

6. SCHOOL DIVISION / MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES

At the present time there are 57 school divisions and districts and 202 municipalities in the province of Manitoba. Only portions of existing school division boundaries match those of municipalities. In fact, there are literally dozens of sets of boundaries in Manitoba, each designed for their own purpose, but providing services to or affecting the same people. An evaluation of the multiplicity of boundaries results in only one commonality - that is the majority of existing sets of service boundaries are built on the smallest of building blocks - municipalities. However, very few match sufficiently to minimize confusion.

If more attention were paid to attempting to match service boundaries, they would become more recognizable and frustration would be reduced. It is not uncommon at the present time to converse with a property owner who questions the logic of different tax levels on pieces of similarly assessed property directly adjacent to each other. This happens frequently because school divisions contain or bridge an average of four municipalities, and since school division boundaries also dissect municipalities, there is a multiplicity of tax levels, even within the same municipality.

Municipal and education services are two of the most evident public services for Manitobans. The disparate boundaries are evident not only in taxation areas but also at election time. Since the outer boundaries do not match, it follows that it is impossible for individual ward boundaries to match (if the division and municipality use a ward system - which most do). Even if outer boundaries were coincident, it is not automatic that wards would be the same. However, at least the potential for greater similarities and understanding could be augmented by maximizing matching of major boundaries.

In most instances, school board and municipal elections now take place in the same year. However, there are still a few school divisions that hold 'off-year' elections. Maintaining different areas of jurisdiction and off year elections can force duplication of several electoral processes inclusive of preparation of lists of voters, and the conduct of elections themselves. These processes can be expensive and experience has shown that elections in 'off-years' have generated little interest in the absence of a pressing local issue.

OBSERVATIONS ON MUNICIPAL/EDUCATION BOUNDARIES

- There are 202 municipalities and 57 school divisions/districts in the Province of Manitoba.
- Only small portions of existing municipal and education boundaries are coincidental.
- Proliferation of different sets of boundaries can be costly and confusing.
- Not all school trustees and municipal councillors, reeves and mayors are elected at the same time.

CONCLUSIONS ON MUNICIPAL/EDUCATION BOUNDARIES

- The importance of school division boundaries following individual property lines would be reduced, if the majority of problems created by impervious boundaries could be addressed through operational principles. The choice of the most appropriate school for individual students should be based more on common sense and practicality rather than being dictated by the existence of a school division boundary line. Thus, the potential of matching municipal and education boundaries would be increased and the ensuing benefits of such coincidental boundaries would also rise substantially.
- Matching of education and municipal boundaries wherever possible can contribute to simplicity and understanding by taxpayers and electors and economies in preparations of lists of eligible voters and the conduct of elections themselves.
- Conducting municipal and school board elections simultaneously appears to provide considerable advantages.

7. PERMEABILITY OF BOUNDARIES

Without a doubt, the most common complaint heard by the Commission at its public meetings and through calls to the Commission office related to the impervious nature of our existing school division/district boundaries. There are many situations where, through good cooperation and cross border relationships, the effect of school division boundaries is minimal. However, there are examples where parents and students have been frustrated by the formidable nature of these apparently unscalable and impenetrable walls where boards and administrations have chosen to interpret these lines on a map to be fences or barriers.

In Winnipeg where there are ten city based school divisions, some parents are overwhelmed at the number of boundaries and the apparent impenetrability when it comes to making choices; choice of courses and choice of schools. In rural areas the problems emanate primarily from the fact that students represent statistics that generate grants. Divisions in attempting to protect their grant base try hard not to lose students. In some instances, it was apparent to the Commission that decisions relating to this topic were made more on the basis of protecting the financial base of the division than what was in the best interest of the student and the parents.

Transportation of students is a major source of problems, primarily in rural areas. While some divisions cooperate extensively and busses are allowed to cross boundaries for practical reasons, there are too many instances where impractical arrangements are created by protectionism developed along boundaries. On many occasions the Commission heard of specific arrangements where parents were forced to drive children to existing school bus routes, usually that of a neighbouring school division, so that home division students would not be inconvenienced by non residents. This whole issue of resident versus non-resident creates problems both fiscally and socially. Students labeled as non-residents and parents of non-resident students can be made to feel like outsiders and as such their interests tend to become subservient to those of the receiving division. On several occasions the Commission heard of situations where students were being treated as pawns with little respect for them or their parents' feelings or well-being. These cases represented the extreme of a graduated scale created by the present system. Parental and student choice is totally dependent upon the goodwill of the divisions involved.

Research into jurisdictions where choice has been improved have focused primarily on the State of Minnesota which was the first state to adopt legislation in the area of school choice. Typical

research findings on school choice tend to quote only 2 to 3 percent movement following implementation of choice. This usually relates to choice between districts. Minnesota's experience shows that choice can be as high as 14% when choice of school within the district is also included in the statistics.

Dr. Joe Nathan, Director for the Centre for School Change at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and Professor James Ysseldyke, writing in the Phi Delta Kappan on the topic *What Minnesota Has Learned About School Choice* states:

"Minnesota's choice plans have helped thousands of students and have garnered widespread public support. Many of the choice programs also have strong support from professional educators. However, no one in Minnesota suggests that these plans have solved all the state's problems. They are widely viewed as part of our approach to improving education."

Nathan and Ysseldyke forewarn us however, that:

"Choice, like electricity is a powerful tool that must be handled with care. Some choice programs including some public school choice programs, create more problems than they solve. Educators need to create new options and help families understand them."

In a paper entitled *Organizational Change at the Local School Level Under Minnesota's Open Enrollment Program* which was presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Atlanta in April, 1993, James Tenbusch and Garet Michael concluded that open enrollment:

"Increased competition and collaboration between school districts; stimulated improvements to school curricula and support services; promoted greater parent and teacher involvement in school planning and decision making; fostered a more equitable distribution of school resources and student access to educational services, and increased the ethnic and cultural diversity of schools."

The Commission can see some positive advantages to allowing improved choice for parents and students in selecting the schools they attend. Of course, there are some practical limitations to the exercising of such choices. For example, the receiving school would obviously need to have sufficient space to accept those from beyond the local area and especially in rural areas, the limitations of bussing must be taken into consideration. Freedom to choose a school can not predicate the right to be bussed to any school of choice. It would create an unmanageable situation for transportation coordinators if they were expected to respond to the individual wishes of everyone. Consequently it would appear reasonable to limit bussing guarantees to the closest practical school for the course choices of a student within his/her own school division or to the

nearest school in a neighbouring school division if indeed that neighbouring school is even closer. It is apparent to the Commission that the choice of school should be based more on common sense, distance, bus route practicality, and availability of program choices pertinent to the individual rather than the mere existence of a line on the map as a school division boundary.

Choice of the closest local school within a division or a closer school in the neighbouring division, complete with school division bussing where applicable, would appear to be an achievable goal. The receiving school division would need to have reasonable notice of such choice and time to incorporate the student residential locations into the bussing patterns, regardless of whether or not boundary crossing was required. The receiving division should receive the regular education grant along with any appropriate transportation grant for the transported students. A practical system for dealing with residual or non-resident fees would need to be established and this is discussed in the next section of this report.

Parents and students could exercise choice beyond the closest local schools inside or outside of the division but the parents should be expected to provide their own method of transporting the children or the students themselves should find their own way to the more distant schools. This would be applicable in both urban and rural situations. The receiving division would need sufficient notice to plan for staffing, programs and other budgetary considerations. This assumes there is sufficient space at the school of choice.

OBSERVATIONS ON PERMEABILITY OF BOUNDARIES

- Boundaries which were designed primarily for taxation and administrative purposes, have, in some instances been transformed into fences or barriers to keep students in and/or to keep students out.
- Impermeable boundaries are one of the greatest sources of parental and student frustration with the present system.
- Solutions to these issues could result in much greater satisfaction for students and parents and would allow precious resources to be focused on education rather than the administrative hassles that ensue.

CONCLUSIONS ON PERMEABILITY OF BOUNDARIES

- Improved permeability of school division boundaries should be a high priority in the Department of Education and Training's reform of education in Manitoba.
- Barriers to school and school division choice must be reduced to allow for more parental and student capability of exercising that choice.
- Freedom of choice of school to be attended must be tempered with practical limitations:
 1. There must be sufficient space available at the school of choice.
 2. If eligible for transportation it should be provided to the closest practical school in the home division or after proper serving of reasonable notice, to a closer school in an adjacent division.
- Transportation to schools beyond the aforementioned choices should be the responsibility of the students and/or parent.
- A simplified system of dealing with residual or non-resident fees must be designed.
- With improved freedom of choice exercised in the aforementioned fashion, the need for school division boundaries to be property specific will reduce. This in turn would allow for boundaries to be more permanent and would enable the creation of more coincident boundaries. This could substantially reduce confusion and costs surrounding the assessment, taxation and electoral processes.

8. RESIDUAL FEES (TUITION FEES FOR NON-RESIDENT STUDENTS)

Students who attend a school beyond the home school division boundary are referred to as non-resident students. Although records are incomplete, statistics available show that in 1993 there were at least 3,300 students crossing school division boundaries to obtain education in neighbouring divisions. It is also apparent from similar limited records for 1992/93 that more than \$6.6 million is involved in the cross-division transfers. Because records are incomplete, and because the Commission is aware of numerous instances where students cross boundaries with no fees charged by the receiving divisions, it is reasonable to predict that actual numbers exceed 3,300. The magnitude of the issue is not quantifiable in the absence of complete records.

Most non-resident students cross divisional boundaries to obtain education that is not available in their home division. Good examples of this include vocational education offered at regional centres and specialty courses and programs that some divisions have not been able to offer either due to insufficient numbers or school division choice.

Residual fees for non-resident students are not uniform amongst school divisions as they are determined individually by the division charging for the services. Typically the fees are meant to cover the portion of the cost of provision of the service beyond the regular grants received directly from the Department of Education and Training. If the student is included in the September 30 count for the receiving division, then the regular grants are applicable to the receiving division. Since the regular grants do not cover the entire cost of education services, the receiving division would be penalized if it were expected to provide the services without the funding. There is no automatic provision for transfer of applicable special levies and consequently the primary method used at the present time to balance these situations is the charging of a residual or non-resident fee.

Many divisions have either formal or informal policies with respect to the acceptance of non-resident students without charging fees. Some have no policy at all. Where good working relationships exist and where no major consequential imbalance results, arrangements may be made with little fanfare and sometimes with no formality. It was not uncommon for the Commission to learn of substantially differing arrangements among neighbouring divisions. Occasionally fees are charged to one neighbour; effectively ignored for another, and differing amounts charged to yet another because of unique circumstances.

PUPILS RECEIVED FROM/SENT TO ANOTHER SCHOOL DIVISION – SEPT. 30, 1993

DIVISION/DISTRICT	PUPILS RECEIVED INTO DIVISION	RANGE OF FEES RECEIVED	PUPILS SENT OUT OF DIVISION	RANGE OF FEES PAID
Winnipeg No. 1	218	NR	208	\$650 – \$4,000
St. James - Assiniboia No. 2	127	\$296 – \$9,030	89	\$835 – \$5,140
Assiniboine South No. 3	68	\$972 – \$1,700	82	\$1,670 – \$9,030
St. Boniface No. 4	395	\$835 – \$4,140	57	\$650 – \$3,100
Fort Garry No. 5	61	\$1,150 – \$4,200	49	\$700 – \$4,140
St. Vital No. 6	60	\$715 – \$3,785	233	\$291 – \$3,000
Norwood No. 8	115	\$291 – \$1,750	113	\$743 – \$11,292
River East No. 9	199	\$650 – \$4,500	97	\$418 – \$3,000
Seven Oaks No. 10	63	\$312 – \$1,792	110	\$650 – \$31,010
Lord Selkirk No. 11	140	\$638 – \$1,400	37	\$726 – \$6,785
Transcona-Springfield No. 12	49	\$987 – \$6,765	92	\$676 – \$2,973
Agassiz No. 13	60	NR	123	NR
Seine River No. 14	116	\$366 – \$3,200	240	\$600 – \$26,300
Hanover No. 15	275	NR	94	NR
Boundary No. 16	32	NR	47	NR
Red River No. 17	77	\$787 – \$1,575	193	\$280 – \$3,300
Rhineland No. 18	33	\$0 – \$1,510	23	\$0 – \$1,510
Morris-Macdonald No. 19	157	\$0 – \$1,300	69	NR
White Horse Plain No. 20	25	NIL	73	\$0 – \$5,224
Interlake No. 21	40	\$0 – \$936	59	\$1,600 – \$18,000
Evergreen No. 22	20	NR	21	\$0 – \$1,400
Lakeshore No. 23	37	\$0 – \$960	44	NIL
Portage la Prairie No. 24	18	NIL	31	NIL
Midland No. 25	7	NR	27	NR
Garden Valley No. 26	54	NIL	22	NR
Pembina Valley No. 27	17	\$0 – \$1,460	22	\$0 – \$1,460
Mountain No. 28	38	NR	4	NR
Tiger Hills No. 29	13	NR	53	NR
Pine Creek No. 30	23	NIL	23	NIL
Beautiful Plains No. 31	23	\$0 – \$2,282	28	\$0 – \$1,850
Turtle River No. 32	30	\$0 – \$1,200	17	\$0 – \$1,200
Dauphin-Ochre Area No. 1	58	NR	14	NR
Duck Mountain No. 34	66	\$960	10	\$1,051 – \$1,102
Swan Valley No. 35	61	\$170	0	NR
Intermountain No. 36	0	NR	34	NR
Pelly Trail No. 37	10	NR	18	NR
Birdtail River No. 38	22	NR	19	NR
Rolling River No. 39	41	NR	62	NR
Brandon No. 40	176	\$0 – \$12,300	73	\$0 – \$1,500
Fort la Bosse No. 41	19	NR	9	NR
Souris Valley No. 42	12	NIL	18	NR
Antler River No. 43	7	NR	35	NR
Turtle Mountain No. 44	20	NR	34	\$4,000
Kelsey No. 45	51	NR	3	\$1,600
Flin Flon No. 46	61	NR	3	NR
Western No. 47	33	\$0 – \$1,460	38	\$0 – \$1,460
Frontier No. 48	3	NIL	503	\$0 – \$300
Churchill No. 2264	0	NR	0	NR
Snow Lake No. 2309	0	NR	3	NR
Lynn Lake No. 2312	0	NR	0	NR
Mystery Lake No. 2355	29	NR	2	\$1,850
Sprague Consolidated No. 2439	0	NR	1	NR
Leaf Rapids No. 2460	15	\$1,993	0	NR
Pine Falls Special Revenue No. 2155	18	NR	2	NR
Camp Shilo Special Revenue No. 2316	0	NR	27	\$3,900 – \$31,260
Whitshell Special Revenue No. 2408	0	NR	1	NR
TOTAL	3,292	-	3,289	-

Figure 35

NR – This information was not reported

Source: Schools' Finance Branch forms FB121 and FB121A

Figure 35 on the previous page was drawn from the computer files in the Schools' Finance Branch and displays the information that was reported by divisions and districts. It is evident that reported fees charged or paid range from 0 to \$31,260 per student. Obviously, the highest amounts refer to special needs situations. Because these arrangements are inter-divisional there is not a high priority placed on reporting these arrangements. The home division is obligated to pay residual fees for a student attending an approved program or course in another division when these are not offered by the home division. In any other scenario, the parents are responsible for payment of these fees.

If there is to be improved freedom of choice for parents and students as to schools they will attend, there is a need for a much more simplified and consistent system to deal with residual fees. The Commission is grateful to the major education associations and especially the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials for advice on this topic. Members of these associations deal with this area daily and consequently their advice was most helpful to members of the Commission. It is apparent from these discussions that a more uniform and effective system for residual fees is possible. It can simplify the process; remove an acute source of aggravation for parents, school administrations and school boards; ensure that divisions providing the service are appropriately compensated; and provide a consistent understandable system.

OBSERVATIONS ON RESIDUAL FEES

- More than 3,300 students crossed division/district boundaries in 1993 to obtain education.
- The primary reasons for boundary crossing include vocational education, special needs programs and education in a language not available in the home division.
- Residual fees reported range from 0 to \$31,260.
- More than \$6.6 million changed hands between divisions/districts in 1993.
- There are no consistent policies governing whether fees are charged, how much they are, or who pays them, other than the following requirement.
- The home division is obligated to pay for approved courses not offered in the home division. For other choices, the parents are responsible.

CONCLUSIONS ON RESIDUAL FEES

- A rational simplified system of funding transferral must be designed to accompany cross border movement generated both by necessity and improved school choice.
- The finite details of such an improved system ought to be worked out by collaboration between departmental officials from the Schools' Finance Branch, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Education Finance and Manitoba Association of School Business Officials since they are most qualified to address the issue.
- Consideration should be given to a new system including:
 - (1) elimination of residual fees as we know them now.
 - (2) determination of appropriate regional levels for transferral of funding between divisions based on categories such as regular instruction, vocational and special needs.
 - (3) transferral of such funds electronically at the Schools' Finance Branch based on enrollment statistics of divisions as of September 30 each year.
 - (4) retention of special levies raised in the home division.
 - (5) payment of transportation grants to the division providing the bussing. (If the school of choice is the closest practical school, irrespective of whether or not a boundary must be crossed to get there, then the division responsible for bussing would be the receiving division, assuming the distance and provincial policy make that student eligible).

9. DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

A Manitoba task force commissioned by the Minister of Education and Training in April, 1992 spent a full year studying the future role for distance education programs and types of technologies to be employed from kindergarten to post-secondary levels of education. The final report was published in October, 1993. It would be very useful for readers of this report to familiarize themselves with the distance education document as it deals with the topic in far greater depth than space and time allows for here. The Boundaries Review Commission approach was in the context of how distance education could or would be affected by boundary revisions and in turn how distance education could assist with any contemplated changes.

Earlier in this document under the heading "What's Working Well" credit was given to a few very positive examples of distance education initiatives. Utilization of interactive technology is at the infancy stage of integration as a delivery tool for education in our province. Utilized appropriately, interactive television can play a very positive role in filling gaps in the present delivery structure. In many locations, there are insufficient numbers of students to warrant the local provision of teaching staff for all courses. As an alternative to students leaving home and transferring to distant schools, and as an alternative to no instruction being offered at all, distance education presents a very positive potential.

Most people would agree that there is no true substitute for personal instruction by qualified teaching staff on a direct interaction basis. Consequently, distance education should not be viewed in the context of a cost saving measure to replace teaching staff. It should be viewed as a delivery medium for education where other alternatives are either prohibitively costly or totally unavailable.

Some of the fears expressed to the Commission during the public meetings emanated from suspicion that allowing distance education to get a foothold may lead to replacement of personnel. It was evident that some fears also arose from genuine ignorance of the capabilities that present day technology offers. The generation gap between today's students and some parents, administrators and school trustees was very evident. Today's youth are so exposed to computers and television that their technological horizons far exceed those of most adults. In fact, some of the anxiety in the adult population stems from computer illiteracy since most of the advances in computer technology have taken place in the last twenty years. Many children are now teaching their parents how to use computers complete with modems which allow them to

interact worldwide. Thousands of home owners throughout Manitoba utilize satellite dishes for entertainment, educational and business purposes and we now have examples of interactive cable operations. Manitoba's growing fiber optic distribution network is improving the capability for quality dependable communications in many parts of the province. There are however, areas of northern Manitoba where communication links are still suspect in terms of dependability. The recent problem with the Anik Satellite displayed how vulnerable distance education can be if it is totally dependent on earth-satellite linkages.

While the Commission recognizes the potential advantages from the use of distance education being in the field of delivery of education itself to areas in need and to small student numbers, there are further benefits which should not be overlooked. Professional development for staff at all levels is critical, yet difficult to achieve due to time and budget constraints. Use of interactive television could reduce the time, travel and cost factors of delivering and accessing these services. It could also improve the opportunities for wider distribution of presentations by top quality speakers and education leaders in selected fields which may otherwise be prohibitive due to cost.

If school divisions were to be enlarged, one of the issues would be driving distances for trustees to attend school board meetings. While personal contact can not be replaced totally by interactive television, some school board meetings could be conducted without everybody driving to one location. If interactive television suites were located strategically at schools throughout the province, it would be possible for some meetings to be conducted utilizing that electronic medium. In fact, it would probably be very helpful for the entire system if school trustees and staff became more knowledgeable of the operation of such systems by hands-on usage. As with any topic, it is much easier to understand and make decisions if one has first hand experience. This is especially pertinent to understanding both the advantages and limitations machines and technology place on the information highway.

Several times during the public meetings, the Commission was forewarned about "road-kill on the information highway". Distance education has great potential as an education delivery tool, as a methodology for reducing prohibitive distances, and as a provider for services not otherwise available. It can be expensive however, and should not be regarded as a universal solution or as an acceptable replacement for personalized teaching. Unrealistically high expectations exist in some areas and these may create negative reinforcement if implementation of distance education is not approached in a judicious manner.

CONCLUSIONS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

- Distance Education is already providing answers to some of Manitoba's education delivery problems and shows great promise for the future. However, it is not a panacea. It can be costly to implement and in some cases this may be prohibitive, but it has the potential to solve several education delivery problems for Manitoba, especially due to Manitoba's size and sparse population.
- Distance education should be regarded as an education delivery tool when other forms of personal education are unavailable either due to distance, density or other limiting factors.
- Distance education should not be approached on the basis of wholesale replacement of teachers with interactive television. Not all students can benefit from this mode of delivery and thus education by qualified teachers should remain as the top priority delivery model wherever physically and fiscally possible.
- Without strong leadership from the provincial Department of Education and Training, distance education is unlikely to proceed far beyond the few initiatives already in place. The Commission is concerned that excessive dependence upon the initiative of regional consortiums developing on their own will doom the process to premature failure. There are too many bridging issues involving provincial and interprovincial corporations such as Manitoba Telephone System that create negotiating problems for individual groups. The Commission believes that the provincial Department of Education and Training must take an active leadership role if the full benefits of distance education are to be realized.