

Good Afternoon,

We would like to thank the commission for allowing us to participate in this education review.

Here with me this afternoon representing River East Transcona School Division is our Vice Chair – Jerry Sodomlak he has 5 years' experience as a school trustee and over 30 years' experience in education as a teacher and administrator, Vince Mariani has been our Secretary Treasurer/CFO for 27 years.

My name is Colleen Carswell and I am the Chairman of the board of Trustees. I am currently serving my 27<sup>th</sup> year as a school trustee. Having never been acclaimed I had to campaign to gain the trust of my community. I am humbled by my communities continued support of me and my work for the children, families and taxpayers of Transcona. In many of my elections my numbers have exceeded those of civic and provincial electors. I am but one School Trustee example of the democratic process that is so important to our society.

We are here representing River East Transcona School Division which is a dynamic, caring and innovative school division where our teachers and staff dedicate their days to providing students with the education, guidance and services they need to learn and reach their fullest potential.

We have over 16,500 students in 42 schools staffed by over 3,000 team members. We offer a wide, diverse range of programming.

Located east of the Red River in the northeast quadrant of the city, we serve the urban communities of East and North Kildonan and Transcona, and the rural communities of East St. Paul and St. Clements.

River East Transcona School Division is the second-largest school division in the province. We have the lowest cost per student in the urban area and we are the 5<sup>th</sup> lowest in the province. We spend \$1500.00 less than the provincial average per student.

If the mandate of this education review is truly to improve student success what we will lay out for you in our presentation is what we believe leads to student success and what severely impacts student success.

Given 10 minutes we will only have time to address two areas; Amalgamation/Governance and Student Learning and Success.

Who better to talk about Amalgamation?

River East Transcona is only 17 years old. It was established back in 2002 with the amalgamation of River East School Division and the urban portion of Transcona-Springfield School Division. Transcona-Springfield was the only School Division that was split, with Springfield being joined with Agassiz to become Sunrise School Division and Transcona joining with River East to become River East Transcona School Division. I along with 2 other current trustees lived through this devastating time.

The government of the day said that amalgamation would save tax payers money, and that the education of children would improve. We are here today to tell you that those statements are not accurate.

From 2002 through to today the taxpayers of River East Transcona have not seen a savings due to amalgamation.

**Fact** amalgamation has cost tax payers more. Costs that were a direct effect of amalgamation such as employee contracts, were increased, no employee had a negative impact due to amalgamation, all items that were dealt with went to the highest denominator. These increased costs were not just for a year but have been a cost to tax payers every year for the last 17 years. There was no reduction in administration costs, the larger the division the more staff that is needed. Program costs were increased, costs for names on school busses, divisional buildings, letter head. From the smallest to the largest detail that was dealt with during amalgamation, there is no truer statement than amalgamation cost tax payers more money. Let me say that again. There is no truer statement than to say amalgamation cost tax payers more money.

**Fact** Education suffers. Trustees, Senior Administration, School Administrators and School Staff from day one dealt with the effects of amalgamation through policy revisions, employee contracts, melding structures and infrastructures, budgets, staff placement, programming and the list goes on. A wealth of time and money that were spent on these issues rather than dealing with what they should be dealing with, such as; new initiatives, program reviews, and student success, lead to time wasted rather than time well spent.

Trying to bring two communities, two operations together is no easy task. Transportation, maintenance, technology issues needed for the first day of school needed to be addressed quickly, efficiently. Trustees tried their very best to shield the classroom from the governance changes, policy revisions and budgets but no matter how hard they tried that just didn't happen. Staff morale was negatively impacted.

17 years later and we are still trying to implement equity across the division by blending certain programs and policies. It is only by the great work of School Boards across the province that were affected by amalgamation that we are where we are today.

Amalgamation did not save tax payers money, it did not improve student education and the larger we got meant the reduction in collaboration and cooperation opportunities and longer wait times for parents.

Plainly said amalgamation does not lead to student success.

So what does lead to student success and what are the challenges for student success. Recently, we held two student forums, one with high school students who talked about how they define student success and the other with middle years students who through their story boards talked about what success looked like to them in their schools. Trustees were also asked, what is your definition of student success. At the time I thought it not to be a good question, everyone know what student success is, but

as we went around the table and you heard the answers, none being right or wrong. You realized that everyone has a different definition of what student success looks like to them, as so did our students.

That is because success is different for every child. Isn't that the definition of student success, that it is tailored for every child, tailored for their needs. In River East Transcona School Division, we work towards a very inclusive environment to meet each student's needs ranging from the most rigorous academic programs in AP and IB to our most individualized Specialized Learning Environment, our SLE program. We strive for improved student success through early interventions in our preschool programming. Early years Initiative Programs such as Reading Recovery to our Senior Years Apprentice Programs and new methods of teaching and learning through a STEAM philosophy. We are constantly reviewing and looking for new programs that are current, relevant and engaging, because that is what is paramount for improving student success and graduation rates.

What doesn't work is using international test scores as the sole indicator of student learning and success. Canada ranked in the top countries in the world and Manitoba results show 8 of 10 meet or exceed national expectations. Rob Santos of Manitoba Education presented a report for Healthy Child that stated the negative impact of poverty and socio-economic factors on student learning and when that was considered it put Manitoba in 2<sup>nd</sup> overall scores in Canada. Now that's student success.

River East Transcona has the 2<sup>nd</sup> most influx of Syrian refugees in the province last year with high levels of families living in poverty and a growing indigenous population. The relevancy of that report shows we have factors that will skew national or international data on a single test for a random group of students.

If I could give you an analogy from one of our trustees who works in health care. In a hospital when a patient is hooked up to a monitor – the doctor/nurse cannot just look at the monitor to assess the patient, it gives some signs but looking at the patient gives the fuller picture.

If we use that analogy in education. Don't just look at a single test score to measure student success, look at the needs of the whole child.

Education is the great equalizer – public education is more than test scores. We need to look at the needs of our children and community and make sure we are preparing them for the world before them which is different than the world we came into. Human connections, relationships, cooperation and the ability to collaborate with others are huge assets for the work force after graduation.

In conclusion; If the mandate of this education review is to truly improve student success

The answers do not lie in amalgamations, or in standardized individual test scores rather in addressing the root issues – poverty and socio-economic influences. Education cannot work in isolation or be expected to address all societal issues and still be asked to continually improve. Education cannot do this alone, health, justice, social services, daycares all work with the same families in the same communities for the same goal, unfortunately in isolation of each other. It is imperative for the good of the child that these agencies start working together for our children/families.

The province needs to provide a provincial definition for student success so that we are all working on the same page and in the same direction. Although not part of the commissions mandate what needs to be fixed to allow for student success is the present funding formula. We are not asking for more money, but a more equitable funding process.

After 27 years as a school trustee I am confident in saying that we as school trustees as school boards have the distinct ability to listen to our communities and incorporate local voices into the operations of our division while building relationships between schools and communities. While always keeping in mind why we do this. So that every child reaches their fullest potential, their success. What happens if this voice is gone?