



Key Themes of What We Heard

Theme 1: Relationships

Participants shared not only how important it is, but also their desire to build and maintain strong and positive relationships broadly across the education sector, including students, parents/caregivers, families, communities and community organizations, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous governments, school and division staff, as well as the department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. Key challenges that impacted relationships included the COVID-19 pandemic, the governance changes proposed in Bill 64, and the inability to meet in person to maintain relationships. The changing public health situation meant that there were frequent updates to guidelines and requirements. On a positive note, frequent conference calls and the ability to meet virtually as a large group increased alignment with the implementation of these orders and guidelines.

Trust

Throughout the forum, we heard that public trust and confidence in the public health and education systems weakened due to controversies of the pandemic response and the strong public response to the proposed legislation. We also heard that remote learning and the polarizing views towards public health orders (mask mandates, school closures, etc.) created barriers to building and sustaining relationships and trust.

We heard that a priority must be to rebuild these sentiments and renew engagement and consultation with Kindergarten to Grade 12 education stakeholders. Examples of rebuilding trust shared by participants included:

1. Increasing public engagement in policy development.
2. Receiving and integrating public feedback into public policy.
3. Ensuring policy reflects the needs of our increasingly complex society.

Significant consultations to formulate *Manitoba's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Action Plan (2022)* and a number of advisory tables, comprised of members from school divisions, schools, and education partners, are a few of the strategies that the department has undertaken. Similarly, the education associations and partners have invited the department to participate in planning discussions. This joint planning and communication is serving to strengthen relationships and our system.

Inclusion and Safety

Another common subtheme, within the discussion of relationships and trust, was inclusion and safety. Participants shared that, for some community members and families, there is both hesitancy and a sense of fear towards authority figures and the education system. Alternatively, participants shared experiences of challenging engagements with dissatisfied community members and families sharing negative sentiments on the education system. Participants agreed that all community members and families must be able to access engagements in an inclusive and safe way. They also shared a desire for schools to be safe and inclusive places that families, students, and communities can go to in order to connect and experience a sense of belonging.

We heard that building positive experiences with the school community is vital to building trust, comfort, and good faith within and across the community. Examples of inclusive and welcoming engagements shared by participants included:

1. Seeking to intentionally reengage with parents/caregivers and the community following challenging interactions where and when dissatisfaction is shared.
2. Recognizing that building trust and safety starts in the classroom.
3. Continuing to build trust and safety in the community outside of the school environment.
4. Creating safe and welcoming spaces in the school environment.

Accessible Engagement

Participants highlighted several recurring barriers to parent/caregiver and community engagement, magnified by the pandemic, that require attention and change in order to achieve trust, resolve long-standing challenges, and build/re-build meaningful relationships. Using academic language and educational jargon and requiring parents/caregivers and school community members to register for school meetings/engagements were noted as factors that create barriers and limit opportunities to engage with parents/caregivers and the school community.

We heard that we must “meet parents/caregivers where they are at.” Examples of how to do so shared by participants included:

1. Using social media channels to advertise meetings/school activities.
2. Attending and/or hosting community barbecues.
3. Extending open invitations to school activities instead of requiring registration.