



Annual Board Advocacy Plan for 2015-2016

Background:

In the spring of 2014, the Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Board ratified a renewed policy framework for the school division. As part of the policy renewal process, the Board committed to developing an annual advocacy plan which is to be reviewed and renewed on an annual basis.

Purpose:

The Board and individual trustees represent and promote the best interests of students through their interactions with families, the public, the media, community partners, provincial organizations and with government. It is the responsibility of the Board of Education to act as an advocate for students, to continually enhance their experiences, opportunities and wellbeing within the context and mandate of *the Education Act, 1995*. Ultimately, the purpose of advocacy is to influence education policy and to seek to secure sufficient resources in order to meet local student needs identified by the Board of Education. Effective advocacy depends on consistency and persistence, as well as engaging others.

The underlying assumption of the Board Advocacy Plan development process is that the Board plan should complement the existing strategic direction of the Board. It should outline focussed and specific actions that the Board can take to actualize the stated goals that have already been committed to in the Board's strategic planning and guiding documents.

Strategic Advocacy:

In April of 2014, the Board of Education approved a renewed version of the Three Year Strategic Plan (2014-2017). Through planned collective and individual advocacy efforts and through the actualization of The Board Advocacy Plan (2015-2016), the Board's work will support progress towards stated goals in the Three Year Plan.

<http://www.srsd119.ca/publicationsfiles/SRPSD%20Strategic%20Plan%202014-2017.pdf>

Process:

During the September 21st and October 5th meetings of the Board, trustees reviewed the 2014-2015 plan and provided input into its renewal. Their collective feedback forms the basis of the 2015-2016 plan. The Board will review and approve the draft plan in October and revisit the Advocacy Plan in November of 2015 and again in March of 2016, as indicated on the Board Annual Work Plan.

2015-2016 Board Advocacy Plan

The Board identified four priorities areas on which to focus advocacy efforts for the 2015-2016 school year:

- 1. Academic Enrichment**
- 2. Vulnerable Students**
- 3. Facilities Renewal**
- 4. Public Relations and Communications**

1. Academic Enrichment:

The Board of Education is committed to recognizing, enhancing and promoting academic enrichment opportunities in the school division and will continue to advocate for programs and resources that will enrich the academic experience of students.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board promote the school division's current and future plans to offer dual credit course offerings, industry-specific training opportunities, program enhancement initiatives and strong academics.
- That the Board continue to monitor the development of academic enrichment programs, generally, and the development of an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, specifically.
- That the Board continue to support, promote and monitor the Program Enhancement Grant program.
- That the Board actively advocate (locally and provincially) for resources that support the development of enrichment-specific programs.
- That the Board engage post-secondary institution(s) at planned linkage meetings for the purposes of promoting dual credit programs and innovative partnerships that have a positive impact on student learning (i.e. University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina and/or Saskatchewan Polytechnic).

2. Vulnerable Students:

Funding adequacy continues to be a primary concern of the Board of Education, especially as it relates to supporting vulnerable students. The school division has an inordinate number of students and families that are vulnerable. Striving to meet the complex needs of vulnerable students places extra demands on the school division budget, which is not always recognized through provincial funding distribution. The Board affirms the need to continue to advocate for adequate resources for students with vulnerabilities in order to meet bold provincial and locally determined targets around student learning.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board continue to share information relating to vulnerable student demographics and associated impacts on student learning and the school division budget at planned linkage meetings throughout the year.
- That the Board continue to promote the success of programs that are having a positive impact on the learning and futures of vulnerable students.
- That the Board raise awareness at the provincial level about the impacts of student transiency and advocate for a provincial strategy to address and mitigate the effects of student transiency on learning.
- That the Board continue to advocate for sufficient funding for vulnerable students at the provincial level and raise awareness with SSBA Executive and membership at provincial events.
- That the Board continue to advocate for a review of funding distribution weightings and factors that impact the division's capacity to actualize provincial and local strategic plans relating to vulnerable students.

3. Facilities Renewal

The school division has a number of schools that are in significant need of renovation or replacement. Some schools are over-capacity and require portable classrooms. The Board's 2013 Facilities Report provides a comprehensive set of actions for renewing infrastructure in the school division. To actualize this plan requires significant advocacy. The capacity of Boards of Education to access capital funding and renew infrastructure in rural schools and schools with declining student enrolment is significantly limited by the terms and conditions laid out in the Education Regulations, 1986. Space utilization weightings disadvantage schools that currently need portable classrooms and rural school capital infrastructure renewal, generally.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board continue to advocate for a Ministerial review of Section 95.8 of the Education Regulations, 1986 as they relate to school review, enrolment thresholds and the geographical proximity of schools.
- That the Board continue to publicly recognize the strong stewardship of the school division's facilities and maintenance record and advocate for preventative maintenance funding.
- That the Board continue to advocate locally and provincially for a provincial capital infrastructure renewal plan that recognizes the unique context of rural schools.
- That the Board of Education continue to address the need for relocatable classrooms in the school division and advocate for a suitable solution.
- That the Board continue to act on the recommendations of the 2013 Facilities Review Report.
- That the Board use rural schools to host future engagement meetings with Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the Minister of Education and/or government officials, and local/municipal governments.

- That the Board meet with Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) Executive to share concerns about the provincial infrastructure backlog, the prioritization process for capital projects and the need for a rural schools renewal plan.

4. Public Relations and Communications:

The Board of Education affirmed the importance of improving public relations and stressed the need to enhance positive public relations. Positive public relations and the promotion of the Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division's culture of excellence is seen by the Board as an integral part of advocating for students. Effective advocacy is contingent on the Board's capacity for strategic communications and developing a robust and positive public relations presence. It also requires the right tools.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board maintain a strong radio and media presence in order to publicly promote student achievements with a strong emphasis on academics and students achieving at high levels.
- That the Board continue to support and promote the welcoming culture of Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division schools.
- That the Board publicly recognize and highlight the achievements of all Governor General Award Winners in the graduating class of 2016.
- That the Board continue to monitor and provide input into the division's communications planning as part of the annual Communications Accountability Report presentation (i.e. website renewal) and as part of the Budget development cycle (i.e. staffing).

Additionally, the following issues may be addressed by individual trustees or by special committee or on an ad hoc basis, as needed:

- 5. GLBTQ Students & Staff**
- 6. Student Voice**
- 7. Ministry Relations**
- 8. Charitable Foundation**

5. GLBTQ Students

The experiences of GLBTQ students in school systems have been a topic of interest to some Board members at National events over the last 2 years and more recently as a result of Ministerial interest.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board advocate for sufficient resources and direction from the Ministry of Education to build capacity in our schools to support students and staff that identify as GLBTQ.

- That the Board research education policy and available supports and resources for sexual minority students and bring back a research report, with recommendations, to the Board.

6. Student Voice

The Board of Education continues to champion the involvement of student leaders in education governance.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board continue to promote and monitor the activities of the Saskatchewan Rivers Students for Change (SRSC) group by way of committee.
- That the Board share the successful development of the SRSC group locally, with the SSBA and with other trustees from around the province.
- In the future, consider the merits of proposing a resolution at the SSBA that would call for legislative changes and, ultimately, allow for full implementation of a student trustee initiative.

7. Ministry Relations:

The Board of Education places high value on maintaining strong relationships with the Ministry of Education and seeking out opportunities to engage directly with the Minister or Ministry of Education on educational matters.

Proposed Actions:

- That the Board seek out formal and informal opportunities to work jointly with the Minister of Education and/or Ministry of Education officials.
- That the Board host the Deputy Minister of Education in the school division.
- That the Board invite the Minister of Education to visit school(s) that have been identified by the Board as being high priority for major renovation or replacement.

8. Charitable Foundation and Scholarship Fund:

Recognizing that an important function of the Board of Education is to seek to secure sufficient resources in order to meet local student needs in an overall context of fiscal restraint, the Board of Education is in the process of formalizing a SRPSD Charitable Foundation.

Proposed Actions:

- That the work of the Charitable Foundation continue to be overseen by a joint Board/Administrative Committee and that the Committee provide regular updates and recommendations to the Board, as needed.