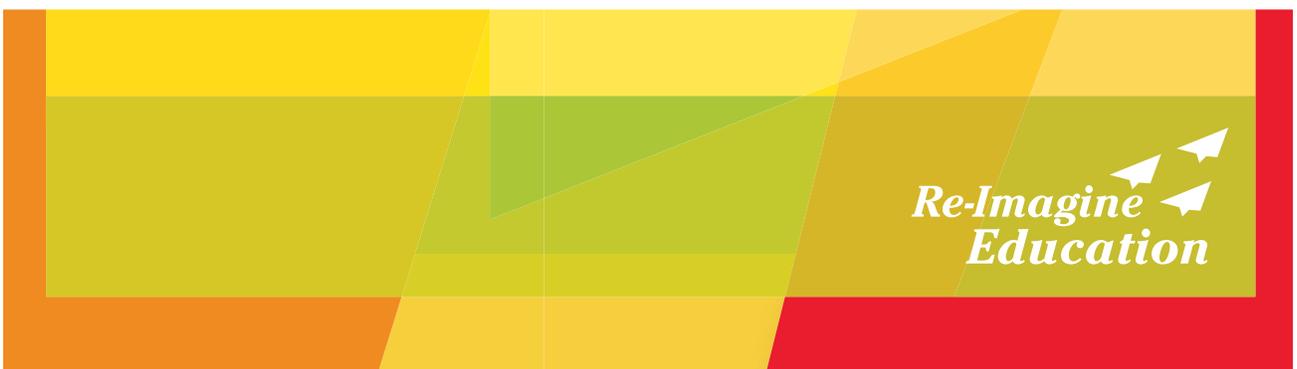


Education Re-Imagined:

12 Actions for Education

EXPANDED EDITION



Foreword

The world is not short of efforts to imagine, or even will into existence new futures for public education. Corporations and technology companies try to persuade and even scare us into believing that schools are broken, teachers are stuck in their ways, and an outdated industrial model of education is boring our students rigid. The future, they tell us, is digital. Students won't need teachers so much because they can look things up for themselves, and virtual learning will be the pathway to innovation and student engagement.

Teacher unions, meanwhile, have sometimes been too inclined to claim that teachers are just fine, we should mainly trust them to get on with the job for which they are qualified, but because their workload is increasing and the challenges are getting harder, we should give them more resources to do it. More teachers, smaller class sizes, better pay, and less testing – this is a second common scenario for educational reform.

This report does not merely sit between these extremes. It goes above and beyond them by bringing public as well as professional voices into the debate about the future of our children's education, and the education of our children for that future. And the results are salutary. For one thing, parents and the public still want what they have always wanted – teachers who can help their children to read and write and count well, and to become human beings with strong values and good character. They don't want teachers to be reduced solely to facilitators. They don't want children to be inspired by algorithms. They want teachers who can teach, educate, and lead their children into becoming informed and engaged citizens.

The report also draws attention to what is changing and should change in the future of teaching and learning. Classrooms will not be the only place where children learn, and class sizes no longer the unit for bargaining for resources. With and without technology, new kinds of learning spaces for young people are evolving as schools get to grips with the diversity of their students and other adults are working alongside teachers to support all students' needs in more flexible ways. Students want and need more of a say in their own learning and how schools are run, and teachers will sometimes need to step to one side to help them do that. Professional development will remain a priority but need to align with proven effective practice so that it is not mainly a way to indulge new fashions or implement government strategies, but to help teachers learn with other teachers within and across their own schools, so they can teach and reach all their students effectively.

There's nothing outrageously innovative in this report. The public and professionals don't want to put an end to schools as we know them, turn our schools into glorified offices, or imagine that the answer to all our educational problems exists in digital tablets or other devices. They want teachers to continue to be the responsible adults who can help their children develop strong values, master fundamental skills, and become better citizens and fulfilled workers. Professionals especially also understand that schools need more capacity to be able to draw on a wider range of adults to respond to children from all kinds of backgrounds and with all sorts of needs. The world is changing. Teaching is changing. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation understands that but also sees that the things we have always valued in our best teachers – stepping forward to lead and guide our young learners – must also be sustained. Along with directions being set by the government of Saskatchewan, this evidence-informed report is an important contribution to the future of education in Saskatchewan and therefore to the future of the province itself.

Andy Hargreaves

Research Professor, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, USA

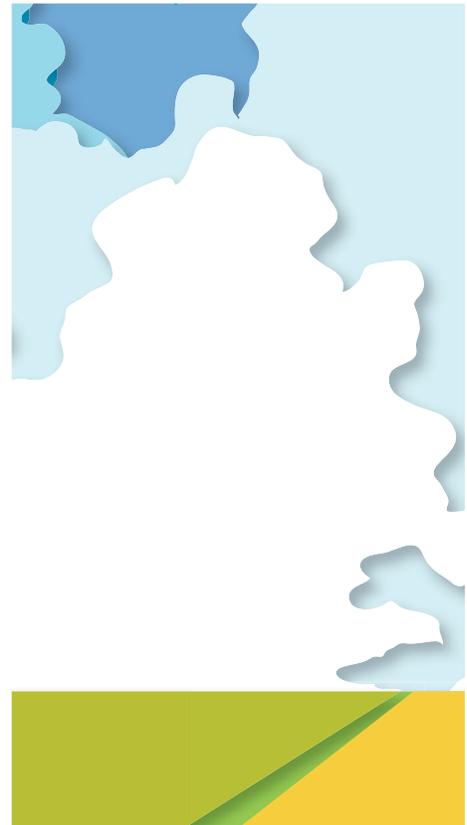
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Who We Are

The community-based organizations and Indigenous sovereign nations that guided this work care deeply about education and are determined to ensure that the students of Saskatchewan receive a high quality education today as well as in the future. We thank the following for their time and contributions:

Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation
Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations
Inclusion Saskatchewan
John Howard Society of Saskatchewan
Métis Nation - Saskatchewan
Northlands College
OUTSaskatoon
Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry
Saskatchewan Alliance for Youth and Community Well-Being
Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission
Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce
Saskatchewan Health Authority
Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
Saskatchewan Ministry of Education
Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation
Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association
Saskatoon Open Door Society
Trans Umbrella Foundation
University of Regina
University of Saskatchewan

We are proud to present the findings of this Re-Imagine Education initiative. We hope you will join with us in advocating for the implementation of these **12 Actions for Education**, ensuring a bright future for our students, our families, our communities and our province.

Community Praise for Education Re-Imagined . . .

“Much has changed in our education system over the past few years, some of which has not been to the benefit of our students. Hopefully the actions in the report, when acted upon, will improve all aspects of our educational system for the benefit of everyone involved in and impacted by negative events of the past.”

*Dr. Earl Cook, Minister of Education,
Métis Nation – Saskatchewan*

“As education gets re-invented and re-imagined, so does business, so do communities, so do families.”

*Monica Kreuger,
1st Vice-Chair
Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce*

“I was honoured to be involved in the Re-Imagine Education project and frankly I was inspired by the genuine interest in getting opinions on where we as parents, students and teachers would like education to take our children over the next decade.”

*Catherine Weenk
Parent and former Co-Chair, School
Community Council, Saskatoon Public
School Board*

What We Imagine

Imagine, for a moment, a student starting Grade 2. Maybe it is your child. Maybe it is your grandchild, or that little person down the street whom you often see riding their bike up and down the sidewalk in front of your house.

When we imagine what the Saskatchewan education system will look like 10 years from now, we imagine the education journey ahead of this child. We are also imagining the future of our community as this child grows into a contributing member of that community.

Seven-year-olds in Grade 2 are typically not interested in funding models or standardized tests, curriculum renewal or legislative limits on class size. What they do care about is going to a school where they are safe and cared for and where they can have fun, learn new things, make friends and satisfy their innate curiosity for the world around them.

Over the past 10 months, we heard about the importance of such things as educational resources and school division policy. What surprised us is that we also heard that, fundamentally, parents, students and teachers envision the same kind of school as our imaginary student above.

How do we, as a society, ensure that children and youth have the educational experience that they envision and deserve?

How can we ensure that our decisions and systems provide safe and rich learning environments for our children and youth? How do we strip away the noise and focus on what really matters?

In short, how do we Re-Imagine Education?

The Invitation

Re-Imagine Education is a bold initiative inviting us to challenge our views of what education looks like today and what it could look like in the future. The goals of this initiative are lofty:

- to amplify the issues facing public education today
- to create a vision for education in Saskatchewan

Education is vital to the future of our province. It affects everything and everyone. **The decisions we make about education today will change the way we experience our lives tomorrow.** Public education belongs to us all and this initiative is about working together to create bold strategies and solutions that can strengthen or improve public education in Saskatchewan communities.

Re-Imagine invited parents, grandparents, caregivers, students, members of the business community and post-secondary institutions and members of the public and teachers to share their hopes and dreams for public education now and in the future.

As part of the engagement process, we asked important questions:

- What should public education look like?
- What do we want our children to know?
- How do we provide our youth with the skills needed for a flourishing life?
- What is the role of schools in communities?
- How do we encourage children to be critical thinkers, media savvy and enthusiastic citizens?
- What role should schools play in promoting creativity, empathy and respect for self and others?
- How do we encourage local involvement?

People from around the province gave serious consideration to these questions and shared their thoughts either in community conversations or through written submissions.

The response was overwhelming and reflected the importance of public education in people's lives and in their communities. In total, 204 schools, 69 community and seven student consultations were held across the province. Over 6,000 people willingly contributed to the public online survey, making it one of

the most comprehensive surveys on public education undertaken in the province.

This is important work. The current strategic plan for education, *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*, is quickly coming to an end. While the existing plan outlined some important goals, the report was developed without significant public input. The time has come to begin redefining a vision for the evolution of public education in our province.

More than 30 years have passed since a comprehensive review of public education in Saskatchewan included significant public input. In 1981, Saskatchewan Education established a Curriculum and Review Committee to design a public education system to ensure students were prepared for the 21st century. The final report, *Directions*, reshaped our attitude and approach to learning. However, that work did not and could not have anticipated the accelerated technological developments, changing societal norms and expectations, the changing nature of work, or the extent of diversity, all of which are now reflected in today's classrooms.

The public's voice, through Re-Imagine Education, is calling for a refresh or a reset of the public education system across Saskatchewan.

The Process

Opportunities for public and community engagement took place between September 2018 and February 2019. The first phase involved regional meetings with representatives from each school where participants engaged in conversations about the future of education. Representatives were then invited to go back to their local school communities and facilitate similar conversations. We received a total of 204 submissions from schools across the province.

In addition, reference committee members and other members of the public held consultations in their respective communities with their boards, their membership, their colleagues, and their neighbours. Over five months, 69 community engagements and consultations took place.

Finally, the reference committee, adamant that all voices be represented in the data, extended opportunities for engagement to groups and Indigenous sovereign nations that have traditionally not been included in education conversations. These included OUTSaskatoon, the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan, EGADZ, the Saskatoon Open Door Society, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, the Métis Nation - Saskatchewan as well as several northern communities. We are grateful to these organizations, nations and communities for opening their doors and for the honest and insightful conversations.

Consultations were held in schools, libraries, community halls and event centres, hockey rinks and coffee shops across the province. The conversations were passionate and engaging. People care deeply about public education and the future of Saskatchewan children.

The Re-Imagine Education process included another opportunity for involvement. An independent research company, Praxis Analytics, conducted a public survey and participation was advertised on social media, radio, billboards, theaters and through the Re-Imagine Education website. Six thousand people responded to the survey, providing over 400 pages of open-ended commentary.

Without question, when asked to envision the future of education, people in Saskatchewan had a lot to say.

We learned there is much to celebrate in the public education system. Stories of engaged students, caring and passionate teachers, supportive parents and innovative teaching and learning resonated through the data.



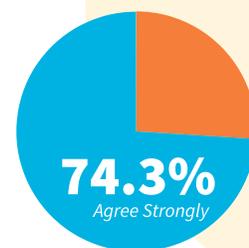
“Schools are the backbone of many communities. This is where the children spend their day, it is often part of the community’s identity in the province. I feel that as rural schools get smaller or even close this important part of a community is being lost.”

Community Engagement Forum

However, we also heard that the public education system today is under significant stress. Class sizes are growing, student needs are becoming increasingly complex and outstripping available resources. Funding has not kept up. Rural schools are especially feeling the strain of underfunding due to decisions such as school closures, more classes with multiple grades, or outdated resources.

Most notably, we heard that education matters. That people are passionate about their children and grandchildren's futures and that they want to be involved. We were encouraged to be bold, to ask the difficult questions and to make recommendations that were actionable, that would have real impact in the classroom today and would help to secure a bright future for Saskatchewan children and youth.

Everyone benefits from having an educated population



Vision for Education

Re-Imagine Education invited the Saskatchewan public to share their blue sky vision for education beyond 2020. The initiative created an opportunity for youth and adults from around the province to talk together about their hopes and dreams for the future of education in Saskatchewan.

Common themes as well as a compelling vision for education emerged.

The Saskatchewan public envision education as an all-important process valuing people and positive relationships. A child's educational experience nurtures their unique gifts and talents and ensures learning spaces that are inclusive, responsive and most importantly, safe.

Purpose of Education and an Educated Person

We also asked participants to share their ideas around the purpose of education and to define an educated person. We received a long list of things that the education system should or could do. There is growing expectation that schools can and should meet the wide array of issues inherent in today's society. The lists varied from person to person and group to group, yet there were key similarities. Of interest was that, in the public's eye, the purpose of education has not changed substantially over the years, nor has the definition of an educated person. Creating well-rounded, capable and literate citizens who meaningfully engage with their communities and society is as important today as it was in the past.

The purpose of education is twofold.

- People value the development of skills in a number of subject areas including reading, writing and math.
- Education has an important role in developing individuals who are socially aware, critical thinkers and lifelong learners. Citizens who are compassionate and respectful and who appreciate diversity.

These two dimensions of essential skill development and social awareness work together to create a well-rounded individual who, regardless of ability or background, is able to realize his or her potential and make a meaningful contribution to their broader community.

"Educational purposes has not changed since the main goal is to train citizens to create better institutions and live a better life."

Community Engagement Forum

When asked about the main purpose of education, the public identified these six priorities:

- Learning to read and express ourselves well
- Learning to problem solve
- Learning how to work with numbers
- Learning things useful in the world of work or entrepreneurship
- Learning values
- Learning how to be good citizens

The public has high expectations and wants to be confident that education is fulfilling all of these purposes. Teachers are highly valued by the public as trained professionals with the necessary skills, abilities and professional judgment to guide and support students in fulfilling their potential.

However, within the current system, the pressures of standardized assessments, inclusion without necessary supports, mental health challenges, increased bureaucracy, ongoing staffing cuts and lack of resources collectively undermine the ability of schools to meet their purpose.

We also heard that people believe that the strains on education today are creating an unsustainable system and is certainly unable to meet the future needs of our children and youth. This underlines the need for a new vision for education in Saskatchewan.

“The purpose of education should be raising good citizens, individuals who could be responsible, honest, strong, polite, informed, and caring.”

Community Engagement Forum

Being Bold

We were encouraged by respondents to be bold, courageous and forward-thinking as we imagined the future. Addressing the gaps between the vision for education and the realities of the current system offer opportunities to strengthen public education and ensure all students have access to the high quality education they deserve.

Throughout the data, four main themes emerged as areas of focus:

- The Learning Environment
- Decision Making in Education
- Legislation and Policy in Education
- Funding Education

Recommendations for action in these four key areas can move us towards the system of public education the people of Saskatchewan envision and deserve.

As I Re-Imagine Education for Saskatchewan, I hope that ... “It gets shaken up. Let’s be brave, Saskatchewan.”

School Engagement Forum

The Learning Environment

An overwhelming theme was the idea that the learning environment is different today than it was in the past. Shifting societal realities and expectations see schools taking on increased roles in students’ lives that may have previously resided with families or other groups.

The data showed significant public trust in teachers and in their ability and training to make the best decisions to guide children’s learning and meet their needs. The public has high expectations for both the system and its teachers and has confidence in the classroom teacher to meet these expectations.

Class sizes are growing. Student needs are increasingly complex and both recent and on-going societal changes are affecting children and the classroom in new and challenging ways. Administrative demands on the teachers’ time such as testing and reporting are increasing, and the resources that address this intensification have diminished.

Participants were clear that they support an inclusive education system where all students have the opportunity to learn and develop their individual gifts. They were also clear that an inclusive education system requires the proper resources to help students succeed.

The data reflected a need to ensure classrooms and schools are a safe and nurturing environment for all students. Parents in particular are seeking reassurance that their children and youth are safe, encouraged and in environments that ensure that they learn to their full potential.

“Education must provide a safe space for people of all backgrounds/abilities to interact.”

Community Engagement Forum

Characteristics of a healthy and safe learning environment:

- A focus on the teaching and learning relationship
- Invites a love of learning
- Smaller class size
- Family involvement
- Community support (Elders, Knowledge Keepers)
- Differentiated instruction
- Learning supports, including qualified educational assistants
- English as additional language supports
- Mental health supports, e.g., counsellors
- Minimized standardized tests and increased teacher decision making about student progress
- Reflective of the community

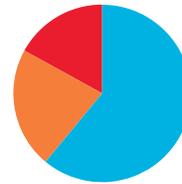
Part of the equation is time. Teachers and students need time to build strong and trusting relationships. Participants are aware of increasing demands on teachers' time in today's classroom and are optimistic of practices and resources that can make classrooms a safer and more nurturing learning environment in the future.

The Learning Environment Re-Imagined:

- Focuses on students' gifts
- Respectful
- Variety of course options
- Access to professional supports
- Strong standards
- Uses current technology
- Access to community resources
- Has flexible learning spaces
- Access to diverse range of activities
- Honours and supports diversity

Therefore:

- 1. Learning spaces must be resourced so that teachers can create a safe and effective learning environment for the diversity of student learning.**
- 2. Human resources must be provided to support inclusion and create classrooms where every child can learn. This means providing educational assistants, Elders, speech-language pathologists, educational psychologists, counsellors, librarians, English as an additional language teachers and others to support classroom learning.**
- 3. Move beyond test scores. Establish structures and processes to cultivate a sense of shared accountability among government, teachers, parents, and community members for student success at all stages of his or her educational experience.**



61.2%

of respondents agreed
teachers are in the best position
to choose the methods they use
to guide student learning

“It is important to remember that education is always changing. New discoveries and innovation lead these education changes...I think it is important to keep an open mind when developing a new education system.”

Community Engagement Forum

“Indigenous students need to see themselves in every aspect of the learning environment from teachers, administrators, senior level administrators to relevant curriculum, contemporary resources, culturally appropriate policies and practices.” – Public Online Survey

“Students learn through the relationships, NOT the material.”
Public Online Survey

Decision Making in Education

The data from consultations, public engagements and the survey indicate that the people of Saskatchewan want education decisions to be made in the best interests of our children and youth.

Participants were clear that education is a shared responsibility. Government, school boards, teachers, students, parents and communities each have a role to play in making decisions and in supporting education. When these parties are involved and empowered, real accountability is possible and decisions are transparent and visibly centred on student learning.

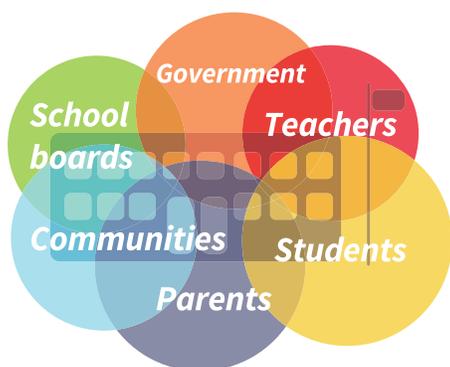
Schools are the hub of the community. Participants told us that the school is the ideal place to support students' diverse needs. Schools should be a centralized point that can deliver a wide range of services and programs. Participants told us that the school building is an important place to gather and build community. It was also recognized that communities can also provide learning opportunities for students outside of the school building.

Community members overwhelmingly shared a desire to support their children and youth. They see schools as important centers where the community can gather, provide activities and build relationships. In the public's eye, schools should be open spaces for the community without further extending expectations on teachers or the school staff.

Finally, the data reflected a clear desire for ongoing and meaningful conversations about education within communities. **The public is calling for opportunities for their voices and opinions to be heard on matters that affect their children and their children's education.**

Therefore:

- 4. Restructure authority and agency to the local school community to ensure local voice at the school community level.**
- 5. School facilities must serve as the hub and gathering place of the local community, providing space for community programming.**
- 6. To ensure ongoing and sustained input into all aspects of education in Saskatchewan, establish a Provincial Council on Education that is free of politics to ensure that education programs, services and policies are aligned with research and best practice.**



“When my daughter is in school I want to be welcomed into the school. I don’t want her to feel that she isn’t good enough or that I’m not good enough to be in there because of my background”.

Student Consultation

“Everything works better when we all work together. A school is often the center of a community & should be valued & respected as an important place & an integral part of the community.”

School Engagement Forum

“Ideally the school will be the hub of a community wheel with many spokes including things like health care, social services, cultural groups, sporting/ club organizations amongst others. As this hub school and their staffs will play an important role of identifying needs and making both sides aware of opportunities available or people in need of assistance.”

Community Engagement Forum

“To have a strong relationship between the school and the community, both have a role to play. The school need be open to its community reality and work towards its development and the school should the focal point of community responses. For the community, it needs to be present and visible in the school. Parents must build relationship with the school staff and support them.”

- Community Engagement Forum

Legislation and Policy in Education

Education in Saskatchewan operates within a system of rules and expectations as laid out in legislation (written by the provincial government), in policy (written by school divisions) and in curriculum documents (written by the Ministry of Education). Teachers are required to teach the curriculum and to report on how students are meeting the outcomes stated in curriculum documents.

Re-Imagine Education participants said that education should set high standards and that consistency is important. They also said that flexibility and adaptation are necessary to create an education system that responds to the needs of every community and for every student.

To Re-Imagine Education we must be willing to rethink even the basic structures such as traditional classrooms, age-alike grouping, five-day school weeks and 50-minute classes.

Another major theme that emerged was around input and transparency. Parents, teachers and students want to be involved in making decisions that directly affect education. Students in particular expressed interest in having input into decisions.

Increased transparency and involvement provides an opportunity for community-based conversations around issues where there is a diversity of opinion. The Re-Imagine data revealed the need for continued dialogue and understanding in many areas and especially regarding the following:

- Failing students,
- Late assignments,
- Report cards, and,
- Math curriculum.

The Re-Imagine data tells us that there is a need for further dialogue within school communities about local policies that influence student learning and success.

Curriculum, in particular, received a lot of attention, with comments suggesting that curriculum needs to be relevant to students and that the current curriculum is not keeping pace with broader societal changes. The data reflected a need not only for relevant curriculum but also for a process that ensures that the curriculum is manageable.

At the same time, participants spoke of the need to support curriculum with learning resources and professional development for teachers.

Therefore:

- 7. The school program, including curriculum development, must be continually updated, utilizing teachers' professional knowledge in all phases and providing opportunities for input from parents, students and community members.**
- 8. The Ministry of Education must provide a full range of resources and materials as well as teacher-led professional development opportunities to support curriculum implementation for classroom teachers.**
- 9. School division policies must be developed in collaboration with school staff, parents and students so that the outcomes meet the needs of the community.**

“The school curriculum should include courses that help prepare students for real-life challenges.”

Community Engagement Forum

“Back to basics and make the report card simple and clear so parents can see exactly how their child is doing in each subject.”

School Engagement Forum

Funding

Participants in the Re-Imagine initiative stated clearly and often that education funding is important. They also said that the current method and levels of funding are not enough to meet the needs of students today, let alone the future.

The people of Saskatchewan envision education as an investment. A strong education system creates educated and productive citizens. The public understands that by investing in education we realize savings in other areas such as health, justice and social services.

Participants talked about the need for funding to be predictable and stable so that school divisions can make decisions in the best interests of teaching and learning. **Without question, funding decisions should not be political but rather be driven by the needs of students.**

We heard that students flourish when the education system, families and communities work together. Our children and youth require a system that is outside the political rhetoric. To thrive, students need a stable, sustainable and transparent system from PreK through to Grade 12.

As a province, we need to shift the conversation from what does education cost, to what investments are required for each child to receive the education that he or she deserves. A funding model, based upon a grassroots analysis of the real costs, could ensure long-term, sustainable and depoliticized funding for education in Saskatchewan.

Many participants had ideas and suggestions about how money should be spent or where money should be directed. More adults in classrooms and mental health supports were two examples of supports that were mentioned repeatedly as critical to ensuring a healthy education system. However, participants also expressed concern about one-time cash investments that are not sustainable and often can do more harm than good.

Therefore:

- 10. Conduct a comprehensive study to determine the real costs of a quality education system fit for the 21st century and commit to a long-term funding mechanism to ensure students receive quality education.**
- 11. Any funding model must be designed to provide the resources required to support the varied needs of students, including behavioural issues, learning needs, cultural diversity and mental health.**

“The public has the responsibility to demand that more than just adequate resources are available for public education. The government must fund this.”

Community Engagement Forum

“We need to fund our education system appropriately... we either fund students during their PreK-12 education now... or we fund increased incarceration, reliance on social/welfare, etc.”

Public Online Survey

“Stop cutting funding for education! Stop taking teachers out of classrooms, cutting support staff and bring back guidance counseling for these kids!!”

Public Online Survey

Further Learnings

What have we learned? We have learned people in the province care deeply about education. We have learned that people genuinely trust and believe in their schools and have high expectations for teachers and for students. **We have learned that the system is not broken but that we need to be bold in making decisions now to ensure a successful future for our province and for our children.**

We learned that people want to continue to talk about the future of education and that this initiative is the beginning of the conversation.

Therefore:

12. The Actions for Education outlined in this report must be acted upon. We are all accountable. Government, policy-makers, decision makers and traditional leaders, parents, community groups and the public share the responsibility of ensuring that conversations about the future of education continue and that decision makers are held accountable.

“I believe, and have believed for a while, that education needs a complete overhaul. It should look less like rows and columns, and more like a creative space for young people to develop ideas, challenge themselves, and gain knowledge that is interlinked across the core subjects.”

School Consultation Forum

Afterword

Re-Imagine Education is an impressive piece of policy making. It's not just the ideas that are forward-looking, but the way it connects ideas and process.

First, there is the breadth of project, which involved several phases. Each one was targeted at a different group, from individuals to schools to community-based organizations who were often excluded from past policy discussions, such as the John Howard Society or the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. This process was *inclusive* in the best sense of the word.

But breadth is not necessarily depth, which draws attention to a second feature of the process: *dialogue*. The process encouraged real exchanges within and between these groups, and on some very basic questions. Only a decade ago, things would have been done very differently. An expert panel might have been struck, travelled around the province holding hearings, then written a lengthy report. That report would have been addressed to the minister, and everyone would have looked to the government to act on it.

Re-Imagine Education asks us to look at reform differently. Certainly, it recognizes government's vital role in education, but it has as much to say about the role of the community at large, which highlights a third feature of the approach: *ownership*. A rich dialogue like this one not only sifts through the finer points of the issues, it uncovers the deep interconnections between them, such as the links between culture and learning; and this, in turn, reveals the complexity of the task that lies ahead.

Ambitious goals like accessibility or cultural security won't be achieved by government alone. The community has a critical role to play. Ownership implies responsibility and action. This not only produces a better school system, it creates *resilience* – a collective will to face and overcome the obstacles to progress, to see the project through to completion, and to resist the erratic or capricious forces of change that arise along the way.

As the project moves into its next phase, there is every reason to be hopeful that Saskatchewanians will rise to the challenge. In the coming decades, systems like this one must be rebuilt and revitalized from the bottom up, not the top down. That way lies the future.

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ReImagineEducation.ca

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