



School District of Mystery Lake

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Success for All

January 19, 2023

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The School District of Mystery Lake Board of Trustees has been invited by the Manitoba School Boards Association to write a letter on the Province of Manitoba's proposal to develop and implement a University and College Performance Based Funding model. We as a school board do not support the government's proposal and we recommend that the proposal is withdrawn for the following reasons:

- a) such a performance-based model of funding fails to support increased and sustained access to post-secondary educational opportunities for Manitoba's Aboriginal and northern-based learners;
- b) discriminates against the liberal arts and humanities, inhibiting the training of the liberal professions of which the north is so grievously short, such as teaching, social work, mental health, and civic municipal and band-based governance;
- c) is one based on an industrial-type educational model that measures and privileges outcomes in trades and business while failing to recognise that access to and participation in a liberally conceived and broad-set post-secondary curricula contributes not only to the successful fulfillment of the province's employment outcomes, but also to the general well-being of the north's families, communities, and civic culture.

The School District of Mystery Lake has a responsibility to advocate for Northern Manitoba's children and families, to help them engage in the pursuit of educational opportunities, in partnership with other public school and First Nation educational

agencies in the north and in tandem with the University College of the North. It is accepted that northern and Aboriginal learners face insurmountable barriers to education services due to geography and remoteness, food insecurity, child and family poverty, and a historical legacy disadvantaging northern and Aboriginal learners as described in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Performance based metrics in either entrance to or exit from post-secondary institutions would create barriers to northern populations that have traditionally been educationally at-risk or have had poor histories of performance in conventional educational settings. Placing emphasis on graduation metrics, the successful acquiring of credits, and retention in course-based programs would reduce the opportunities of many of our students who already struggle to succeed in Thompson's elementary schools and at R.D. Parker High School. We believe as northern educators that more funds need to be made available to enhance access to those demographics that have traditionally been disadvantaged in post-secondary education, including first generation northern and Aboriginal university/college attendees. The tendencies emerging from proposed changes in the funding will reinforce existing practices for institutions to admit and fund only those students with a proven history of academic accomplishment. The proposed funding model will create more, not fewer, barriers to educational access while structurally reinforcing existing forms of inequality and poverty, removing the great incentive for students and northern families to look to post-secondary educational engagement as an opportunity for social mobility.

Secondly, we believe that a performance-based funding model is an outdated one, based as it is on an industrial model of curricula and programming. An emphasis on business and industrially employable skills, while not a bad thing in and of itself, creates a bias against the liberal arts and humanities when paired with funding accessibility for programming, allowing those with ready access to educational funds to pursue liberal studies and those without, to not. Such patterns of educational attainment, discriminating against liberal arts studies for the majority, sounds reminiscent of 19th century, early industrial models of education, where the poor were trundled off to trade school while the elite attended liberal arts schools (Eton, Princeton, Upper Canada College) to go on to become community leaders in business, law, and governance. In contrast, our learners depend not only on access to vocational training but also to a liberal education to attain employment. What is more, as pointed out by Professor Niigaan Sinclair in an article for the Winnipeg Free Press, such a conundrum is compounded for students from the north; he writes: "Indigenous students are, most often, enrolled in the humanities and social sciences, fields that produce teachers, nurses and social workers, along with people who land somewhere in the non-profit, creative or political sectors."ⁱ We agree with Professor Sinclair's conclusion, that this government's planned changes to college and university funding will disadvantage Aboriginal and Northern learners in the years to come.

Lastly, we believe that performance-based funding, again, in privileging an industrial based philosophy of education, stresses too much the attainment of employment while neglecting the general benefit of having attended college or university to overall health and mental well-being in our families, institutions, and northern communities. In other words, general well-being and educational aspiration or attainment cannot be quantified or measured with a final, fixed salary or engagement in employment as a single or primary performance-based outcome. If you are a school trustee, a parent, a member of band council, a church deacon, or member of provincial parliament, the attainment of,

or engagement in, a generously funded and liberal based college or university education increases the civic and cultural capital of any host society. For many northern learners, just having had the opportunity to attend college for even a semester and then deciding to move to the regional workforce, start up a local business a la Steve Jobs, or establish a new family is a significant life benchmark.ⁱⁱ Measuring program retention and degree or diploma attainment as the 'sole' or primary criteria for success negates the benefits of having partly or temporarily attended one of Manitoba's post-secondary establishments. In addition, the institutional pressures to graduate and retain students will lead to greater degrees of mark inflation and the devaluation of program quality controls, leading to an increasingly poorly trained and under-skilled workforce.

For these reasons and more, the Board for the School District of Mystery Lake recommends that the sitting government withdraw the planned changes to post-secondary performance-based educational funding to one made in closer consultation with university and college leadership, educational experts and professional teaching practitioners. Indeed, we ask that the government increase funds to publicly funded education and emphasize access, and removal of barriers, to educational attainment.

Sincerely,



Lindsay Anderson, Chairperson
Board of Trustees for the School District of Mystery Lake

cc Manitoba School Board Chairpersons

¹ Niigaan Sinclair, "Pallister's education policies crash the party: Indigenous graduating-class size at U of M a remarkable achievement; new provincial legislation a big step backward," *Winnipeg Free Press* (10 May 2021).

² Steve Jobs, for example, dropped out of the prestigious liberal arts school, Reed College. Though Jobs would not conform to the school's structure, he continued to attend classes, to audit them and benefit from campus experience. Rated by the province of Manitoba on a performance-based metric, this experience in schooling would be measured as a failure. Of course, Jobs went on to found and establish Apple as the most valuable company on Earth; for more information on Steve Jobs and Apple, "where it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing," read Walter Isaacson's *Steve Jobs* (Simon and Schuster, 2011). Today, the name of Steve Jobs is one most associated with technology and innovation.