

## **2023-2024 Board Advocacy Plan**

### **Background:**

As part of the policy renewal process, the Board committed to developing an annual advocacy plan which is to be reviewed periodically and renewed on an annual basis. It is the responsibility of the Vice-Chair to lead the process of drafting and presenting the Board advocacy plan for the coming year and updating the Board regularly on progress (Policy 6.8).

### **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 various levels of 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 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 effective engagement.

The Board Advocacy Plan complements the existing Strategic Plan of the Board. It outlines general and specific actions that the Board can take to actualize the stated goals from the Board's strategic planning and guiding documents.

### **Process:**

In June or August each year, the Board reviews the recent Advocacy Plan and has the opportunity to provide input into its renewal. Trustees' feedback forms the basis of the current plan, and there are opportunities throughout the year to provide further input into advocacy. The plan is revisited in November and again in March of each year, or as otherwise determined by the Board through its Annual Work Plan.

### **Long Term Goal Areas:**

The Board identified areas for advocacy efforts align with the focus areas of the Strategic Plan. Advocacy in these areas (see details in Appendix A) occur as a matter of course in interactions with others and when opportunities present. The short-and medium-term goals and actions are outlined on the next pages.

- 1. Learning and Innovation**
- 2. Inclusion and Cultural Responsiveness**
- 3. Mental Health and Wellbeing**
- 4. Citizenship and Relationships**
- 5. Governance and Leadership**

## **Short Term Advocacy Targets (October 2023 to August 2024):**

### **1. Secure new and sufficient funding to implement the new Provincial Education Plan**

#### Actions/Activities

- (a) Meet with MLAs and Minister of Education to share concerns and request supports to support students in recovery from learning interrupted by COVID and specifically request sufficient funding to implement the new Provincial Education Plan.
- (b) Engage with School Community Councils (SCCs) and parents to ensure they are informed and encouraged to advocate for additional funding to implement the PEP.

### **2. Eliminate Grade 12 provincial examinations (departmental exams)**

#### Actions/Activities

- (a) Request administration to acquire data (fiscal, academic, or other) that supports the goal of elimination.
- (b) Seek support from other school boards, SCCs, Prince Albert and Area Teachers' Association and other organizations (providing rationale/data suggest actions they can take).
- (c) Meet with MLAs and Minister of Education to provide rationale/data and encouragement to end departmental exams in their current format.

### **3. Develop plans for the end of sexual violence in schools.**

#### Actions/Activities

- (a) Identify board development activities to enhance Board understanding of sexual violence, consent education and related topics.
- (b) Request Ministry of Education include stronger curriculum content that promotes healthy behaviours and prevents sexual violence, especially in the absence of this content after grade 10.
- (c) Follow the actions started by the Ministry of Education regarding "pronouns and preferred names". The results will guide the Board's actions.

#### Several of these seven activities will be pursued through three common actions:

- 1) Focused engagement with School Community Councils.
- 2) Meeting with local Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs).
- 3) Meeting with Minister of Education.

## **Medium Term Advocacy Priorities (12 – 24 Months)**

These areas will be monitored over this school year and the next and actions will be taken as opportunities present themselves. When the Board reviews its Advocacy Plan in October 2023, short term actions will likely emerge from the following items for the school year:

### **1. Learning and Innovation Targets**

#### **1.1. Secure sustainable funding or in-kind support for SRPSD indigenous language programs.**

##### Actions/Activities:

- (a) Meet with Minister of Education to promote and celebrate our current language programs and promote plan for future.
- (b) Explore partnerships First Nations and Métis and post-secondary organizations
- (c) Identify and communicate with potential corporate sponsors.
- (d) Locate and access federal or international funding programs that support indigenous language programs.

#### **1.2. Use Federal, Provincial and local partnerships and innovations to enhance Early Learning opportunities.**

##### Actions/Activities

- (a) Request the use of Federal allocation to develop a pilot program that provides childcare and provincially funded Pre-K program on alternate days.
- (b) Develop support from other school boards and submit an SSBA resolution to request Minister make full-time Kindergarten mandatory and provincially funded.
- (c) Meet with the Minister of Education to advocate for full day, every day Kindergarten and additional Prekindergarten programs in the school division.

### **2. Mental Health and Wellbeing Targets**

#### **2.1. Secure additional funds for next three years to continue to support and monitor students needs caused by the COVID disruptions.**

##### Actions/Activities

- (a) Request report from senior administration outlining the scope and nature of the issue.
- (b) Meet with local human service agencies to build awareness and collaboration.
- (c) Meet with MLAs and Minister of Education to share concerns and request supports, and specifically request sufficient funding to implement the new Provincial Education Plan.

#### **2.2. Establish schools as sites for more appropriate and accessible local mental health supports for students and families.**

##### Actions/Activities

- (a) Meet with local MLAs and the Ministers of Health and Education or government/secretariat/mental health action plan.
- (b) Communicate promote the school infrastructure in place to meet mental health needs and advocate for integrated delivery of mental health supports in schools.
- (c) Meet with local Health Region officials to strengthen mental health supports offered in schools, with particular attention to child and youth psychologist need.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Long Term Advocacy Focus Areas & Broad Strategies**

#### **1. Learning & Innovation**

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

##### **Broad Strategies:**

- a) Advocate for additional Prekindergarten programs in the school division.
- b) Advocate for universal full day, every day Kindergarten in SRPSD schools. Approve resolution at the SSBA 2023 Annual Fall Assembly.
- c) Promote the school division's current offerings: dual credit courses, e-learning, industry-specific training opportunities, program enhancement initiatives and strong academics.
- d) Engage post-secondary partners and advocate provincially for dual credit programs, locally developed programs and innovative partnerships that have a positive impact on student learning and transitions.
- e) Advocate provincially for renewal of graduation requirements that reflect the current and future needs of students.
- f) Include parent engagement and student engagement in its advocacy efforts.

#### **2. Inclusion and Cultural Responsiveness**

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 are not fully 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.

##### **Broad Strategies:**

- a) Share information relating to vulnerable student demographics and associated impacts on student learning and the school division budget at planned linkage meetings and with government throughout the year.
- b) Promote staff capacity-building programs that are having a positive impact on the learning and futures of vulnerable students.
- c) Continue to respond to the calls to action in the Truth & Reconciliation Report and to be seen as champions of reconciliation.
- d) Advocate for fully resourced inclusive education at the provincial level and raise awareness with SSBA Executive and membership at provincial events.
- e) Advocate for a review of funding distribution weightings and factors that impact the division's capacity to actualize provincial and local plans to support vulnerable students.
- f) Share strategic goals and diverse stories of student success and anti-oppressive, anti-racist practices in student-first, plain language.

- g) Create a coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to consider joint-advocacy efforts and initiatives (i.e. Action on TRC Calls, September 30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, June 21 National Aboriginal Day, and other opportunities).
- h) Establish advisory mechanisms to ensure the voice of LGBTQ2S+ community, persons with disabilities and other visible and invisible minorities are present in Board deliberations.
- i) Expand membership on the Elders Council and ensure there is sustainability funding for them.

### **3. Mental Health & Well-Being**

The Board of Education envisions and works towards communities where students, staff and families are supported to sustain and strengthen their resiliency and mental wellness. Proactive measures to preserve and support mental wellness

- a) Advocate for wholistic interventions, supports and partnerships that address the root causes of academic disengagement: poverty, transience, marginalization, mental health and addictions.
- b) Meet annually with MLAs, MPs and Saskatchewan Health Authority leadership to advocate for sustainable, predictable and sufficient funding for mental health programs in schools.
- c) Recognize that schools are easily accessed sites for students to access mental health services and meet annually with MLAs and MPs to advocate for integrated service delivery of mental health supports in schools.
- d) Advocate to the ministries of health, education, social services and justice to raise awareness of local service capacity concerns.

### **4. Citizenship & Relationships**

The Board of Education affirms the importance of public engagement and enhancing positive relationships with students, staff, parents and the public. Positive public relationships 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 and providing local voice. It is also clear that effective relationships within schools and between schools and families are essential elements for student success. Advocacy will be helpful in strengthening the reciprocal connection between effective relationships and positive citizenship in students, staff and the public.

#### **Broad Strategies:**

- a) Continue to support diversity and the welcoming culture of Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division schools.
- b) Publicly recognize and highlight the achievements of all Governor General Award winners in each graduating class.
- c) Prioritize school community councils engagement and capacity building.
- d) Ensure the Board's Communications Committee considers Advocacy Plan goals in its actions.
- e) Continue to support the activities and effective operation of the Saskatchewan Rivers Students for Change (SRSC) group and promote implementation of student voice/student leadership structures in other divisions and levels of government.
- f) Include a Communications or Key Messages component on each Board agenda.

- g) Promote the sharing of and response to the data gathered annually from the OurSchool parent survey and the results of the staff satisfaction survey conducted every three years.
- h) Meet annually with local post-secondary partners as part of its linkage meetings
- i) Promote its connection to and the messages of the Public Schools of Saskatchewan (Public Section) that promote the value of public education.

## 5. Governance and Leadership

The Board of Education believes in the importance of strong local voice and takes seriously its role to provide open and accountable leadership. This includes maintaining strong relationships with the Ministry of Education and seeking out opportunities to engage directly with the Minister and/or Ministry of Education on educational matters. The foundational statements of the board outlined in Policy 1 articulate the Board's beliefs in local government.

### **Broad Strategies:**

- a) Advocate for sufficient needs-based funding, through letter or meetings with the Minister and MLAs, in order to meet student needs and actualize local/provincial goals.
- b) Advocate for a Ministerial review of Sections 55 to 58 of the School Division Administration Regulations, 2017 as they relate to school review, enrolment thresholds and the geographical proximity of schools.
- c) Publicly recognize the strong stewardship of the school division's facilities and maintenance record and advocate for continued provincial support for preventative maintenance funding.
- d) Lobby locally and provincially for a provincial capital infrastructure renewal plan that recognizes the unique context of rural schools.
- e) Advocate for local voice in education by developing local campaigns that contribute to SSBA advocacy initiatives such as Local Voices, Local Choices and Local Government Week (in November annually).
- f) Lobby for flexible and sufficient governance funding to provide effective local voice.
- g) Submit a resolution to the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to restore provincial funding to support school board trustees in becoming certified governance professionals.
- h) Consider the establishment of a local initiative to encourage trustees to become certified professionals in governance.
- i) Seek out formal and informal opportunities to work jointly with the Minister of Education and/or Ministry of Education officials.
- j) Communicate key messages around the strength, stewardship and importance of locally-elected trustees and autonomous boards of education in the province.
- k) Lobby for strategic and targeted funding to address accessibility issues in schools and monitor/respond to the development of provincial accessibility legislation.
- l) Continue our engagement with our City of Prince Albert and Rural Municipalities in our school division.

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