

Brief History of the Manitoba Department of Education

With the passage in 1871 of An Act to Establish a System of Education, the government of Manitoba created a dual denominational education system under a Board of Education and its two Sections – the Protestant and the Catholic, with the Protestant and Catholic churches each “controlling” their respective sections. The Act had given the Board of Education central control over education, not unlike that which had happened in other provinces of Canada, in terms of providing grants for teacher salaries and school operations, making regulations, establishing curriculum, selecting and approving textbooks, controlling teacher certification and giving local control of educational matters to school trustees.

In 1890, the province eliminated denominational schooling and created a free, non-sectarian, public school system, with a Department of Education having administrative and financial control, in part through the use of school inspectors, and an Advisory Board with the authority to make regulations, develop curriculum, approve textbooks and set provincial examinations at the secondary level. The first Minister of Education was appointed in 1908. Compulsory school attendance legislation was passed in 1916 and the period of bi-lingual schooling which began in 1896 was terminated with further provincial legislation in 1916. The Library for the Department of Education was established in July 1916, providing assistance to school libraries in the selection and purchase of books for their collections.

The Great Depression and Prairie drought of the 1930s resulted in massive unemployment in Manitoba and a sharp reduction in immigration. With less money for education, the Department of Education began cutting expenditures, resulting in the continuous reduction of payments to schools beginning in 1932, the termination in 1933 of the Free Text service for elementary schools begun in 1903, and the elimination of the school library grant in 1934. Nevertheless, in 1931, Deputy Minister of Education Robert Fletcher opened the Manitoba Text Book Bureau, a self-funded agency to provide easy access for schools and parents to acquire approved textbooks at good prices negotiated through the Bureau. In 1937, legislation stripped the Advisory Board of its powers; the Minister of Education now had policy direction over curricula, textbooks, teacher training and examinations.

The post-World War II baby boom resulted in the rapid expansion of elementary and secondary education in the province and provincial prosperity led to increased funding for education. The Department’s *Manitoba School Journal*, first issued in 1938, was discontinued in 1963, and replaced by the *Department of Education Bulletin*. 1181 Portage Avenue was officially named the Robert Fletcher Building on December 3, 1968. In 1967 the government passed Bill 16 that made mandatory the integration of “mentally retarded” children, and, a year later, appointed a supervisor of Special Education. With the passage of Bill 113 in 1970, French language instruction in schools was provided. 1976 saw the establishment of the Bureau de l’éducation française and Special Materials Services. On April 1, 1978, the Manitoba Department of Education, and the Department of Continuing Education and Manpower were combined to create a restructured Department of Education. A few months later, Manpower moved to the newly created Department of Labour and Manpower.

The Department of Education was reorganized in 1990 becoming the Department of Education and Training, with the addition of the training unit of Employment Services and Economic Security. In 1991 *Answering the Challenge* was published, outlining a major reorganization of the high school system. In December 1993, the ministers responsible for education in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories signed the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (WCP), K-12. The WCP was renamed the WNCPE in February 2000 with the inclusion of Nunavut. In 1994, the government reorganized the Department with a focus on educational renewal with many initiatives, including mandatory curriculum associated with "New Directions." 1995 saw the release of *Guidelines: Advisory Councils for School Leadership* designed to enable parent and community involvement in schools.

In 2003, the MB4 Youth Division was created and became part of the newly renamed Manitoba Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth. Legislation assuring the right of students to Appropriate Educational Programming was passed in 2004, with proclamation on October 28, 2005. Beginning in 2004, the Department began the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Action Plan* and the *Education Agenda for Student Success 2002-2006* were underway.

Today, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth is charged with the responsibility for setting priorities and allocating funds for the province's public and independent Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system and for citizenship and youth initiatives. The Department is also responsible for providing policy direction on administrative matters of the education system under authority of the following Acts of the Consolidated Statutes of Manitoba:

- The Blind and Deaf Person's Maintenance and Education Act
- The Education Administration Act
- The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act (Part III.2)
- The Public Schools Act
- The Public Schools Finance Board Act
- The Teachers' Pensions Act
- The Teachers' Society Act

In terms of education finance, Manitoba shares the responsibility for public school finance between the province and locally elected school boards. The province provides a level of funding to all school divisions primarily based on a formula that recognizes enrolment, expenditure levels and property assessment values. Local school boards have a legislated authority to levy a tax on all assessed property to meet the balance of their budgetary needs after taking into account provincial funding levels.

John Tooth
Departmental Librarian
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