



## *October 2021 Report to the Canadian Catholic Schools Trustees Association*

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### **Pandemic**

The Covid 19 pandemic has been the focus of our schools in the last 18 months. Our schools were in remote learning for the last portion of the 2020/21 school year. We reopened in September in code yellow, or the lowest stage of the pandemic response which allowed the required 2m distancing to be relaxed so that all students could be in class and there is regular classroom use. When the required 2m distancing was in place, gyms and other spaces were used as regular classrooms and high school students attended alternate days. Masks are required in schools for staff and students, kindergarten to grade 12. There were a few cases of parents demanding mask exemptions for their children but the province provided detailed requirements for doctors to follow in order to grant exemptions. We have found that students are already used to wearing masks and there has been few issues with students.

Manitoba has also required that that all employees and volunteers be double vaccinated or have negative rapid test results 3 times a week or every 48 hours. Two of the tests can be done at home while the third needs to be observed by a testing supervisor. We have a very high vaccination rate in our schools and there is low number of staff requiring testing. Manitoba has had vaccination cards since the spring and they are required for public events and businesses such as gyms, restaurants, and theatres. There was also an uptake in vaccinations for employees when the requirement was announced at the end of August that allowed for completed vaccination status by the end of October. We currently only have one support staff member who is unvaccinated and will not submit to testing who will be going on unpaid leave. Substitute teachers are also required to be vaccinated as a condition of employment.

We have recently been allowed to voluntarily collect the vaccination status of students. This is to assist schools with contact tracing and the need to isolate. As of October 7, 2021, we had not yet had a case this school year. Manitoba has not yet been greatly impacted by the 4<sup>th</sup> wave that is impacting Alberta and Saskatchewan. Case numbers in Winnipeg are lower than the southern health region of Manitoba where there is a low vaccination rate. There is currently discussion between government and public health about a required vaccination mandate for students 12 and older for participation in extra curricular sports and other activities. Schools have been hosting vaccinations clinics but there is a low response rate because most students are already vaccinated. This will soon change when a vaccine is approved for ages 5-11. Parental permission is required for students who receive vaccinations during school hours but students over the age of 12 can receive them after hours without permission if they meet the requirements as a mature minor as per legislation.

Catholic schools will have access to safe school funds to support pandemic related expenses this school year at the same rate as the public system. For us this represents just over 1 million dollars that will be used by schools to focus on mental health, recovery learning, and keeping schools safe.

## **Political**

Brian Pallister has retired as Premier of Manitoba and the governing Progressive Conservative party is currently holding a leadership race. Calvin Goertzen, the former education minister is Premier till the end of October. The government has withdrawn Bill 64 the education reform act that would have eliminated public school boards in the province and created a central education authority. There was a great deal of opposition to the bill in both rural and urban Manitoba. It will be up to a new premier to decide the direction that education reform will take. The commitment and legislation to move to provincial bargaining for teachers and provincial funding from general revenue remains. There is speculation is that there will be amalgamation of divisions from the current 37. Many rural divisions are small and range from 700 to 2000 students. The City of Winnipeg itself has 6 separate divisions. We continue to monitor the situation for potential impact that any changes will have on Catholic (independent) schools.

## **Truth and Reconciliation**

All Catholic schools in Manitoba were closed on September 30<sup>th</sup> for National Truth and Reconciliation Day. This followed a week of educational activities in the schools and is part of the ongoing path towards truth and reconciliation. All teachers and support staff have until June of 2022 to complete the online training program *4 Seasons of Reconciliation* that was developed the First Nations University of Canada. An Advisory Committee to the Superintendent on Truth and Reconciliation has been formed which will help support the efforts of the Manitoba Catholic Schools Office as we continue this journey.

God Bless and Stay Safe!

Robert Praznik  
Superintendent  
Manitoba Catholic Schools