

# Education – K–12

## Key Challenges Now Facing Manitoba’s K–12 Public Education System

The Manitoba K–12 Public Education System, as of the current year, supports more than 190,000 students in roughly 700 public schools across the province. Over the past ten years, provincial public school enrolment has risen by more than 10,000 with most of that growth coming in just the past three or four years. Moreover, The Manitoba Teachers’ Society’s (MTS) projections call for sustained if not accelerating enrolment growth through the coming decade.

The responsibility of appropriately funding such growth requires long-term vision and commitment on the part of the provincial government along with educators province-wide. It is in every sense a most profound investment in our collective future.

With its three-year freeze on Operating Fund Revenue, the provincial government has stepped away from meeting its moral and constitutional responsibility to properly fund Manitoba’s fast growing public education system. More and more students are being served with fewer and fewer resources per child as government funding loses ground each year to inflation and enrolment growth.

Given significant inequities in wealth and income across Manitoba society, these effective cuts to school operating funding have had a corrosive effect on measures to mitigate unmet student needs. The loss of the K-3 class size initiative is a case in point. We would argue in fact, that gains previously made have been lost and the classroom situation is worsening.

## Funding Manitoba’s K–12 Public Education System

For 2018–19, the Financial Reporting and Accounting in Manitoba Education (FRAME) Operating Fund stood at \$2,431.9 billion. Of this, \$1,454.9 billion was received from the province. This amounted to 59.8 per cent of total operating fund revenue. The audited FRAME statement for the preceding year also reflected a provincial share of less than 60 per cent, a level we hadn’t seen since 2003–04.

We estimate the provincial contribution for the current year to have fallen further to less than 59 per cent. The trend is as clear as it is disturbing. For comparison sake, in the 2015–16 school year, the last year of the previous government’s tenure, the figure was 63.6 per cent.

Please note that the operating fund does not include Provincial Capital Grant Funding for such things as new schools. It focuses rather on the cost of operating Manitoba's K–12 Public Education System.

#### Restoration of Province's Share of K–12 Education Operating Funding

The APB reinvests in the K–12 Public School System, restoring provincial support for operating schools to at least the level/proportion previously noted. This would require a \$135–\$140 million investment over 4 years. This would allow for enhanced supports for Special Needs programming and Newcomer supports (see APB chapter on Newcomers).

*Increased Operating Expenditure year one: \$35M*

#### Sustainable Annual Funding Growth

With provincial support for the K–12 Public School System restored to former levels, predictable and sustained annual funding growth is key. Given strong student enrolment growth now approaching one per cent per annum and inflation typically running two per cent per year, a roughly three per cent increase in operating fund revenue is essential if resources per student are to be maintained. Anything below this, the system is losing ground on a per pupil basis. The increase in provincial support would amount to \$45–50 million per year.

*New Expenditure: \$45M*

#### Class Size and Composition

In addition to restoring funding lost over the past few years and providing sustainable annual funding growth on a go forward basis, the APB reinstates the cap on class sizes for students in Kindergarten to Grade three. This is to help ensure that teachers are able to give our youngest students the individualized attention they need to enhance their educational outcomes.

Starting in 2012–13, the K-3 Class Size Initiative saw the Manitoba Government commit up to \$20 million in operational funding. It also promised up to \$85 million in capital funding for additional classroom spaces. Adjusting these figures to reflect inflation and observed K-3 enrolment growth the APB provides \$25 million in additional operating funding and \$110 million in new capital to be rolled out over the four years of the government's current mandate. This is over and above the government's recently announced school construction commitment.

The rationale for additional construction dollars turns on observed enrolment growth of roughly 1,700 per year the last four years. Speaking to the government's own commitment, the Premier indicated that it would remove 11,000 students from being forced to use portables, a laudable goal which the APB supports. However, as current demographic trends suggest, enrolment growth over the ten-year span cited may well be in the range of 15,000 to 17,000. The planned building program is not enough to house anticipated increase in enrolment let alone address the space requirements of smaller K-3 class sizes.

*Increased Capital Expenditure – year 1: \$27.5M*

*Increased Operating Expenditure – year 1: \$6.25M*

#### Poverty – Establishment of a Universal Meal Program

As demonstrated above, meaningful budgetary measures are necessary in a number of key areas. The Manitoba Teachers' Society's (MTS) recommendations contained in its submission to the Province's K–12 Education Review placed taking meaningful and concrete action to mitigate student poverty among the most important. The APB establishes a universal meal program for all school-age children in the province. The program will be available for any school-age student at no cost to the student regardless of perceived need.

## Background

Existing nutrition/meal programs now operating in schools across Manitoba are often partial, oversubscribed or non-existent. Large segments of the province have absolutely nothing formal in place, often relying solely on the generosity of teachers and other staff reaching into their own pockets provide what they can. A recent MTS survey of teachers showed almost 25 per cent spent their own money to feed kids.

It is unacceptable in this day and age that many Manitoba students are food-insecure and are frequently going hungry (see the APB section on Food Security for more). As such, The Manitoba Teachers' Society advocates a province-wide funding approach to replace the current ad hoc/charitable funding model that's now covers only parts of Manitoba.

To illustrate, during the 2018–19 school year, the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM), the largest organization involved in school nutrition programs province-wide, were actively supporting programs in 271 schools. In their words “the programs provided 30,500 school age students with consistent, healthy snacks and meals during the school day.” Breakfast Club of Canada and President's Choice: Breakfast for Learning also collectively support some nutrition programs in another 30 to 40 schools.

While this is incredibly important work, as was noted earlier, there are roughly 700 public schools across Manitoba. If one subscribes, as the APB does, that poverty and food insecurity are to be found in all areas of the province, the obvious implication is that there remains enormous unmet student need in many locales.

## Existing Programming and Associated Costs

According to their figures, current Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) grants to school nutrition programs have fallen from 18 per cent of calculated food costs in 2016–17 to just over 10 per cent in the 2019–20 school year. As of 2018–19, calculated food costs were \$8,578,156.

CNCM grants were \$1,009,840. Total requests from programs amounted to \$2,434,674.

CNCM data also shows that program offerings vary greatly in many of the schools they operate in. In some, a breakfast program is offered. In others, only snacks are available. In still others, breakfast, a snack and lunch are all provided to those students who desire them. The CNCM's calculated food cost estimate cited reflects these very significant variations in what is provided in different schools. If all of them provided breakfast, snacks and lunches the food cost cited would essential double but of course there limits to what a charity-reliant model can deliver.

## Establishing a Real Province-Wide Program – Cost Implications

As a first step in working towards a cost estimate for such a program, the APB starts with some basic assumptions relating to student enrolment, the school year, the average daily cost per pupil and ultimately student uptake i.e. the proportion of students who use it on average. Here we start with the following assumptions to establish a cost estimate for just food. They are

1. Average Cost of food per student per day \$5 for snack, breakfast and lunch depending on age category. Little ones eat less; older ones more.
2. All 190,000 K–12 public school students use it (Unrealistically high estimate for sake of establishing an upper-bound)
3. Students can access this 190 days per year

On this basis, if all students participated the Total Food Cost Estimate (TFCE) would be \$5 x 190,000 students x 190 days = \$180.5M yearly.

Obvious considerations which substantially lower the cost of the program include normal student absentee rates and overall percentage of student uptake. We know that there will be students who choose not to take advantage of the program daily. Under models now in use, chari-

table donations now defray a significant amount of the overall food cost.

A quick look at data from CNCM suggests about a 50 per cent student uptake in the meal programs they help support. If one includes snacks the uptake for which is typically reported as 100 per cent. This inflates the uptake figure we believe. It is of no surprise that student uptake differs according to meal type. We believe that a more realistic total student uptake figure for a comprehensive meals program (i.e. breakfast, snack and lunch) would possibly run as high as a third of the student body. Using this to calculate an initial Total Food Cost Estimate, we get  $\$5 \times 63,333 \text{ students} \times 190 \text{ days} = \$60.166\text{M}$  yearly.

The potential need for hiring staff to deliver such programs needs to be explored i.e. so that assumption isn't immediately that teachers will do it.

As mentioned, under models now in use, charitable donations defray a significant amount of the overall costs. Whether such support can be leveraged further across the province with greater government assistance is unknown. What is known is that large areas of Manitoba have no current nutrition programs. The APB argues that the Manitoba government can and should provide school-aged children in need what charity cannot.

A universal meal program will be rolled out to all areas of the province. Meal offerings will include breakfast, a snack and lunch where need warranted. To establish such a program, the APB invests \$15 million in year one to be followed by increases of \$5 million per year thereafter until the stated goals are met. The figures cited may require adjusting if efforts to leverage resources

through, for example, charitable partnerships province-wide are more or less successful.

*Increased Operating Expenditure: \$15M*

### Summary and Concluding Remarks

This section of APB has focused on four key areas requiring the investment of significant new resources over the government's four year term. These are:

1. The restoration of the provincial share of funding for Manitoba's K-12 Public Education System to former levels
2. The commitment by the provincial government to provide sustainable annual funding growth in line with enrolment growth and inflation
3. Reinstating the K-3 Class Size enrolment cap
4. The establishment of a Universal Meal Program

The collective year one investment for the four areas cited above would require a provincial commitment as summarized below:

### Total New Operating Expenditure:

*Restoration of lost funding: \$35M*

*Sustaining operating funds: \$45M*

*Covering costs to cover inflation and increased K-3 enrolment re:*

*Expansion of class space: \$6.25M*

*Province-wide universal meal program: \$15M*

*Total: \$101.25*

### **Total New Capital Expenditure:**

*Investment in new classroom space \$27.5M*