

Submission to the Educational Governance Review Consultation Panel

January 24, 2017

Leadership in Learning and Life



Introduction

The Board of Education for Prairie Valley School Division #208 is pleased to present our perspectives to the Educational Governance Review Consultation Panel.

As a Board, we support our staff and communities in all they do to provide learning opportunities and success for a growing enrolment that now stands at almost 8,500 students across southeast Saskatchewan. Our Division encompasses almost 27,000 square kilometres, from Regina Beach and Bethune to the west, Kelliher and Lipton to the north, Milestone, Sedley and Montmartre to the south and Whitewood and Kennedy to the east. Our Board consists of 11 members elected on a subdivision basis, including Sakimay First Nations, which is established as a subdivision. Prairie Valley has 39 schools located in 32 communities. It is unique in that it is entirely rural, consisting of towns, villages, resort villages and rural municipalities, with no urban centre. There are two Hutterite colony schools in the Division. Fifteen First Nations are within or are in close proximity to the division: Piapot, Muscowpetung, Pasqua, Standing Buffalo, Little Black Bear, Okanese, Star Blanket, Peepeekisis, Muskowekwan, Carry the-Kettle, Sakimay, Cowessess, Kahkewistahaw, Ochapowace and Pheasant Rump. At amalgamation, we inherited a wide array of grade configurations including Pre-K to grade 12; 1 to 6; 1 to 8; 7 to 12; 8 to 12 and more. We also have seven licenced child care centres in our schools for students and community members, meaning we provide services to children and youth ranging from infants to age 22. Seventeen per cent of our student population is self-declared First Nations and Métis and more than 500 students who reside on First Nations land attend Prairie Valley schools.

The day-to-day business of running the school division involves many people doing many different jobs – almost 1,300 staff provide classroom instruction, specialized student support services, personal assistance to students, curriculum expertise, behaviour management, school-based operational services and management of human resources, facilities, technology, communications and finances. Regardless of role, our work aligns to common outcomes through integrated planning work at the sector, division, school and classroom levels. We have focused our efforts with staff on addressing teacher wellness and workload intensification, providing targeted professional development and training and dedicating significant work to improve workplace health and safety.

Overview of this Submission

Our submission consists of four sections:

1. Looking Back and Looking Forward in Prairie Valley School Division – our Board’s perspectives on governance based on our experience
2. Elements of Governance – an assessment of our practice against the principles of good governance set out in the Perrins report
3. Shifts in Governance – our response to the shifts proposed in the Perrins report
4. Conclusion – our perspectives on the options

1. Looking Back and Looking Forward in Prairie Valley School Division

Over the past 10 years, Prairie Valley School Division has grown into a high performing organization. Many progressive initiatives have taken root and become part of who we are as a school division. We are confident in our approaches, and we know that continuing along our path will sustain progress for our students and communities. Our Board demonstrates strong governance practices by managing board business effectively, working professionally with the Director of Education and staff, meeting and exceeding standards of accountability and reaching out to engage students, school community councils (SCCs), community members, First Nations governments and local governments in public education. The evidence of our joint efforts with staff is in found our academic, graduation, financial and support services results.

In Prairie Valley School Division, we seek to know Every Student by Name, By Need; we are confident in our instructional practices; we are on a sound financial footing; we are committed to respectful, safe and inclusive learning environments for students and workplaces for staff; our infrastructure, technology, transportation and other support services are high quality and equitable across all schools; and we rigorously measure, monitor and seek to improve all aspects of our operation.

As an entirely rural school division, we encounter unique service delivery challenges. We cannot centralize services but instead must deploy across 27,000 square km. We cannot bus students into urban centres for programming or rely on urban service-providers and so have developed some creative ways to deploy services across our school division. Certainly, we understand that urban centres have their unique challenges as well, and do not minimize those, but they are different from the challenges that we face. Offering a reasonably equitable range of courses that appeal to students' interests and engages them in learning in small rural high schools requires creative delivery approaches such as magneting, distance learning and local partnerships. Under our magnet design, students travel over the lunch hour to a host school that has the staff, equipment and facility to offer electives in areas such as welding, commercial cooking, languages, psychology, robotics and sciences that would otherwise be unavailable. About 500 students benefit each year from approximately 70 courses delivered via magneting. This is an example of how we apply local knowledge and understanding at both the governance and administrative levels to address local issues.

Although the primary subject of the *Educational Governance Review Report* is educational governance, public discussion has included the potential for school division amalgamation, therefore we will address this issue first. Our Board supports stability in the structure of school divisions. Amalgamations are disruptive and time-consuming for staff, communities and boards. It was several years after the 2006 amalgamation until we found our footing and created an effective, high functioning organization with common protocols and a unified culture. Our performance results – whether student achievement, financial or infrastructure – speak to the success of our efforts.

An Examination of School Division Restructuring in Saskatchewan, by Jackie Kirk

<http://saskschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/08-03.pdf> articulates some lessons learned from the 2006 amalgamations. Among them:

- The history of education in Saskatchewan has been one of amalgamation into larger units of delivery. The case for successive amalgamations has been premised on creating school divisions large enough to deliver a reasonable range of programs and services from grades 1 to 12 and to improve equity for tax payers and students. This is not an argument put forward in the Perrins report, suggesting that that the last (2006) round of amalgamations succeeded in creating school divisions with the capacity to deliver a reasonably consistent and high quality range of programs and services.
- The Education Equity Task Force that determined the 2006 boundaries went through a detailed local consultation process with each board (which then numbered about 81). While not everyone necessarily agreed with all of the boundary decisions, all “felt heard”, which was key to acceptance of the changes.
- Implementation was critical and while many things went right, overall there was insufficient leadership at the Ministry (then Department of Learning) that resulted not from a lack of good intentions, but from a lack of operational knowledge. The fact that implementation was successful overall is attributed to local leadership, thus it is important to bring operational staff in the sector along in support of structural changes.
- There was no strategy for measuring the success of restructuring. This speaks to the need to articulate a deliberate purpose for restructuring and define up-front how progress will be measured and how success will be defined.

We think our school division is an optimal size now, large enough to offer a wide range of programs and services but as Board members we are still close enough to our communities and SCCs to keep the public voice in public education. We support keeping our focus on reading, math, writing, graduation and attendance – things that matter to students and families and to the future of the province.

A refinement of external school division boundaries could be considered, based on our experience over the past 10 years. As an example, proximity to the City of Regina means that some Prairie Valley residents attend school in Regina. Busing rural students into Regina goes back many years, for reasons of either geographic proximity or access to high school and/or French Immersion programming that historically was not available in small rural divisions. Given the geographic area and few student numbers, busing can be complex and inefficient. Over time, programming within Prairie Valley School Division has improved and as a result, the number of students being transported into Regina schools has declined by more than half, from 450 students in 2008 to less than 200 in 2015. This number will continue to decrease as French Immersion is fully implemented in White City and Lumsden, but some small communities continue to prefer to attend school in the Regina systems. Boundary changes can be contentious, and we have learned that local consultation is necessary prior to making adjustments.

Turning to governance, we begin by considering the nature of the education sector. We all share in the belief of a universal right to a high quality education. We all know that education attainment levels are important determinants of the future employment and financial prospects of individual students and an educated citizenry (which we define as going well beyond the 24 credits required for graduation) is

critical to the future social and economic well-being of Saskatchewan. *“A more educated labor force is more mobile and adaptable, can learn new tasks and new skills more easily, can use a wider range of technologies and sophisticated equipment (including newly emerging ones), and is more creative in thinking about how to improve the management of work.”*

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2006/04/education-dickens>.

Unlike the health, justice or social services sectors, the education sector has mandated (legislated) participation by all Saskatchewan residents between the ages of 6 and 16; given that our clients are minors, their parents and guardians are also directly and personally involved in the system on a daily basis. Under *The Education Act*, in fact, schools act in the position of parents while students are in their care (*in loco parentis*). Thus the reach of education is *broad* (170,000 students plus their families), *deep* (with daily contact over a period of 13 or more years) and intensely *personal* (as we are dealing with the complexities of human growth and development). This, we believe, warrants a unique and closer governance model than might be appropriate in other sectors.

The service delivery challenges in among human services sectors can be quite different – in the health sector, for example, we understand the challenges to focus on fragmented services, silos and service continuity. In the education sector, we have a simple and consistent philosophy and that is to bring services to students. Management structures are then organized around direct service delivery to students and schools. While teachers and other staff have a very complex task – supporting the learning, growth and development of children – our service delivery philosophy and structures are actually quite simple. Amid any future changes in our sector, we must not lose that direct service delivery philosophy and our connection with students, families and communities. We understand that this review is focused on governance, not service delivery. However, the importance of education to both individuals and the province and the broad, deep and personal reach of schools in the lives of children and families support a model of governance that keeps boards close to the people we serve.

A key role of board members is public representation. We see value in the role of elected board members in listening to and representing parent and community views about the education system. The Perrins report suggests a larger role for SCCs in place of elected boards; we suggest that SCCs, as parent and community volunteer groups that support local schools, have neither the interest nor the time to represent their communities at the provincial level. As a division with 17 per cent self-declared First Nations and Métis students and 15 First Nations in close proximity, we recognize that the sector needs to find ways to enhance the representation of First Nations in governance of the provincial education system.

A related board role is to act as an intermediary between government and the public, influencing government policy and direction where appropriate and subsequently helping to explain that policy and direction at the local level - local voice up and local voice down. As a Board we play both roles. We have worked to influence provincial direction in a respectful way – for example, advocating to the Minister for a review of the funding formula was part of our governance role; doing the analytical work on the Technical Committee was an administrative role. We have also helped our public to understand provincial policies – for example, by meeting with communities who are looking for new school

construction, to explain how government evaluates and prioritizes school construction projects on a provincial basis.

Board members also have an oversight role to the corporate functions of the division. We explain in the next section the ways in which our Board fulfills its oversight role through planning, monitoring and accountability processes at the system level and in each major area of our operation. Among the most important of our oversight roles is with respect to the financial management of the school division.

Prairie Valley School Division has achieved \$8M in cumulative efficiencies and savings over the period 2012-2013 to 2015-2016 (and will total almost \$12M cumulative by the end of the current fiscal year; base budget savings total \$2.6M annually) and we will continue to work hard to make every dollar work for students. We do not understand how changing governance or amalgamating school divisions is the answer to the financial challenges that we face. We support efforts to find economies of scale and consolidate services and administrative functions common to all school divisions that preserve local services and supports to students and staff in their schools. We understand that the Province faces a serious financial challenge and are fully committed to help address the challenges.

2. Elements of Governance

The Perrins report outlines six principles of good governance that were derived from a review of several frameworks of good governance in education and other sectors (in italics, below). We analysed our governance practices as the Prairie Valley Board of Education against these six principles and found them to be a useful framework.

We hope the following summary of our experiences will provide the panel with some insight into how these principles of good governance can be - and are being - put into practice.

Strategic Direction:

- ***Clear vision of what is needed to achieve the goals of society and understanding the complexity involved in achieving the vision.***

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Prepares a four year strategic plan with annual updates that is precisely aligned to the ESSP with division-specific targets and actions.
- Includes in our strategic plan a series of local priorities that are not included in the ESSP but that are important to us (e.g., science, extra-curricular participation, bus ride times, facility and IT service response times, internal and external audit results) and unique to rural Saskatchewan.

Effectiveness and Efficiency:

- ***Effectiveness is the capacity to achieve results; efficiency is the best use of resources.***
- ***Effectiveness of a board is dependent upon its capacity to act in accordance with the principles of good governance. Saskatchewan's Provincial Auditor notes the role and purpose, membership, structure, board culture, decision-making processes, knowledge and training***

opportunities, and internal and external relationships of boards will impact their effectiveness.

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Inherited a deficit upon amalgamation but since 2008, has balanced the budget in nine consecutive years and established a modest operating reserve to help cushion revenue or expense pressures.
- Faithfully complies with all Ministry directives and requests. This includes the January 2015 request for voluntary financial restraint (over \$500K in savings as a result of the restraint request plus \$1.1M in previously planned efficiencies) and the November 2016 request (\$2.2M in savings, including \$645K in reduced spending as a direct result of the restraint request and almost \$1M in previously planned efficiencies).
- Has developed and reported on an annual Efficiencies Agenda each year since 2012-2013. We define efficiencies as real spending reductions or productivity gains that get the same or better results. Since 2012, and including planned savings for 2016-2017, we have documented, cumulative savings of \$12M. These figures are real gains (i.e., are not estimates of future avoided costs).
- Has a record of clean audits and problem-free Ministry approval of every budget and audited financial statement. The Provincial Auditor began reporting on school division audit results in 2011, and in 2013 began publicly reporting on school division-specific deficiencies; Prairie Valley is one of few school divisions to never have been cited by the Provincial Auditor for any deficiency.
https://auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public_reports/2016/Volume_1/03_School%20Divisions.pdf
- Has an active Audit and Risk Management Committee that oversees two internal audits each year (both financial, e.g., handling of school generated fees and revenues, and non-financial e.g., compliance with instructional minute requirements and criminal records check process); engages directly with the appointed auditor and Provincial Auditor representative; takes a broad perspective on risk that extends beyond financial matters and includes, for example, technology security.
- The Audit and Risk Management Committee reviews each semi-annual report of the Provincial Auditor to stay current with issues in the broader public sector. For each education-related performance audit, the Committee expects our staff to review and report on their practices against the audit criteria and incorporate specific actions to improve practices to ensure we meet the audit criteria.
- Prepares, publishes and adheres to an annual Board work plan so that the work of the Board itself is articulated.
- Conducts an annual Board and Director evaluation.

Accountability:

- ***The practice of accountability requires a clear understanding of the decision-making authority and who is accountable to whom and for what. This requires a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities, expectations and reporting requirements for results, effectiveness and efficiency.***

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Understands the distinction between governance and administration and empowers our staff to do what they do best, whether that is overseeing instructional or support services, trusting that we have good communication and accountability processes in place. We also know we have excellent leadership and credit our staff for the results of their work.
- Reviews and updates sections of our Policy Manual annually, so that the full manual is reviewed within a three year period. Last year, this included a refresh of our materials that support SCCs, including easy to use templates, a standardized SCC-Principal Annual Work Plan and simplified procedures.
- Prepares a comprehensive Community Report annually that reports back on our strategic plan. The Community Report speaks to each and every commitment we made and target we set, whether we achieved what we intended, exceeded expectations or did not achieve what we set out to do. The report provides our results in simple graphic format and explains what we will do going forward to improve or sustain results.
- Receives and reviews quarterly public performance reports on: School Operations (academic results, attendance, etc.); Student Suspensions; First Nations and Métis Education; Finance (including quarterly public accounts); Transportation; Infrastructure; Information Technology and does a quarterly wall walk with staff.

The Perrins report notes: “While every board has signed on to the ESSP and recent discussions with boards indicate commitment to the Plan, some boards and their administrators struggle with what they see as competing accountabilities” (p 12). Prairie Valley does not struggle with competing accountabilities because we have aligned our strategic plan with the ESSP and are respectful of Ministry requests and expectations. We feel no contradiction or competition because the school division, Board of Education and Ministry are all working toward the same goals.

Transparency:

- ***Transparency means that decision making processes and the rationale for decisions are accessible to those who are concerned with the decisions.***

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Posts Board packages on our website and holds public board meetings.
- Prepares Board Notes immediately following each Board meeting that summarize, in plain language, what the Board did. These are sent to all staff, SCCs and other stakeholders and are posted on our website. Board members speak to the Board Notes at SCC meetings so that all councils get the same information.
- Prepares and posts supplementary public accounts that provide additional detail about Board remuneration and activities, including reporting on the number of meetings each Board member attended and other activities for which remuneration is received.
- Prepares and posts a long-term Facility Master Plan and a three-year facility Preventive Maintenance and Renewal Plan so that schools and communities know where their local projects sit in the priority list and understand how projects are assessed and rated.

Participation:

- ***People who are impacted by decisions have an opportunity to have input either directly or through legitimate organizations or individuals that represent them.***

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Hosts annual Student Senates to give students an opportunity to speak directly to the Board of Education about issues that matter to them.
- Regularly attends SCC meetings and hosts regional SCC meetings each spring to solicit feedback to bring the community voice to the Board table.
- Has an accessible appeals process – our Board typically hears three to six parent appeals of administrative decisions per year to ensure that the processes applied were fair and consistent with policy (not to revisit or revise the decisions of administration).
- Has a staff member assigned to assist students and parents through the suspension hearing process.
- Has made efforts to engage our First Nations education partners, in particular the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council.
- Actively encourages attendance at our Annual General Meeting – it is a celebration of our year and an opportunity for the public to directly ask the Board questions.
- Sends out a newsletter twice per year to all residents (not just those with children in schools) to communicate about the public education system and ensure people know who Board members are and how to contact them.
- Hosts parent information nights (e.g., mental health & addictions; on-line bullying) to provide parents and guardians with relevant, useful information.

Equity:

- ***All have equitable access to services and derive equitable benefit from the expenditure of public funds on education.***

The Prairie Valley Board of Education:

- Improving equity of opportunity for students, regardless of where they live or their circumstances, was a top priority for the Board in the years immediately following the 2006 amalgamation. Our staff have put the Board's priority to improve equity into action:
 - A common challenge across rural Saskatchewan is how to provide a reasonable array of secondary course offerings in small high schools with limited staff. We have addressed this challenge via magnet programming, bringing students from smaller rural schools together at one site for courses they otherwise would not be able to access.
 - Allocates additional teaching FTEs to schools with lower academic results. Schools in communities with lower socioeconomic indicators also receive additional teaching allocations and non-salary funding for nutrition and after school programming.
 - A team of curriculum specialists provides targeted, subject-area specific assistance to teachers and students through our Direct Service Delivery model.
 - A rigorous, standardized student assessment practice to measure students against grade expectation standards in reading, literacy, math Treaty essential learnings and science. All were put in place prior to the ESSP.
 - Eliminated compulsory student fees and capped fees for elective courses.
 - Developed a rigorous and fair method for assessing and prioritizing facility improvements.
 - Monitoring and reporting on bus ride times against target ride times.
 - Centralizing equipment, learning resource, technology and furniture refreshes to achieve economies of scale and standardization across all schools.

Overall, we believe that the practices of the Prairie Valley Board of Education align well against the governance principles in the Perrins report. We readily acknowledge there is always room for improvement and we are committed to strengthening our governance practices wherever possible and sharing good governance practices among boards of education so that we learn from each other. We have taken advantage of opportunities to do so by presenting at the National Congress on Rural Education and at Saskatchewan School Boards Association events.

3. Shifts in Governance

After outlining the challenges facing the K-12 education sector, the *Educational Governance Review Report* recommends a series of governance shifts for the system as a whole (in italics, below). Overall, the Prairie Valley Board of Education supports the proposed changes and offers the following comments.

Educational Governance Review Report	Prairie Valley Board of Education Observations
Strategic Direction and Accountability:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>redefine the roles of the Minister in the legislation and regulations to enhance the ability to provide direction in relation to outcomes and standards and to assess the extent to which they are achieved;</i> 	<p>Agree. Greater clarity in legislation will serve the system well.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>examine the number of members per board for public and separate systems;</i> 	<p>Given the size, diversity and dispersion of our population, we believe representation in Prairie Valley School Division is appropriate. See page 11 for comments related to enhancing First Nations voice in education governance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>standardize expectations of boards in relation to required competencies of board members; require mandatory board training.</i> 	<p>The role of Board of Education members is to serve as the voice of the community. Agree with the Provincial Auditor’s recommendations that boards should assess professional development needs and target professional development so that board members continue to grow in learning how to monitor the system and ask the right questions.</p>
Effectiveness:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>renew and strengthen the emphasis on education outcomes through an ongoing focus on the ESSP and consideration of an Education Quality Council with responsibility for monitoring system performance.</i> 	<p>Agree with the emphasis on educational outcomes. In Prairie Valley School Division, we assess students against standards, set performance measures and targets for both instructional and non-instructional services, and have rigorous public reporting and accountability. While we do not yet have detail about the structure and operation of the proposed Education Quality Council, if this same approach can be taken at a provincial level, we are supportive in principle.</p>
Efficiency:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>enhance the focus on lowering the cost curve, creating enhanced value in the system, and improving services to students through efficiency, shared services and continuous improvement initiatives in keeping with the work already underway in the PLT (centralize business functions such as central IT, financial, HR, payroll, procurement and purchasing).</i> 	<p>Agree. School divisions need to continue to find efficiencies while maintaining timely and effective services to schools.</p>
Consistency/Standardization:	

Educational Governance Review Report	Prairie Valley Board of Education Observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>standardize governance costs, including remuneration rates, annual maximum remuneration for board members and rates for travel and sustenance (taking into account northern areas), professional development, and maximum number of board meetings;</i> 	<p>Agree, with the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized remuneration and/or a remuneration cap should not act as a deterrent to participation by a diverse pool of potential candidates (e.g., small business owners might need to hire someone to replace them when attending to board business) or by geographic location (e.g., rural-based members might need to drive 2+ hours to attend a board meeting). • Professional development can be standardized to an extent, but flexibility is needed to address the specific circumstances and assessed needs of each board. • The number of board meetings needs flexibility to account for specific circumstances of each board (e.g., if reviewing school viability, developing a multi-year strategic plan).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>standardize administrative costs, including consideration of a provincial pay grid for out-of-scope positions and standards for the number of central office staff in relation to school-based staff; and</i> 	<p>Agree, however, we note that dispersed rural geography needs to be considered, as rural school divisions incur significant windshield time.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>consider additional standardization of locally-bargained terms and conditions.</i> 	<p>Agree. We support the process now underway.</p>
<p>Participation:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>reinforce the value of school community councils ; and,</i> 	<p>Agree. Within Prairie Valley School Division, we believe that SCCs are fulfilling their role to support school learning improvement plans and connect their communities to the school. We do not believe that their role can be expanded beyond what is reasonable for volunteers to commit to in terms of time and personal responsibility.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>enable First Nation representation on boards.</i> 	<p>Agree. In Prairie Valley School Division, we have 15 First Nations in proximity. We agree that First Nations should have a voice in education governance and believe that discussion with First Nations partners is needed to determine the best mechanism for enabling greater First Nations voice in governance of the Pre-K to Grade 12 education system.</p>

Conclusions

We believe in elected boards of education and support shifts in governance that will improve the quality of education and maintain the high performance that we currently have within Prairie Valley School Division. Our concluding thoughts about the options in the *Governance Review Report* are presented below.

Options 1 and 2 risk creating very different education systems as between the public and separate systems. Under Option 1, we could have one provincially appointed board for 135,000 students and eight locally elected boards for 40,000 students. This could mean different access for parents and SCCs to their board member and central decision-making structures (in the public system to appointed board members and in the separate system to elected representatives) and different accountability orientations (public board(s) to the government and separate boards to their electorates). It could also mean different educational experiences for students.

Option 3a targets the 12 amalgamated public school divisions, the same communities that were impacted in 2006. It is difficult to find a logical connection between the governance issues raised in the Perrins report and Option 3a. What will be gained by moving from 18 school divisions to 8 to 14 school divisions? Option 3a appears to be less of a *governance* reform option and more of an exercise in redrawing boundaries. There is no evidence to support that larger school divisions will be better for students or communities. If the objective is to strengthen governance, that can be done without amalgamating school divisions and all of the complications inherent in that process.

Option 3b also impacts certain school divisions but in an even more targeted way – in the north and in areas surrounding Regina and Saskatoon - thus the comments regarding Option 3a also apply to Option 3b. While some might argue this is less disruptive than Option 1 or 2, the purpose of the governance review is not to minimize disruption, but to address the challenges identified in the Perrins report. There is no apparent logic for amalgamating the Creighton, Ile a la Crosse and Northern Light school divisions into one school division, nor for merging Prairie Spirit School Division into Saskatoon Public School Division or Prairie Valley School Division with Regina Public School Division. No evidence is provided that service delivery or system management (student achievement, student services, finance, technology, transportation or facilities) will improve by merging Prairie Valley schools into the Regina system. The evidence of our progress is in our student achievement and system performance results. The objective, as we understand it, is to strengthen governance and position the sector for future challenges; that can be done without amalgamating school divisions and all of the inherent complications. We have explained certain circumstances and challenges in rural settings and outlined some of the governance and service delivery practices that we have found to be successful in Prairie Valley School Division; these contextual differences also argue against moving rural schools into an urban system.

The *Educational Governance Review Report* provides an interesting, high-level look at the sector. There is a considerable distance between the issues and suggestions in the report and sustainable, progressive and paced reforms that will benefit students and families. Careful analysis and planning will ensure that we do right by the students we all serve.