

by 1/4 section. This worked fine in days when farms were usually one section. As farm sizes have changed so should this process.

Traffic flow to surrounding communities have changed since these school division boundaries were put in place. With the amalgamation of divisions in 2002, some boundary lines are impractical and misrepresentation of community lines.

2. The best solution for small schools could well be a Small School Division similar to the Francophone Division. The reason I say this is because small schools and large schools do not have the same ideology — they mix as well as oil and water. The Province will find the rate payers of a Small School Division would be ready to pay for an education system they know is the best for the children in their community.

3. That the funding involved in Bill 28 be put in place so that it is not open to interpretation to ensure the money is spent in the area it was earmarked for.

In closing, I feel the passing of Bill 28 is a victory for all students in Manitoba. The data is now out there that proves what a huge educational victory this is for our children. Early education is very important for our province's future and we must be prepared to finance it. "Where there is the will there is always the way". Mr. Bjornson has the will and will find the way to make "Strengthening Local Schools" happen.

I urge all members of the Legislature to support the passage of Bill 28.

Ed Lelond

Re: Bill 28

Presentation to Bill 28 - The Strengthening Local Schools Act

First, thank you for making an effort to address this issue; however, I have a few concerns regarding this bill.

Executive Summary

First, I had written a document sent via email to the Minister of Education on April 17. My concern was closure of Westview elementary school, my old elementary school. This is not the right school to close, it has increasing enrolment and two major housing developments under construction in the area. The most obvious alternative solves two problems:

overcrowding of Transcona Collegiate at the same time as underutilization of elementary schools. This was caused by moving grade 9 to high school, and grade 6 to middle school. The school board informed me that reversing this requires permission from the Department of Education, so I wrote to the Minister asking for said permission. It was never my intention to seek a moratorium on all school closures. In fact, I do not object to closure of Sherwood elementary school; a school with declining enrolment, well below 50% capacity, no new housing developments in the area, and in fact the area is fully developed so there is nowhere to construct further housing developments. I thank the government for addressing the issue, but fear such an indiscriminate province-wide ban will be repealed, and if left in place could adversely affect management of the school system. In fact, section 7 of Bill 28 already repeals the moratorium, effectively this bill repeals itself. Another concern is use of a consulting firm from outside the province, a firm that has produced questionable enrolment projections. And one of the new housing developments has land allocated for a new elementary school; is the school board "trying to pull a fast one"? Although enrolment is increasing, Westview currently has slightly more than 50% capacity; but it is about to increase. Is the school board attempting to bypass provincial legislation by closing Westview now, before either the seniors complex or the two housing developments are complete? Do they intend to say "oops, we needed that school", then claim they have to build a new one in Harbourview South?

My understanding is the idea of moving grade 9 to high school came from one particular high school principle in the United States. She wanted to increase funding to her high school without regard to how it adversely affected other schools. She may have made a great presentation to her school board, but this is Manitoba. The Department of Education has to consider what's best for Manitoba. When one school has overcrowding and another is underutilized, the obvious solution is to rebalance enrolment; catchment area realignment. But in this case the problem is grades: overcrowding in high schools and underutilization of elementary schools. I don't know if that school division in the United States had the reverse issue, if so shuffling grades may have been sound management for them, but we have the reverse issue. Grade 9 can be taught with the same curriculum in either junior high or high school, there is no "quality" issue. Shuffling grades back

Enrolment figures from the Provincial Department of Education, Capital Facilities Division, clearly demonstrates enrolment has slowly and steadily increased since 1990. There are two major housing developments under construction in the area, one with 430 new homes, the other with 400. Many of the original residents of the Regent Park area are still there, but they are age 70 and older. A seniors complex is under construction in Transcona, and many of these residents have been waiting for that complex for years. Two real estate agencies are targeting these seniors; moving them out and moving young couples into their houses. This is renewing the neighbourhood. So not only has enrolment at Westview increased steadily since 1990, it is about to undergo a dramatic increase in enrolment.

A daycare operates out of Westview; the operator of which informed me directly that she has looked for alternate accommodation for her daycare but there is nothing available in the area. To accommodate increased enrolment, four area schools would have to handle the overflow: John de Graff, Joseph Teres, Radisson, and Wayaota. All four schools would be filled to capacity. In fact, the daycare in Joseph Teres would have to be closed as well. I spoke to the chairman of the School Board about this; he confirmed it and said he considers the daycare to be expendable. So closure of Westview would result in two daycare closures.

The primary excuse for closing Westview is the claim it has declining enrolment. But figures from the Department of Education contradict that claim. The claim comes from enrolment projections from a consulting firm hired by the school board. The consulting firm is Barringer, located in British Columbia, hired by River East Transcona School Division. This demonstrates a disturbing trend in government: the tendency to hire consulting firms from outside Manitoba. I have seen the Government of Manitoba do this, the City of Winnipeg, and now River East Transcona School Division. The chairman of the school board claims they have the reputation of being the expert in the field, but their conclusion is not consistent with the facts. I am a computer systems analyst, numerical analysis and identification of trends for the purpose of projections is part of my job. I have done this many times for the purpose of capacity planning for computer systems, and allocation of computer resources: computer memory, disk space, computer speed. I have also written programs for numerical analysis for the core business of various clients, such as power utilization

for an electrical utility (TransAlta in Alberta). For me, researching school enrolment was just another numerical analysis. I spoke with residents of my old block in the summer of 2006, and noticed the parents of many of the children I grew up with are still there, but they're over 70 years old. This led me to believe they will move en masse as their friends leave. This belief was born out with statistics from the 2006 census, and the discovery the seniors complex that residents have requested for so many years is finally under construction. So local knowledge is important for accurate results; local knowledge not available to a firm outside the province. Furthermore, the assistant superintendent informed me of the belief that students from new residents would be spread across the grades, with many students of high school age. She cited Prichard Farm Road as an example, but Prichard Farm road is a rich neighbourhood with large homes, most residents are middle-age with teenagers. Kildonan Green under construction near Westview has smaller homes typical of Transcona, targeting young couples. A reasonable demographic projection matches Lakeside Meadows when it was first built, a development immediately across Plessis Road from Kildonan Green. Lakeside Meadows had so many elementary school age students that the new elementary school built in that development, Joseph Teres, was over capacity for the first few years after it was built. Again, local knowledge is required for accurate analysis. So I ask the province to stop hiring consultants and experts from outside the province. I don't expect to get work for myself, but instead utilize the great expertise that does exist in this province.

The solution to enrolment is just sound management. There are different solutions for different areas. Both West Transcona and West Elmwood have a problem with overcrowded high schools, but underutilized elementary schools. That may sound like the same problem, but the two neighbourhoods have different issues and have different solutions. In West Transcona, the solution is to shuffle grade back: grade 9 back to junior high, grade 6 back to elementary school. This permits existing schools to handle the needs without any new construction. In West Elmwood the local high school never did carry grade 9, so that solution won't work. However, several elementary schools in West Elmwood do have declining enrolment, and this area is fully developed, no room for new developments. One pair of schools stands out: Polson and Prince Edward. Polson is one block from St. Alphonsus Catholic

school, which in turn is the same distance from Prince Edward. St. Alphonsus is a private school for grades 1-8, the other two are public schools for grades K-6. Furthermore, Munroe Junior High (grades 7-9) and the school division administration building are on the same property as Polson school. I understand the school division does not want to close Polson because it would look bad to close a school on the same land as the administration building, but that means Prince Edward can be closed. Furthermore, Miles Macdonell high school is a block north and east of Prince Edward, which raises the solution: reassignment. convert Prince Edward to an extension of Miles Macdonell.

Throughout this school division: East Transcona is fine, it doesn't need any change. The former River East school division never did move grade 9 to high school or grade 6 to middle school, consequently the areas of East Kildonan/North Kildonan, and East Saint Paul including the town of Birds Hill are fine. River East Collegiate is close to capacity, no empty space but not overcrowded either. East Elmwood has a crowding issue with its high school, but Kildonan East is technical/vocational school so reassignment or realignment is not effective. The chairman of school board informed me Kildonan East used to have an even high enrolment, handled by scheduling school in shifts, so it can handle the current load. The only areas that need be addressed are in the previous paragraph.

If the school division wants to save some money, all this means they would only be permitted to close one of the two schools. An alternative is to close one of their two administration buildings. Some people objected to merging River East School Division number 9 and Transcona Springfield School Division number 12, but it's done now. If the school division or the province wants to realize a cost reduction from this, then close one of the administration buildings. The former Transcona Springfield administration building is currently being used for student services. Although I can personally attest to the need for student services, it doesn't have to be housed there. When I was a child, student services used rooms in schools; for example, a student councillor meet elementary students in offices in Transcona Collegiate. If there is space in some schools that isn't utilized, move student services there. Sale of an administration building is most effective since that building is already configured for office space. It can be used for commercial offices.

So this comes back to Bill 28. I applaud the requirement for ministerial approval, the clauses addressing travel times, and the use of school buildings for appropriate community purposes. However, I am concerned about section 7 of this act, which repeals "subsections 41(1.2), (1.3) and (1.4) of The Public Schools Act, as enacted by section 2 of this Act". Does this mean the act repeals itself? Does this mean that the moratorium is repealed the same day it is enacted, and that the requirement for ministerial approval is also repealed the same day? I am worried it would become a vague list of desires that the school board can blithely ignore. I am relieved the repeal does not include "subsection 41(1.5) of The Public Schools Act, as enacted by section 2 of this Act". My hope is this will prevent closure of the two previously mentioned daycares. But there is no mention of permitting the school board to shift grades 6 and 9 back to elementary school and junior high respectively.

The presentation I wrote for the school board, presented at the public hearing at Westview school, has more detail on this points. That presentation is attached.

Thank you,
Robert B. Dyck

WESTVIEW SCHOOL FACILITIES REVIEW

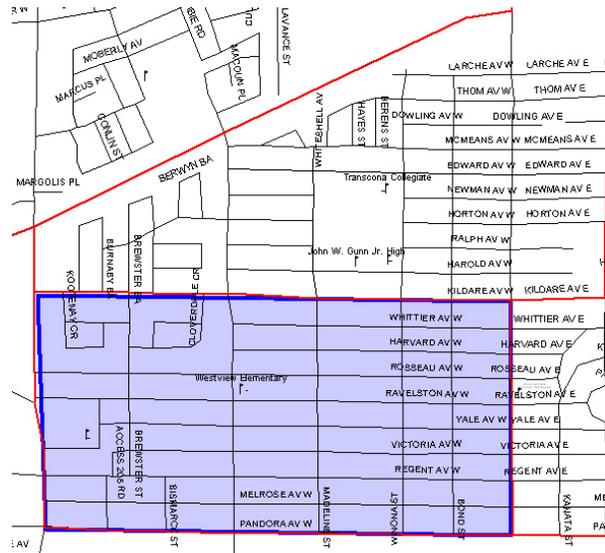
by Robert Dyck

Community member and alumnus of Westview Elementary

Monday, April 14, 2008

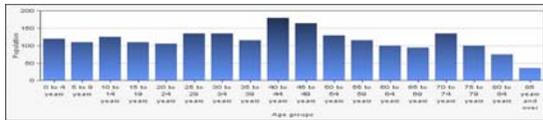
Demographics are changing. West of Hoka St. many residents of the Westview catchment area are the

original residents. I first noticed this in the summer of 2006 when talking to residents of the block where I grew up, Virden Crescent. Parents of the children I grew up with are still there. They're in their 70s now, most will either move into a nursing home or expire from old age. This is a personal anecdote, but what are the demographics? The current catchment area for Westview is the following:



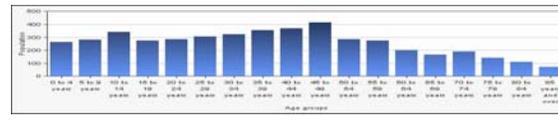
Statistics from the 2006 Census were available from Statistics Canada as of last summer. Statistics including demographics of standard tracts are available free from their web site. Results of a custom area is available but that costs hundreds of dollars. I don't have that money, but the Westview catchment area is contained in 2 tracts. I notice statistics published on websites of the city, province, and school division are from the 2001 census, but the 2006 census is now available. I use the current figures.

Census tract 0121.00 – West of Hoka



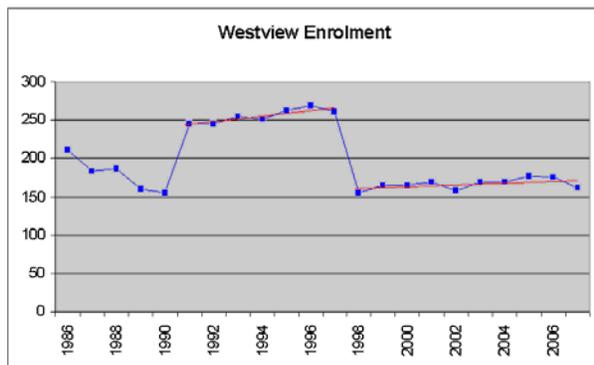
Total population	2,090	
0 to 4 years	120	
5 to 9 years	110	5.26%
10 to 14 years	125	
15 to 19 years	110	
20 to 24 years	105	
25 to 29 years	135	
30 to 34 years	135	
35 to 39 years	115	
40 to 44 years	180	
45 to 49 years	165	
50 to 54 years	130	
55 to 59 years	115	
60 to 64 years	100	
65 to 69 years	95	
70 to 74 years	135	6.46%
75 to 79 years	100	
80 to 84 years	75	
85 years and over	35	
Median age of the population	42.5	
% of the population aged 15 and over	82.8	

Census tract 0122.01 – East of Hoka



Total population	4,655	
0 to 4 years	265	
5 to 9 years	280	6.02%
10 to 14 years	340	
15 to 19 years	275	
20 to 24 years	285	
25 to 29 years	305	
30 to 34 years	325	
35 to 39 years	355	
40 to 44 years	370	
45 to 49 years	415	
50 to 54 years	285	
55 to 59 years	275	
60 to 64 years	200	
65 to 69 years	165	
70 to 74 years	190	4.08%
75 to 79 years	140	
80 to 84 years	110	
85 years and over	70	
Median age of the population	38.5	
% of the population aged 15 and over	81.1	

Is this consistent with historical enrolment figures?



1995: 262

1994: 252

1993: 255

1992: 245

1991: 246

1990: 156

1989: 160

1988: 186

1987: 183

1986: 212

R^2 linear regression trend line shown in red.

Projection for September 2008 is 172 students

Source of enrolment figures for 1986-2006: River East Transcona School Division as provided to me from the provincial finance branch, Capital Facilities. Source of enrolment figure for 2007: school division invitation to the public meeting.

As you can see from these figures, from 1991 to 1997 there was significantly greater enrolment. There must have been a reason for the difference, possibly carrying grade 6 in the elementary school or catchment area redistribution. During that period there was slightly increasing enrolment. During the 1998 to 2006 period there was again slightly increasing enrolment. The enrolment drop in 2007 is similar to the drop in 2002, a statistical anomaly with no significance within the range of these figures. In fact, enrolment in 2005 and 2006 was greater than any year since 1998, and greater than either 1989 or 1990. This reinforces the rising trend.

As for capacity, according to Capital Facilities the school has 33,300 square feet. The rule is 125 square feet per student for middle and senior schools, and 100 square feet for early schools. Using this accepted rule for calculating capacity, Westview has a capacity of 333 students, not 400. That means the $\frac{1}{2}$ enrolment level is 166.5 students. Although enrolment for 2007 is just barely below that level, enrolment for 2003 through 2006 was not.

If you look at year-by-year enrolment for the last few years, the numbers show random fluctuations with

no general decreasing trend. In fact if you follow one class through the grades, enrolment fluctuates.

	K	1	2	3	4	5
2007:	22	22	31	28	32	26
2006:	24	28	28	31	24	40
2005:	27	28	32	22	35	33
2004:	28	32	22	33	31	23
2003:	35	21	37	30	24	23
2002:	22	34	25	25	20	32
2001:	36	26	25	20	30	32
2000:	24	26	24	33	34	23

Another question is why grade 6 was removed from elementary school? Transcona Collegiate now handles S1-S4, John W. Gunn middle school has 6-9, and the area early schools have K-5. This means grade 9 was shifted to TCI to support that school, grade 6 was shifted to maintain middle school, and early schools enrolment suffered. If the grades were shifted back Westview enrolment would rise 24 to 40 students.

New service requirements

The general capacity rule of thumb does not take into account modern requirements. One of the former classrooms has been converted into a computer lab. If computers were spread evenly over classrooms instead of concentrated in a lab, that would decrease the capacity of each classroom, resulting in an equal reduction of school capacity. The reality is schools just need more room today.

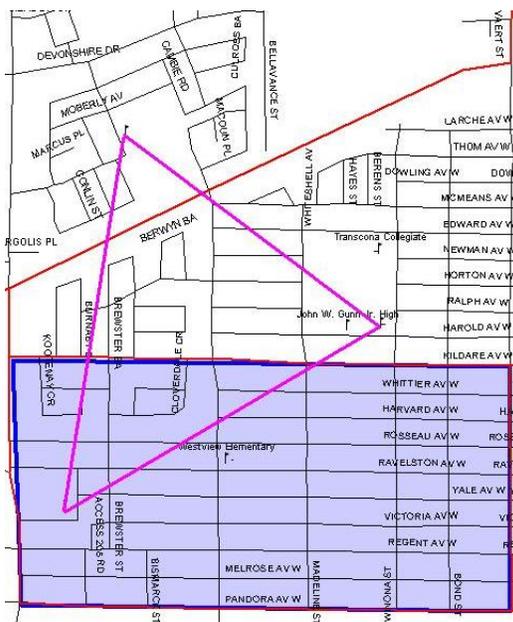
In 1970 when the new gym was constructed, rooms were added for kindergarten. Previously kindergarten was taught in the Lutheran church on Kildare Ave. Now that grade 6 has moved out, kindergarten has moved into a regular classroom. The purpose-built kindergarten rooms are now used for daycare. Calculations of school capacity would have to either subtract area for daycare space, or add children enrolled in daycare. Daycare alone pushes Westview enrolment over the $\frac{1}{2}$ capacity mark.

Nursery school

Jon Gerrard, leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, emphasizes the need for early learning. His rationale is other countries, especially in South America, have instituted early learning. In Canada education for that age is called nursery school. Manitoba currently has nursery school at Winnipeg School Division #1 only,

but if Jon Gerrard gets his way it will exist throughout all school divisions in the province. Elementary schools in River East Transcona will need the extra class rooms, so the capacity of Westview is required.

Geographic placement



When planning divisional schools, one consideration is geographic placement. Westview elementary is within walking distance of Radisson Elementary. Most but not all students within Westview's catchment area are within walking distance of Radisson, leading to an accusation that Westview is redundant. In fact an equidistant distribution of elementary schools would be the separation of Radisson, Joseph Teres, and Regent Park. However, Regent Park is a middle school and it's French immersion. You could swap the functions of Regent Park and Westview, but then Westview would be close to John W. Gunn. Would that serve any useful purpose? Middle school tends to have lockers and a larger gymnasium; would facilities be compatible for a swap?

Although my conclusion is to leave well enough alone, it was necessary to explore this issue.

Small neighbourhood schools

A healthy community, but in terms of neighbourhoods and the school body, requires a student body small enough that all students of the same grade can know each other. Furthermore early

and middle schools must be within walking distance of their homes. Bussing separates schools from homes. Schools must be a focus for the community. This means a large number of small schools is better than a small number of large schools. Huge schools like River East Collegiate may work for senior high, but not for elementary. Furthermore some Westview students live more than 10 blocks from Radisson, requiring bussing. That will increase transport expense, it will not be cost neutral.

Wheelchair accessibility

Westview is wheelchair accessible, Radisson is not. In fact there are special needs students bussed to Westview; these students could not be served by Radisson unless it had major upgrades.

Kildonan Green



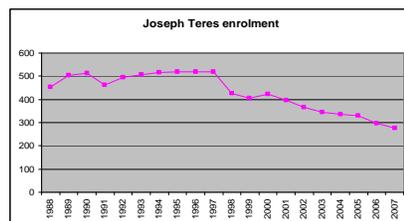
The real kicker in all this is construction of a new housing development. Construction for Kildonan Green has already begun. Kildonan Green is west of Plessis, north of Devonshire. There is no land allocated for construction of a new school, so Westview cannot be replaced with a school in the new development. This development has 400 lots in for phase I, with 90 properties released this year. Genstar expects a full slate of display homes for spring 2008 Parade of Homes. When complete there will be a total of 430 homes.

Joseph Teres is the closest school to Kildonan Green and it doesn't have capacity for the expected number of students. Real estate agents are counting on Westview to handle the overflow, to serve the students of their clients. Westview is the next closest, and Radisson is the only other school anywhere close. Radisson could not possibly handle students from Westview, its current students, and those from Kildonan Green. Furthermore, enrolment figures from Joseph Teres demonstrates enrolment trend from a new development; it opened 1988. Elementary school enrolment starts high and declines

as children of original residents move on to middle and senior school. Using the department's formula for capacity, Joseph Teres can handle 500 students, or 225 more than current enrolment. Joseph Teres doesn't have capacity to handle the influx from a brand new development.

Joseph Teres enrolment

1988:	453
1989:	505
1990:	512
1991:	463
1992:	494
1993:	507
1994:	517
1995:	518
1996:	520
1997:	519
1998:	425
1999:	404
2000:	423
2001:	397
2002:	367
2003:	345
2004:	335
2005:	330
2006:	296
2007:	275



Source: Manitoba Education School Enrolment Reports, provincial finance branch, Capital Facilities, school principal.

Building in great shape

I was there when students were first admitted into the new gym in September 1970. The basketball hoops, climbing net, and climbing bars are still there and in the same condition I remember. There are new plastic clips on the net, and the plastic baseboards have some chipping, but the walls are in new shape. My maternal grandfather built houses for a living, and my father was a steel construction worker until he became a welder for the CN. I have constructed a few buildings with my father and brother, I do know something about construction. This building is in great shape. There is a trough cut in the corridor with a steel cover; this looks like a computer cable conduit. I have run computer cables many times in my career, special purpose cables with dedicated face plates may look nice when they're installed, but

it isn't long before technology makes everything obsolete. I've seen several generations of computer cabling come and go. Fancy installations custom built into a new building only last a couple years before they have to be replaced, resulting in the same setup we see here today. I saw Cisco routers on a wall board, all exposed to student view. This not only makes maintenance easy and effective, it lets students see how it works. It's part of their education.

Addressing concerns raised: the \$1 million of masonry and window work identified in the capital improvement plan is not required. The current exterior does not require maintenance. I know two individuals who work for the engineering firm that did the assessment of Westview, they report that Donna is an electrical designer, not an engineer. That means she is no more qualified to conduct a structural assessment than I. One concern raised by Donna was moisture from masonry causing rot in structural woodwork, due to absence of a moisture barrier. But I was a student of that school in 1972 when class room windows were replaced with stucco panels; I personally witnessed that workmen installed tar paper over the wood sheathing before applying stucco. While work was being done the masonry was exposed, I saw tar paper between the existing masonry and structural wood as well. Tyvek is used today because it is easier and quicker to install, which translates to lower wage expense for workmen, but it does exactly the same job.

As for boiler replacement, get a second opinion. If the goal is to replace it with a high efficiency furnace, compare utility cost savings to capital replacement cost. If equipment replacement is lower over 10 years, then avoiding this capital improvement expense is not a saving. If it's higher then replacement is not justified. The school custodian reports that he himself has maintained the old boiler, and is insulted at the statement it requires replacement.

Student Services Building

The goal of any consolidation is to reduce overhead cost. I'm sure school division administration is under pressure to realize a cost saving from the amalgamation. However, rather than detrimentally impact students, you really have to look at administration. The two school divisions had separate administration buildings before amalgamation; does the division require a second administration building now? The former Transcona-

Springfield administration school division building is now used for student services.

I do have personal experience that demonstrates the need for student services; when I was an elementary student at Westview I excelled in math and science, but did poorly in English. They actually transferred me to remedial class for grade 6. Not surprisingly, I did worse. The remedial teacher tried to get me transferred to a special school for the mentally retarded. My mother had me tested by student services in Winnipeg School Division #1. There was no such service available in Transcona-Springfield at that time. When my IQ came back as an average of 132 (higher in math and science skills), they transferred me back into normal class.

Although this demonstrates the need, it doesn't have to be in that building. When I was president of the community association organization in Elmwood, the city employee who liaised with the association had an office in the River East Transcona administration building. When I visited I noticed another office empty. The city can provide offices for their employees in their own building. School division has room to spare; is there enough to relocate all of Student Services? That is by far preferable.



Harbourview South

A second new housing development is under construction; this one by Qualico. Construction for Harbourview South began in 2006, this development will have another 400 new homes. Fewer than 100 homes were completed last fall, and families have moved into only some of those. The few K-5 elementary students who have moved in are currently being bussed to John de Graff school, across Lagimodiere. School division assistant



superintendent Barb Isaak assured me at the March 4 school board meeting that this is temporary only, students from Harbourview South will be bussed to Joseph Teres school. Does Joseph Teres has capacity for both developments?

Projections

The homes under construction at Harbourview South are similar to Eaglemere and other developments in that area. Homes at Kildonan Green will be average Transcona size homes with a detached garage and back lane. Demographics of new home buyers will not be like those of Prichard Farm Road. The development at Prichard Farm Road is expensive, large homes purchased by established couples with existing families. Those moving into Harbourview South will be similar to Lakeview Meadows. Census Canada 2006 statistics for Lakeview Meadows indicates 1294 dwellings. When that development was first built Joseph Teres had 512 students the third year the school was open. Using that ratio for K-5 students to dwellings, and the fact Harbourview South and Kildonan Green together will have a total of 830 homes, we can expect 328 additional students. That will exceed capacity for Joseph Teres by 103 students.

Just these new housing developments alone will exceed capacity of Joseph Teres; that doesn't take into account renewal of Regent Park by seniors moving out and young couples moving in. Based on the 2006 census, looking at population difference between age groups 70-74 and 75-79 for, a

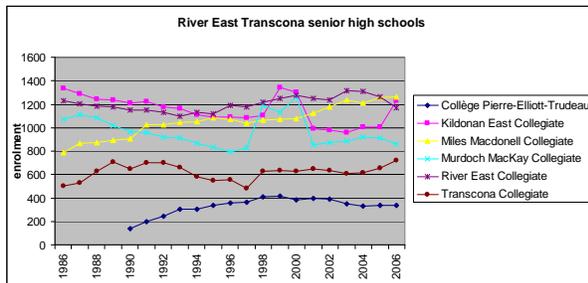
reasonable projection of households changing hands from seniors to young couples will be 47. This increases the number of additional students by 19 to 347. That will exceed capacity for Joseph Teres by 122 students.

If Westview is closed and those students assigned to Radisson, would there be sufficient capacity? Radisson had a total enrolment of 197 students in 2006/07, and Westview has 161 students this year (2007/08). Using R^2 linear regression of enrolment data from 1998 through 2007, projected enrolment for 2008 would be 172 for Westview, and 199 for Radisson; in 2012 it would be 176 for Westview, 169 for Radisson. The consolidated total enrolment for 2012, together with overflow students from Joseph Teres would be 467 students. This will exceed capacity for Radisson as well.

Room for growth

This could be handled by bussing students to Wayaota and across Lagimodier to John de Graff. However, that would reach the limit for all schools in the area, with no room for growth. Again, if Early Learning is introduced throughout the province, there will be no room for Nursery school classes.

Senior High Schools



Another problem is over crowding in senior high schools, while elementary schools are so underutilized that schools are being closed. When one group of schools is overcrowded while another is half-empty, the obvious solution is to shift students. In this case the disparity is in grades, not geographic area. Not all junior high schools in the former River East school division have converted to middle schools, and not all elementary schools have converted from K-6 to K-5; but all in Transcona have. The obvious solution is to shift grade 9 back to junior high schools, and grade 6 back to elementary. This is particularly needed for Transcona Collegiate and Miles Macdonell Collegiate.

At the school board meeting of March 20, trustees stated they requested construction of a new senior

high school in Birds Hill, but the provincial Department of Education denied permission. My understanding is they also require permission to shift grade 9 from senior high school back to junior high.

In fact, Transcona Collegiate is currently using space in Radisson Elementary for theatre. Transcona Collegiate is unable to fit all their programs within their own building, while Radisson is underutilized. However, parents are concerned with exposing elementary age students to adolescent issues they are ill-equipped to handle; such as drugs, gangs, or sexuality. Shifting grades can alleviate overcrowding so each school can fit within their own facilities.

My own family has been affected by crowding in senior high schools. I have two nieces, both of whom will enter grade 9 this September. I can proudly report both are doing well academically, one is entering the Advanced Placement program at Murdoch MacKay Collegiate, while the other applied for the International Baccalaureate program at Miles Macdonell Collegiate. Crowding at Miles Macdonell is such that only students within the catchment area can enrol. Although there are some exceptions, no students from outside the catchment area are permitted in the International Baccalaureate program. My sister had to move, purchasing a house within the catchment area to get her daughter into the I.B. program.

So I am asking the Minister of Education to give permission to the school board of River East Transcona to shuffle grades back: grade 9 to junior high, grade 6 to elementary.

Alternative school review

I hesitate to designate some other school for review, I'm sure the parents of students for that school would object to their school closing, but there is an obvious alternative. As previously stated in this document, Westview elementary has gradually increasing enrolment and two major housing developments under construction in the area. However, other elementary schools have declining enrolment, and fully developed neighbourhoods that not only have no new development under construction, but no land upon which any such development could be built.

There are two elementary schools in Elmwood, both at half enrolment and only two blocks from each other: Prince Edward school and Polson school. Closing one of these and combining their student populations would make more sense than closing Westview school.



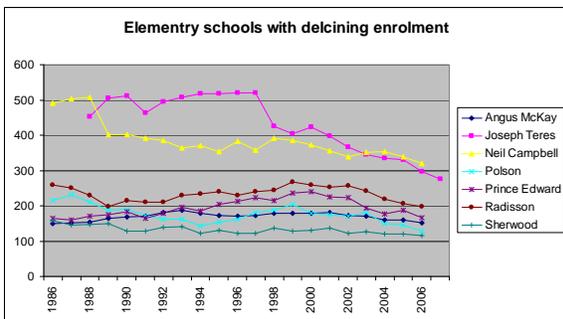
- Miles Macdonell Collegiate
- Prince Edward School
- St. Alphonsus Catholic school, grades 1-8
- RETSD Administration Office
- Munroe Junior High School
- Polson School

	Polson	Prince Edward
1986	214	164
1987	231	161
1988	210	170
1989	188	175
1990	190	184
1991	173	165
1992	162	178
1993	162	196
1994	144	186
1995	153	205
1996	162	213
1997	181	223
1998	187	215
1999	204	235
2000	179	239
2001	174	225
2002	170	223
2003	181	193
2004	149	176
2005	145	188
2006	129	166

Students for Sherwood school, the other one closed, will be served by Hampstead school, not either Polson or Prince Edward.

Reassignment

The rush to close as school may lead some to choose one verses another, but that is not necessary. In fact overcrowding of senior high schools leads to an alternative. As mentioned previously, shifting grades back can relieve crowding of senior high while supporting existing elementary schools. Changing middle schools to junior high would leave the number of grades the same, so their enrolment would be relatively unaffected. This would work well in Transcona because all elementary schools are now K-5, middle schools carry grades 6-8, and senior high 9-12. However, in River East many middle years schools remain junior highs, serving grades 7-9. For example, overcrowding of River East Collegiate has been prevented by retaining Chief Peguis with grades 7-9. John Henderson and Munroe also carry 7-9. John Pritchard is unique by carrying grades K-9. Robert Andrews in East Saint Paul used to carry grades 1-9, but since construction of Birds Hill School to handle elementary years, it is now a junior high carrying grades 7-9. Valley Gardens is the only middle school in the former school division of River East, carrying grades 6-8.



Source: Provincial finance branch, Capital Facilities

Miles Macdonell Collegiate continues to increase enrolment every year. This despite the fact it does not carry grade 9. The obvious solution is to reassign

either Prince Edward or Polson schools to be a senior high school. Elementary school students from one can attend the other.

The obvious solution for west Transcona is grade shifting: Transcona Collegiate to grades 9-12, John W. Gunn to grades 7-9, and Joseph Teres, Radisson and Westview to grades K-6. Again, once early learning is added throughout the province, nursery school will expand elementary to N-6; a total of 8 grades.

Harold Hatcher elementary is not stressed, and Murdoch MacKay Collegiate is not crowded so there is no need to alter these east Transcona schools. Keeping the area consistent would also leave Arthur Day and Wayaota as they are.

One excuse for shifting grades in the first place was introduction of a credit system for grade 9. But there is nothing preventing junior high schools from using the same credit system for that one grade, within the same building.

As mentioned earlier, addition of nursery school will add another grade, bringing elementary schools to N-6 for a total of 8 grades.

Robert Dyck

* * *

Re: Bill 28

INTERLAKE SCHOOL DIVISION
PRESENTATION
TO
THE LAW AMENDMENTS REVIEW
COMMITTEE
ON
BILL 28

THE STRENGTHENING LOCAL SCHOOLS ACT

The Interlake school division is pleased to have this opportunity to address this committee with our concerns about Bill 28, Strengthening Local Schools Act.

Our reservations are many. We understand the noble motivations of this bill but we believe the implications of this act, if passed, will be negatively felt by school divisions and boards for years to come.

School closures are never easy and many hours are already painstakingly undertaken by locally elected officials to thoroughly study a school's viability. Our division has just passed a policy called the "School Facility Review Policy" and we believe it is an

exhaustive process for reviewing our schools. Our jobs as school trustees are to be educated about all information relevant to a decision, not just one side. This bill proposes a consensus among parents and residents of the area. Chances are the information that the community will bring will be very one sided and therefore what chance of consensus is there? In a democratic society, elected officials are tasked with making the "tough" decisions. This bill takes that responsibility out of their hands and lays it firmly in the hands of a biased few, and the minister.

This act proposes that a school board must investigate sharing of its facilities with other community organizations. Daycares are one obvious example and have been done in many communities. However, in small communities the population can be so low that it will be difficult to even find preschool-aged children to attend. The suggestion of seniors groups and other non-profit organizations sharing our building with children can pose a safety issue for our children. Monitoring this and ensuring their safety could be an administrative nightmare. The viability and the cost recovery of this initiative would be very limited.

We have many small schools in our division. We have schools with less than 150 students and high schools with 260 children enrolled. We value those schools and what they can offer to the children. We have no intention of closing those schools. However, when is small too small? When can you no longer afford to provide quality education, especially in this day and age? So much is expected of schools today - special programming, guidance, early literacy initiatives to name a few. Every school is expected to be technologically up to date. At some stage, it becomes cost prohibitive to provide all this variety to the children attending. Is it fair to not fund these schools at the same level as the other schools in the division? Something has got to give. So then is it fair to take away from the other schools in your division, therefore impacting the rest of the student population? In order to keep communities viable, student learning will ultimately suffer.

The issue of bus travel times causes us great concern. As a rural division this would have far reaching affects for us. We have many express routes that service high school students coming from our smaller communities. It cannot be helped that they are on the bus for over an hour. They are first picked up and brought to their local catchment school in less than an hour, however, to travel on further to attend high school they are ultimately on the bus for over an

hour. How can this possibly change? Physically we are not getting smaller but the depopulation of our division is real. We are transporting less and less students. It is costing just as much to run a bus with few students as a full one. Again, our decision making abilities are being impacted because now we will not be able to look for cost efficiencies in this system. How many students are too few to run a bus route? Small buses are just as costly to run as large ones. As well, buses are the safest mode of transportation so the option of car pooling parents opens a whole new set of safety-related concerns as well as liability issues.

The lack of consultation with school boards and MAST is of particular concern to us. School boards have been at the heart of the educational system in this province since the beginning. However, the total disregard of the school boards' role leaves us to wonder about their future. Local autonomy has been eroding in the last few years. What function will we be playing in the education of our children? It is the local school boards who are charged with ensuring quality education to all our students. We know our communities best. When directives and bills are imposed on us our decision-making power is removed. How relevant will school boards be in the future and what kind of individuals will want to serve on them?

We implore you to reconsider this Bill. We do value our small schools and communities and we have always worked to ensure their viability. Our "School Facility Review Policy" mandates us to work closely with communities in our division during the review process, being above-board and honest, and hopefully coming up with reasonable solutions for our at-risk schools. However, at some point we all may have to realize that times change, things change, we are ever-evolving. At the end of the day, the final decision should rest with those individuals who sit together twice each month and who always decide the issues based on what's best for the children. Through the democratic process it should be these people who reach a consensus about what is best for their division.

Valerie Weiss

* * *

Re: Bill 28

I am a resident of Charleswood, specifically Vialoux area or Chapman School catchment of the

Pembina Trails School Division (PTSD). I am also a resident representative of the Chapman School Review Committee. I have lived in this community for the past three years and have noticed an ever increasing change in our neighbourhood. More of the long time residents are 'down sizing' and moving out, while families with young preschool age children are moving in. On my block alone there have been three new families with young children move in in the past two years and that is not including my family of two young children. I understand that the prediction is for continued declining enrolment in schools and therefore changes need to occur to accommodate the change, but I strongly feel that the current process for school closures is flawed for several reasons and needs to be part of the changes taking place.

One is that it appears that historically school divisions tend to pick the smallest schools for closure. Sometimes the reasoning is understandable and as in this case it is not. Enrolment is declining, so why keep open the larger schools? In addition, enrolment is not only declining nationally, but unfortunately even more so for the Chapman School catchment area and why? Some reasons as to why are that since 1995, when Assiniboine South School Division last reviewed Chapman for closure nothing was done by the previous or the current school division to help increase the school's enrolment. Therefore for the past 13 years Chapman School has held over it's head a the dark cloud of 'possible school closure'. This possibility of school closure has been detrimental to the enrolment at Chapman School. I have personally talked to many community members that have children that would love to send their children to Chapman but have not because of the "pending closure". So as a member of the community and a member of the Chapman School Review Committee, I asked the Trustees as to what attempts had been made since the last review to better promote the school to increase it's enrolment? To my surprise, I learned that the PTSD has strict guidelines surrounding the promotion of schools basically making it impossible to promote the school to attract students. This is frustrating, why can a school not promote itself????? So nothing has been done for 13 years to increase the enrolment at Chapman School and to remove the school from the possibility of closure. This is something that needs to change!!!

Secondly, I learned that school divisions that are seeking provincial funding to build new schools

need to show that they have filled the schools up, in other words have 'bums in all the empty seats'. This was something that I struggled to understand about the PTSD actively seeking funding from the Province to build a school in Waverley West, and proposing to close a school. Sounds like a contradiction to me, but if the PTSD is needing a new school, then do a strategic realignment of existing buildings. The PTSD states that their high schools are overflowing and the elementary schools are declining in enrolment. So let's do a strategic realignment of existing buildings and accomplish three goals. The first one of filling the empty east in existing buildings with the overflow from high schools. Which will also help accomplish the second goal of combating the declining enrolment in K to 6 grades by moving them into smaller capacity buildings, and last but not least the PTSD will get the sought after funding to build a new school in Waverley West because it has fulfilled the provincial mandate of filling empty seats.

So why are we closing small schools when enrolment is decreasing? Would it not make more sense to close a larger school, keep a smaller school open and therefore filling the empty seats and thus accomplishing the goal required for seeking provincial funding to build a new school. Even this thought of building a new school, while actively seeking to close schools makes no sense. So the question was asked by the parents and residents of the Chapman School Review Committee if a strategic review of all school within the PTSD had been done. Which the reply was **NO** due to the large scale and scope of such a review. Maybe, I just have a simplistic view, but would not the PTSD first conduct a strategic review of it's division to determine which route(s) may be the better way to go? The PTSD informs me that their high schools are overflowing, but that the k to 6 schools are facing declining enrolment. So what about shuffling around some of the 7 to 12 grades to other schools that have been either a junior or senior high school in the past but are now a k to 6 school and possibly move the k to 6 grades to another school? A specific example that comes to mind is in my immediate neighbourhood there are three elementary schools (k-6), Chapman which can host 225 students, Royal School which is just under a mile away from Chapman can host 550 students and then Pacific Junction which is about a mile away from Royal School and can host 440 students. Now from statistical information that has been provided by the PTSD the projected enrolment for 2010 in East

Charleswood (Pacific Junction, Royal, and Chapman catchments) to K to 6 is under 500 children. The previous school division suggested that the optimal utilization of schools is at 85% use. Using this benchmark, the optimal scenario for East Charleswood would be to utilize Pacific Junction and Chapman School as the K to 6 schools for East Charleswood and reconfigure Royal School for other use. E.g. Middle School or High School which is has been in the past.

- Royal + Pacific Junction = 950 capacity (49% to 66% use)
- Royal alone = 550 capacity (86% to 115% use)
- Pacific Junction = 625 capacity to (75% to 86% use)

Thirdly, I feel that the current formulas used by the PTSD to determine funding for schools needs to be adjusted to accommodate the future trend of decreasing enrolment so that the staff at schools such as Chapman do not feel the limitations that they currently feel due to low enrolment. Which leads me into the funding that follows a student from out of division to their school of choice, this area is not my forte in explaining, but I feel needs to be looked at with the current trend of children choosing to attend a school of choice, particularly those students that attend schools from out of their division. Another area to look at is Day Care that are in the immediate vicinity of k to 6 schools. Many parents choose to send their children to these day cares due to their proximity to a k to 6 school, can the school of choice policy be amended to have children that attend day cares in the vicinity of a k to 6 school be made their catchment school? Or something along those lines?

In conclusion, I had joined the Chapman Review Committee to make an informed decision about the future of our community school. After many hours of personal time, research, meetings and speaking with the community all in an attempt to understand the forces driving the PTSD towards closing Chapman, I have suspended my participation in the process because of concern over the legitimacy of the School Review Process, the constant rejection of ideas/suggestions there were proposed by the community, the feeling of being a 'pawn' so that the PTSD could complete their school closure mandate. To this date I have received no further contact from the PTSD to re-engage discussions and a report from the Chapman School Committee was submitted

without final input from four members of the committee that had suspended or resigned in participation. I thank you for taking the time to consider the outlined points above and fully support the proposed Bill 28. Please keep me informed as to what the next steps are and what participation I may be able to have as a member of the community.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Stefanec
Resident Representative of the Chapman School
Review Committee

* * *

Re: Bill 28

At our meeting of May 22, 2008, the Board of Trustees of the Portage la Prairie School Division discussed Bill 28, The Strengthening Local School Boards Act.

Current provincial guidelines for school closure detail a very specific process that is required in order to close a school. It is a lengthy process that involves public meetings, input from stakeholders and detailed rationalization.

The depopulation of many rural communities has forced boards to study the viability of small schools for both quality of education and financial reasons.

The Portage la Prairie School Division has followed the guideline in closing four unviable schools over the last 10 years, three rural and one urban. In all cases, there were financial savings to the Province and an improved level of educational offerings made available to the students.

Bill 28 limits the ability of school boards to both provide the best possible educational opportunities to all students and to prudently manage the tax dollars derived from the community and province. The board appreciates the intent of the proposal in attempting to protect small schools, but asks that the government reconsider this bill and its implications.

Yours truly,
Charles Morrison
Board Chair

* * *

Re: Bill 28

At a meeting held June 2, 2008, the board of trustees expressed several concerns regarding Bill

28, The Strengthening Local Schools Act (Public Schools Act Amended).

Although the Winnipeg School Division is not directly impacted by the regulations of this bill at this time, there are aspects of the bill that cause us concern for future planning and being able to respond to conditions of declining enrolment in a fiscally responsible manner that our division encounters each year.

We are concerned that this legislation would effectively disallow the closing of any school in the foreseeable future and would place limits on the time transported students could be required to spend on the buses.

The mandate of a school division is to provide the best educational services for the students in its care. The criteria for school closure should be based first and foremost on the impact on these educational services to the students under review and the ability to continue to provide equal and equitable quality of services without the infusion of significant additional resources.

If enacted, these legislative provisions will create new fiscal demands that will detract from school boards' ability to concentrate resources on programs and services for students and have a negative impact on a school board's ability to manage its affairs.

The proposed bill also provides that the minister may allow a school to close if he or she is satisfied that a school board has made reasonable efforts to expand the use of the building for appropriate community purposes. The division already provides every opportunity to communities for the use of surplus space at a reasonable cost. However, there is concern that the potential costs associated with required renovations and the operation and maintenance exceed the financial abilities of most day cares. Where lease payments do generate a profit for school divisions, section 174 of The Public Schools Act provides that provincial operating grants may be reduced to compensate for any such increased revenue. Without a change in this section of the Public Schools Act, there would be no advantage to a school division to increase the costs of leasing to daycares.

In addition, the division may find it necessary to make improvements in the facility that are required by law but not funded by the province. Where there is a shortage of day care spaces, the shortage has

more to do with a lack of staff and funds than a lack of physical space. This will not be rectified by the proposed legislation.

With regard to the section of the proposed legislation related to extended travel times, a school division may have students who do travel on the bus for over 60 minutes. There is a concern that legislation meant to address school closures could be used inadvertently to pressure school divisions to purchase more buses and thus divert dollars for education to transportation services.

The Winnipeg School Division would strongly encourage the government to reconsider this bill and consult with elected school board officials on the implications of this bill prior to enacting this legislation to ensure that it does not weaken the authority of the local school boards and the communities they represent.

Kristine K. Barr

Board Chair

The Winnipeg School Division

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>