

I. INTRODUCTION

1. PREFACE

Local schools and school districts represent one of the first public services organized by our pioneers. They recognized the importance of education as an integral part of the early community. By 1959, when the last major transformation of school division boundaries was initiated there were 1,777 districts in operation in Manitoba. Thirty-five years later, in September of 1994, there were 57 school divisions and districts functioning in the Province.

In the summer of 1993, the government of the Province of Manitoba decided to commission a review of school division/district boundaries as an integral part of a comprehensive renewal of education in Manitoba. The majority of existing school division boundaries have been in place for more than 30 years. While all other aspects of education and indeed society have undergone substantial change in the interim, school division boundaries and the school board/administrative structures designed to operate within these educational jurisdictions have changed very little.

School division/district boundaries, as lines on a map, delineate the geographical areas of responsibility of school divisions and districts for administrative and tax collection purposes. They are, however, much more than lines on a map. In order for anyone to gain an appropriate understanding of the role and importance of boundaries in our province, it is necessary to study the theory behind their existence, the physical and cultural factors that shaped early settlement and growth in Manitoba, and the dynamics of change that have taken place since the last review was undertaken.

This report addresses all aspects of school division and school district boundaries. It examines the theory of boundaries, the history of Manitoba's boundaries, and all factors that influence and are influenced by those boundaries. This information forms the basis for a solution suitable to Manitoba's needs. The objective was to create a system that would build on the past, yet work for the future. The Commission hopes that the information will help all Manitobans understand how we arrived at the present situation. It explains why and how decisions were made. Finally it provides information and mechanisms for delivery of education to all Manitoba students in the future.

2. MANDATE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

MANDATE

The mandate of the Manitoba School Divisions/Districts Boundaries Review Commission is to study, consult and make recommendations to the Minister of Education and Training on any adjustments in school division/district boundaries for the Province of Manitoba.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- I** Develop and release a consultation paper.
- II** Consult with the citizens and associations/organizations of Manitoba to examine the following areas, determining their impact on, and resulting consequences of, boundary alterations in furtherance of educational excellence in Manitoba:
1. Education legislation reform
 2. Demographics
 3. Patterns of transportation
 4. Economic activity in various parts of the Province
 5. Pupil enrollment patterns and program offerings
 6. Tax assessments
 7. Cost efficiency and effectiveness
 8. Governance of francophone schools
 9. School/division/district/department roles and responsibilities
 10. Policy-making structures (role of advisory committees, elected officials, mechanisms for parental input, etc.)
 11. Technology, including distance education, and its impact on, and possibilities for, program development and delivery
 12. Municipal boundaries
 13. Current trends in education reform
 14. Administrative and personnel matters, including employment contracts and the transfer of assets and liabilities
- III** Consult with appropriate authorities to ascertain regulations and practices associated with boundary establishment.
- IV** Determine and recommend the best governance structure which will:
- (a) further educational excellence
 - (b) facilitate effective and efficient program delivery and development in the public school system
 - (c) facilitate the goals of education of the province and ensure that education reflects principles such as equity, openness, responsiveness, excellence, choice, relevance and accountability
 - (d) ensure flexibility in student movement between and among divisions
 - (e) acknowledge the increasing applicability of technology to facilitate program delivery
 - (f) foster partnership between/among government, community, parents, labour, business and industry
 - (g) receive public acceptance

3. BOUNDARY REVIEW - ONE OF A SERIES

A review of boundaries is one part of a comprehensive review of education components ordered by the Government. Each of the components is substantial in its own right, but the Boundaries Review Commission believes that the greatest importance must be placed on an integration of all components. Winston Churchill said that conflicts are never resolved until there is agreement on the territory. It is inappropriate and virtually impossible to conduct a boundaries review without encountering certain aspects of each of the other reviews. In turn, any recommendations that come from our review must be evaluated in the context of each of the others. Only an integrated approach will result in understandable, coherent and comprehensive improvements to education delivery in Manitoba.

The six components of the most recent education reviews are as follows:

1. Public Schools' Finance Model - A new model was implemented for the 1992-1993 school year and is presently operational.
2. High School Reform - Implementation of the intentions summarized in the Departmental document *Answering the Challenge* is presently underway. These initiatives were designed to provide a framework for change to the high school curriculum in order to meet the needs of today's modern changing global society.
3. Francophone Schools Governance - A new non-geographically based school division consisting of francophone schools began operation in September of 1994. The Boundaries Review Commission challenge was to be aware of the genesis of this school division and to determine the most appropriate disposition of the residual components of school divisions affected by removal of the francophone schools.
4. Distance Education - A task force report was released in August of 1993 and the Department is working on the implementation methodology of that report at the present time. The Boundaries Review Commission investigated this area considerably during its activities since we are well into the technological era and we need to ensure we are taking the best advantage of potentials available to us.
5. Review of Public Schools Act - An extensive review of legislation was undertaken via consultations with many Manitobans and a paper was released in April of 1993. Review and implementation is ongoing at the present time. Many of the changes to be recommended later in this report will dictate either administrative, regulatory or legislative changes to enact their intent. Again it is important that efforts in each of the aforementioned arenas be coordinated in order to achieve the most positive consequential impact.
6. School Divisions/Districts Boundaries Review - An extensive review was undertaken and the issues are addressed in this document.

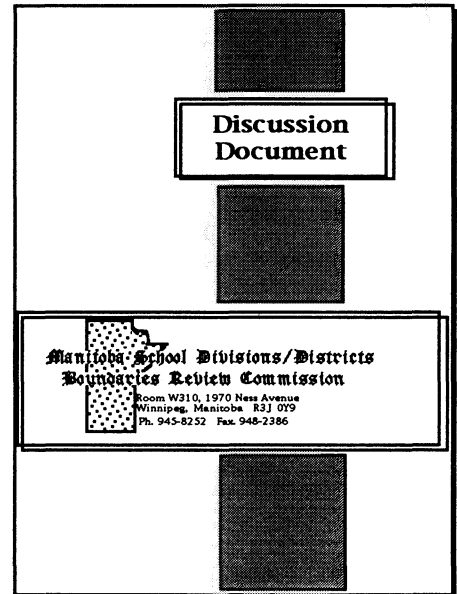
4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

APPOINTMENT AND EXPECTED LIFE SPAN OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission was announced by former Minister of Education and Training the Honourable Rosemary Vodrey on July 20, 1993 and actual work commenced in late August. The Commission's first meeting was held on September 16, 1993. The expected sixteen month life of the Commission was projected to last until the end of November, 1994.

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

The initial challenge was to produce a discussion document for distribution throughout the province in order to promote discussion and elicit responses from all those who are affected by the education system or who, through their taxes, contribute to the education process. A discussion paper was completed and distributed in late November, 1993. Over 7,000 copies of the document were provided to all segments of the education system, local governments, associations and interested individuals. Substantial interest was generated and it provided a basis for debate on pertinent issues surrounding governance of the education system and school division/district boundaries.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Commission chose to consult and listen to the public first rather than require responses to specific proposals. This is a more democratic approach, but there are drawbacks. It leads to speculation on possible outcomes because people tend to defend the *status quo* rather than take chances with a new approach. Better the devil you know..! The Commission decided unbridled public consultation was better than limiting or directing the discussion with specific proposals. A concurrent process of research and review of other jurisdictions was carried out. The final report would then blend the advice received with theory and the experience of others.

The public consultation process included formal and informal sessions both of which proved beneficial. Between January 4, 1994 and April 26, 1994 the Commission held 58 public hearings at 25 different locations throughout the Province. For one hour prior to each hearing an "open

house" session was conducted to facilitate personal interaction between Commission members and the public. This was valuable because it allowed people who were interested, but unwilling to make public or formal presentations, an opportunity to present their views. The approach also created a less formal, less intimidating atmosphere than that usually associated with public hearings.

ATTENDANCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Total attendance at the hearings exceeded 2,500 ranging from a small group of 10 to a large group of 193. A total of 318 formal presentations were made at the public hearings and a further 150 written presentations were submitted. There was a concern that the period after the Christmas break was not a good time to begin the process. These concerns proved to be unfounded as the people responded with an enthusiasm that impressed the Commission.

Figure 1 below and Figure 2 on the following page show the public participation breakdown. Following precedent of all public hearings, the majority of responses were from those directly involved with the education system. This pattern was expected but the Commission was obligated to take a comprehensive approach. It had to provide balanced recommendations which considered the concerns of all segments of the population.

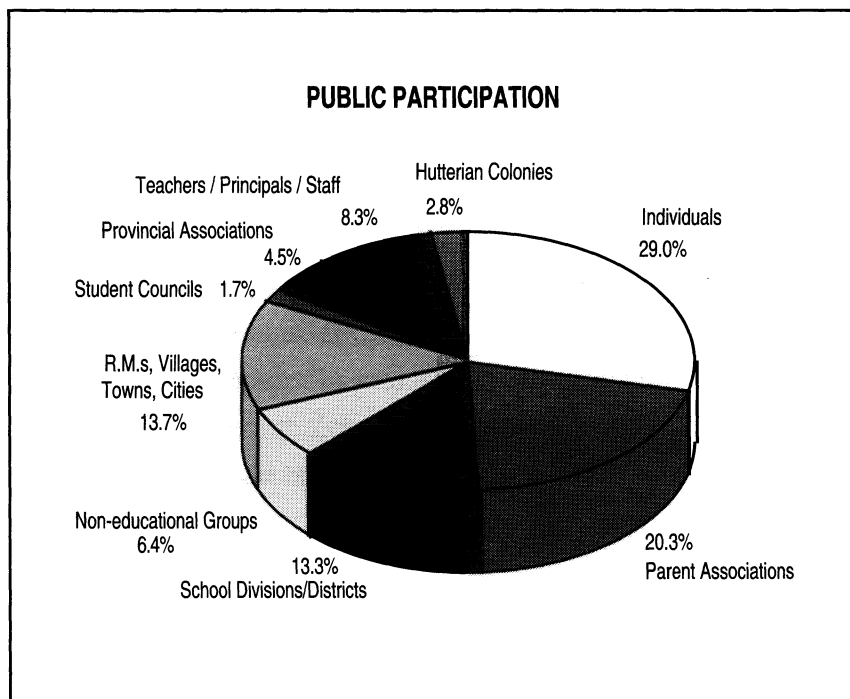


Figure 1

| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Category | <i>formal presentations</i> | <i>written submissions</i> | <i>total</i> | <i>% of formal presentations</i> | <i>% of written submissions</i> | <i>% of total</i> |
| Individuals | 74 | 62 | 136 | 23.3% | 41.3% | 29.0% |
| Parent Associations | 67 | 28 | 95 | 21.1% | 18.7% | 20.3% |
| School Divisions/Districts | 58 | 4 | 62 | 18.2% | 2.6% | 13.3% |
| Non-educational Groups | 20 | 10 | 30 | 6.3% | 6.7% | 6.4% |
| R.M.s, Villages, Towns, Cities | 42 | 22 | 64 | 13.2% | 14.7% | 13.7% |
| Student Councils | 6 | 2 | 8 | 1.9% | 1.3% | 1.7% |
| Prov. Assoc. (Ed. related) | 19 | 2 | 21 | 6.0% | 1.3% | 4.5% |
| Teachers/Principals/Staff | 32 | 7 | 39 | 10.0% | 4.7% | 8.3% |
| Hutterian Colonies | 0 | 13 | 13 | 0.0% | 8.7% | 2.8% |
| Total | 318 | 150 | 468 | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Figure 2

CONCURRENT STUDIES

Following publication of the Discussion Document, the Commission undertook to research educational models in other parts of Canada and relevant areas of the world. There is considerable activity in the field of educational reform across the country and it was important for the Commission to understand the background in each area. Concurrent studies were undertaken of the history and evolution of school division boundaries in Manitoba. A review of similar activities worldwide was initiated to relate the Manitoba experience to the rest of the world. Political Geographer, Dr. Tim Ball of the University of Winnipeg was enlisted to provide knowledge of the theory dictating boundaries and the relationship of theory and worldwide research to the cultural and geographic peculiarities of Manitoba. The major concern was the quality of education within Manitoba. However, it is impossible to ignore the Canadian or global situation. Dr. Ball also assisted the Commission in the editing of the final report.

Interwoven with the public consultations were continuous interactions with education associations representing members in all the sectors of education. This included staff of the Department of Education and Training and others knowledgeable in education. These ongoing consultations were invaluable in developing the knowledge necessary to decipher the masses of information.

TESTING FOR CONSEQUENCES

The Commission wanted to ensure that it was aware of the consequences of any options it was considering. It embarked on a further analytical portion of its review by subjecting options to detailed scrutiny by knowledgeable individuals in the field. The urban area of Winnipeg was separated from other areas of the Province. The Commission was fully aware of the perception

and concern that Winnipeg receives different treatment than the rest of the Province. Separation was necessary because of the substantially different characteristics of education delivery in a concentrated setting versus less densely populated rural areas. The concepts of equity and equality defined later in this report were applied.

Former teacher, superintendent, assistant deputy minister and deputy minister of education, Dr. Glenn Nicholls, was commissioned to review the Commission's Winnipeg options. Dr. Richard Rounds of the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University was commissioned to review a set of rural division options. Former superintendent, Mr. J. Leslie Milne, assisted Dr. Rounds in his review. Their detailed studies provided the educational, financial and socio-economic impacts of hypothetical options posed by the Commission.

With its knowledge augmented by professional advice, it was possible for the Commission to weigh all possibilities, both hypothetically and practically, with a much higher level of comfort about the potential impact of each option. Finally, the Commission evaluated the potential impact of minimal systematic changes or maintenance of the *status quo*. This also became an integral part of the final deliberations.

By the time decisions were reached, members of the Commission had absorbed large amounts of information and a great many opinions. The recommendations represent the culmination of thousands of hours of work, not just by the Commission and its staff, but also by the hundreds of people throughout Manitoba who participated in the process. The entire exercise was a thoughtful and dedicated search for patterns of education within workable boundaries that will enhance the education of our children. The challenges they face are daunting. The best thing we can do is equip them for satisfying and productive lives in our ever-changing world.