

Saskatchewan Party School Closure Proposal, June 21, 2007

“It is a lump-it-or-leave-it attitude and we’re not going to leave it ... That’s what we are doing here. It seems like politics have come to play in the future of our kids’ lives and it’s unfortunate.”

-- Todd Lewis, parent from Gray, Regina Leader Post, June 19.

Overview

This initiative will ensure decisions about education made by school divisions and the provincial government are in the best interest of students. Students must be put first in the education system.

School Closures

School divisions announced numerous school closures this spring. Twenty one schools will be closing this fall with another six having grades discontinued. Three more schools are slated for closure in 2008 and one in 2009.

A Plan for Action

A Saskatchewan Party Government will commit to revising the Education Act and improving the school closure process. We will consult with stakeholders during this process.

Problems with the current process

The Saskatchewan Party understands the role and responsibility of the elected school boards members across the province. The school boards made difficult decisions to close these schools by following the requirements presently in the Education Act. It is our opinion the school closure process needs significant improvements. These improvements can only be made with significant changes to the Education Act. The NDP government has failed to show leadership and provide the school divisions with all the tools they need to effectively undertake the school closure process.

Interim funding so schools can be evaluated under the new criteria

A Saskatchewan Party Government will provide a retroactive reimbursement to school divisions that decide to keep their schools open that have been slated for closure to a maximum of \$350,000 per school per year. This represents one-time interim funding that will provide reimbursement for the costs of operating these schools for two years. This will ensure these schools can be evaluated and assessed under the newly proposed criteria.

Improvements a Saskatchewan Party Government will make

The following changes will improve the school closure process and education in the province:

1. Extend the current 6 month consultation timeline to ensure communities are fully aware of the school closure decisions being made. This will allow communities to participate in the process and provide vital feedback to the school divisions.
2. A utilization report must be completed and presented to the community before grades are discontinued, a school is closed, a school is significantly changed or a major renovation occurs. The report will be presented after consultations are held between school boards, municipalities and community stakeholders. The report will include detailed factors such as square footage per student, physical status of the facility, teachers per student, an estimate of any pending capital costs, and a list of alternative community uses that have been explored for the facility. Schools are a community asset and should therefore be treated like one.
3. Ensure school divisions provide full and complete information to the community. This information will include enrolment projections, population statistics, transportation data, an analysis of the role of the school in the community, the utilization report, and any other pertinent information.
4. Provide funding for schools of necessity. A school of necessity could be eligible for extra money from the Department of Learning if it faces significant geographic realities. If these schools are closed, students will be forced to spend far too long on a bus. Innovative programming such as tele-video conferencing could be used to ensure students receive the best possible education. The current small remote school factor is not adequate to deal with schools of necessity.
5. Provide funding for schools of opportunity. A school of opportunity would qualify for support if a community realistically anticipates a new economic development in the future that would bring new families to the area. This development may otherwise be lost if a school is not available. The funds available will be limited and available to help those schools that meet stringent criteria.
6. Remove the bias that favors more bussing for students. The Department of Learning funds approximately 100 percent of bussing costs incurred by the school divisions. The Department needs to consider shifting their share of funding to cover costs associated with innovation and technology. This will remove the bias that favors bussing and exporting students out of their home communities.

“The people are moving out here. It’s finally starting to happen ... It’s not the time to be pulling the plug on rural Saskatchewan when our economy is starting to go up.”

-- Renaud Bissonnette, Mayor of Willow Bunch, Regina Leader Post, June 7.

Current Closures Anticipated for 2007-2008

School Division	Closure 2007	Grade Discontinuance	Closure 2008	Closure 2009
Chinook	Admiral [15]	Tompkins (6 to 9)	Climax [31]	
	Neville [19]	Climax (6 to 9)	Richmond [53]	
	Piapot [11]			
Prairie Valley	Earl Gray [50]	Kennedy-Langbank (9 to 12)		
	Francis [51]	Sedley (9 to 12)		
	Glenavon [66]			
	Gray [22]			
	Lang [11]			
	Odessa [50]			
	Saar (Kroneau) [33]			
Wilcox [46]				
SK Rivers	MacDowall [54]			
	Prince Charles [125]			
North East	Broadway (Melfort) [93]			
	Sylvania [31]			
	Smeaton [39]			
Horizon		Govan (7 to 9)	Govan [29]	
		Wishart (10 to 12)		
Prairie South	Briercrest [28]			Chaplin [52]
	Willow Bunch [50]			
	Crane Valley [38]			
	Limerick [48]			
	Ecole Ross School [259]			