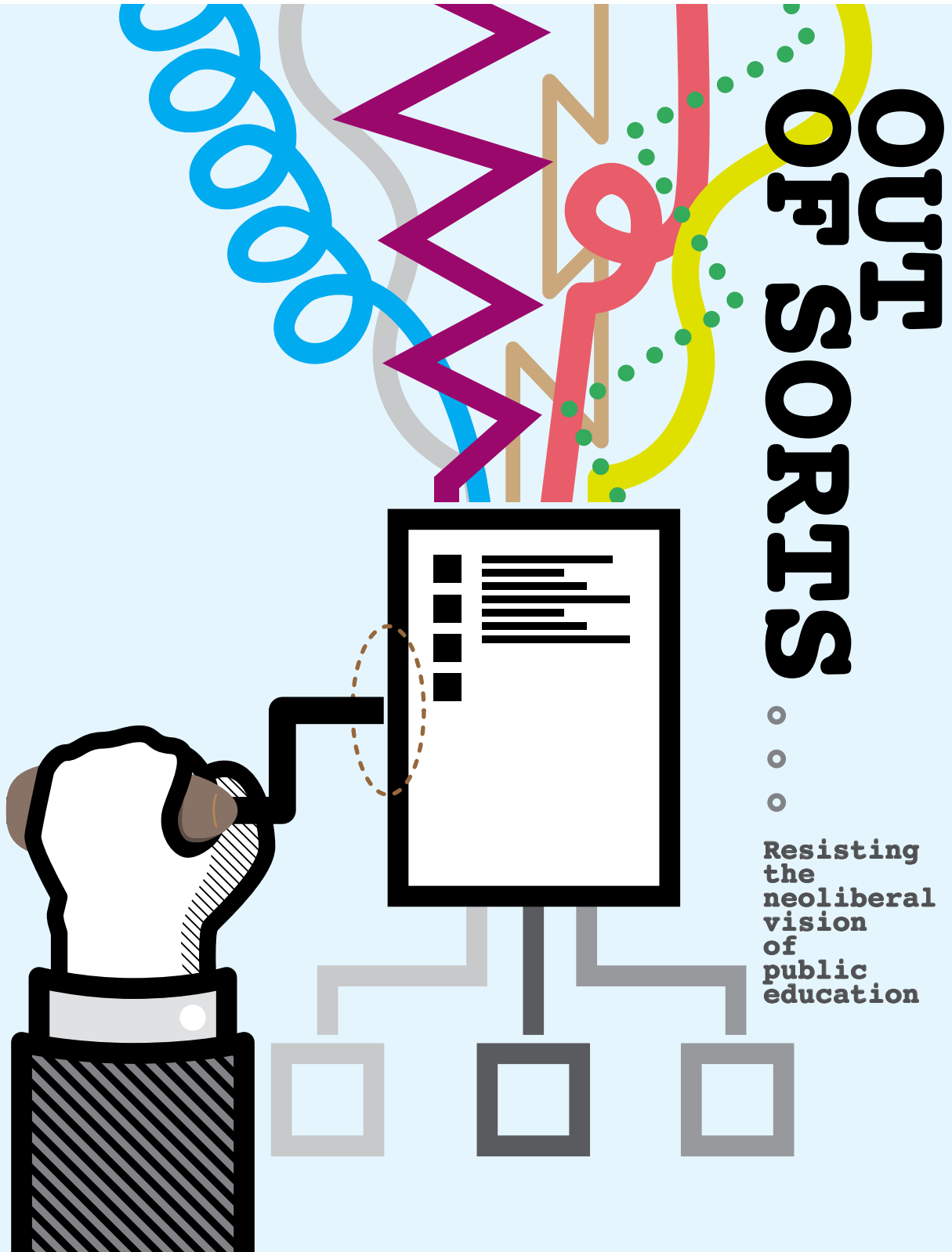


Our Schools/Our Selves

The Voice Of Progressive Education In Canada

Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives

Winter/Spring 2020



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Editorial

Seizing the momentum

Erika Shaker

I am so pleased to reintroduce to longtime readers, and introduce to new ones, our popular education magazine *Our Schools / Our Selves*, which began in 1988 and which the CCPA has been publishing since 2000.

Given the growing prominence of education, both as a target of neoliberal governments and as sites of resistance for those working for systemic progressive change, we felt it made sense to move *OS/OS* from a standalone publication to one that would be regularly combined with the *CCPA Monitor*. I want to express my deep appreciation to Stuart Trew for his enthusiasm and support in this new collaboration.

In addition to the opportunity to address and reach more readers who may not have had read this popular education journal, I appreciate the symbolism; for many people, education is their way into discussions of globalization, privatization, justice and equity—so many of the topics explored in the *Monitor* and in CCPA's other publications.

Given the way in which education is under attack, in so many jurisdictions and on so many fronts, we need to be working together, and not at cross purposes. This can be challenging given that, when it comes to education, there are so many voices, so many needs—particularly as entrenched inequality disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable—and one size truly cannot fit all.

But, and I think this is important, those voices and that diversity are also a tremendous source of strength....provided we are listening to and learning from each other, and that we recognize a rejection of the current neoliberal direction does

not mean an endorsement of the status quo. Too many people have been poorly served by the present system to pretend that this is the high water mark of what we are capable of and what our children deserve. We must strive to do better, with and for all of us.

At its heart, education is about the future, and about each other—two very powerful goals around which to rally, engage with each other, and truly make the kind of progress that leaves no one behind.

And not in a high stakes, standardized test kind of way.

This issue of *Our Schools / Our Selves* focuses on the ways in which the neoliberal education agenda and austerity governments are reshaping education across the country, and the impact of these changes on kids—particularly the most vulnerable—and communities. It discusses the seductive nature of the consumer-based, “choice” narrative that is often reinforced with public money to further a privatized agenda. But it also illustrates the passion with which the public will defend its schools and support their educators and education workers. This is on display in Ontario (at the time of writing) with the current state of labour negotiations between the education unions and the provincial government intent on imposing policies including larger class sizes and reduced course selections, mandatory e-learning, and board funding cuts in either per-pupil funding or total operating funding (or both).

The central feature in this issue is a provincial and territorial scan of standardized testing policies in K-12 education compiled by Dylan Kelly. It provides a snapshot of how pervasive

standardized assessment has become across the country, along with how it is being justified and the concerns that have been and continue to be raised about its impact and pedagogical efficacy. Going forward, we will continue to produce similar snapshots, painting a more comprehensive picture of education policies and practices across the country, and how they intersect with neoliberal reforms.

Chuka Ejeckam asks if it's really the responsibility of public education to mitigate and even reverse the effects of growing inequality, precarity, automation, and corporate power. Similarly, Alec Stratford examines the impact of sufficient and comprehensive anti-child poverty policy measures in Canada and Nova Scotia, and how it is placing additional stress on an already under-resourced education system (underscoring the irony of education being "the great equalizer"). Jim Silver and Kate Sjöberg look at the impact of complex, multi-faceted poverty — with additional forms of oppression — on students' educational outcomes at three schools in a Winnipeg suburb, and the way in which the board has been working with the surrounding community to try and strengthen networks of support inside and outside the schools.

Public money can be used to reinforce educational inequalities, or "educational segregation" as it's sometimes called in Quebec. Public funding of private schools exists in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and (to a limited extent) in Nova Scotia. Stéphane Vigneault provides a history of how public subsidies of private education began and evolved in Quebec, how public schools responded by implementing their own pseudo-private specialized public schools, and the implications of both for socioeconomic inequality in the province. It's an analysis that public education advocates in other provinces — especially Alberta, which also heavily subsidizes private education in the province — should pay close attention to.

Alberta education is also experiencing legislated changes similar to what is being witnessed (and opposed) in Ontario — the difference being that province's position, further along the neoliberal spectrum. In addition to significant cuts, and an end to subsidies implemented by the previous government — which have been met by vocal protests as illustrated by the powerful words of Barbara Silva from Support our Students Alberta — Alberta's minister of education has recently accused the province's educators of teaching pro-environment, anti-oil industry propaganda to students. Simon Enoch and Emily Eaton address

this, in the Saskatchewan context, in their article about "bias balance" and ways in which climate change is, or isn't, being addressed in their province's classrooms.

The post-secondary sector is not immune from neoliberalism's pressures and prescribed restructuring. Claire Polster offers seven strategies for academics to help push back against the corporatization of their institutions, rebuilding solidarity and helping to create healthier campuses and workplaces that reject the often demeaning and demoralizing effects of an internalized corporate mindset.

Public education is a target of neoliberalism and the governments that enact its policies because of the investment it requires, the role it plays in shaping and reinforcing current and future priorities, and the opportunities it provides for civic resistance to regressive ideologies. Which is why, in spite of the intensity of the cuts intended to undermine the public system, disproportionately damaging the most vulnerable; in spite of the rhetoric designed to divide — students from teachers, the public from the schools they care so deeply about, educators and education workers from their elected union leadership — I am optimistic.

Parents, students, and workers as I discuss in "Familiarity Breeds Resistance" are coming together to fight for their schools. Young people are leading province-wide rallies in defense of relevant, inclusive curriculum and a sustainable future. Smaller classes. More course selections. Safe and inclusive schools. More one-on-one time with educators and education workers. These are what parents want to see for their kids.

Rather than dividing us, debates about the kind of schools we want to see for our kids, the supports required to support them inside and outside classrooms, and what it takes to get them, can be instrumental in bringing people together. But it requires us to listen, and to learn from each other and from the past. The attacks on public education are not new; they're part of a neoliberal continuum that's only as relentless as we allow.

I'm looking forward to continuing these conversations about the schools we want, the resources required to meet kids' needs, the communities we're building, the content being discussed and debated in classrooms across the country, and the educators and education workers whose job every day is literally about other peoples' children. And I'm looking forward to reconnecting with our supporters, across the country and internationally, who work every day for universal, high quality, equitable, accountable public education, from cradle to grave. ●



The bias of balance

What Canada's fossil fuel industry wants students to think about climate change

Emily Eaton and Simon Enoch

The past few years have witnessed a number of prestige media organizations offering a *mea culpa* of sorts for how they have reported on climate change in the past. Both the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and *The Guardian* have admitted that too often their blind pursuit of “balance” when covering global warming left readers believing the science of climate change was uncertain and up for debate, even as climate scientists moved towards overwhelming consensus on the reality of anthropogenic climate change. Despite this consensus — endorsed by the national academies of science of 17 countries as early as 2001 — the news media regularly framed the science of climate change as a debate, “balancing” the consensus of the scientific community with statements from fringe climate deniers. In an internal memo to staff, the BBC admitted that it gets coverage of climate change “wrong too often” by seeking “false balance” in its coverage:

To achieve impartiality, you do not need to include outright deniers of climate change in BBC coverage, in the same way you would not have someone denying that Manchester United won 2-0 last Saturday. The referee has spoken.

It is now well understood that this failure of “false balance” was not the news media’s fault alone. In fact, it was a carefully cultivated public relations strategy by fossil fuel companies to exploit journalism’s need for “balance” in order to confuse the public on the reality of global warming. Leaked internal documents demonstrate that the major oil companies — despite acknowledging the realities of climate change by their own scientists — developed a media strategy that sought to politicize climate science by promoting the views of climate deniers and accusing the news media of “bias” if their own hand-picked denialists were not included in coverage. Given the majority of the public rely on the news media for their knowledge of climate change issues, this strategy has done irreparable harm by sowing confusion and uncertainty over the most important issue of our time, delaying the urgent action required to prevent the more catastrophic impacts of climate change in the near future.

While these media outlets acknowledgement of “false balance” is welcome, if not severely overdue, our research demonstrates that the fossil fuel industry has been eager to strategically exploit “balance” in order to influence how climate change is thought about in another equally important public venue: Canada’s classrooms.

The social sciences ought to also be teaching about climate change and considering the politics, economics and societal impacts and/or responses to climate change and climate change policies.

In the 1990s, Canada's fossil fuel industry began promoting what they called "bias-balanced" third-party environmental educational materials and professional development programs to teachers and students in the public-school system. The reach of these industry-sponsored third-party materials into Canada's classrooms is impressive. Inside Education, one of Canada's most prolific energy literacy education organizations — funded by the likes of British Petroleum, Cenovus Energy, Suncor and ConocoPhillips Canada — reports that in 2017, 24,736 students attended their programs, with 1,058 K-12 class-

rooms visited and 416 teachers enrolled in their professional development programs. Canada's other largest third-party environmental education provider, SEEDS (Society, Environment and Energy Development), which has been sponsored by Imperial Oil, Cenovus Energy and Chevron, boasts that its energy literacy series has reached over 1.5 million Canadian students, with programs in more than 8,000 Canadian elementary, middle, junior high, and senior high schools.

For the fossil fuel industry, the preference for third-party vehicles to influence environmental education in schools has been explicit since the outset. It was recognized early on that attempts by industry to directly produce and disseminate teaching materials would be met with suspicion. An advertising feature on behalf of SEEDS in 1989 points out this dilemma:

The problem the energy industry in general has with going directly into education is that any material it produces is immediately suspect. It may, at worst, be branded propaganda. At best, teachers will look at it with suspicion as they wonder what the catch is. One solution is to fund someone else, someone recognized as a reliable authority in the field of education.

It was also recognized that clumsy attempts at blatant propaganda would not have the kind of staying power required to influence environmental education over the long haul. Speaking to *Oilweek* magazine in 1999, the president of SEEDS observed,

We can't put propaganda into the school system. We might do it once, but not a second time. They [schools] are a place to get what we call bias-balanced information into their hands.

Third-party "bias-balanced" educational materials would be the solution to this dilemma, ensuring the environmental education curriculum took the industry's interests into account by

framing any lesson plan that failed to include industry's perspective as "biased," while offering up "bias-balanced" materials that purport to give equal representation to industry, environmental, and educational interests in how they present environmental issues like climate change. Often this includes materials emphasizing the centrality of fossil fuels to modern life as well as the economic benefits of oil extraction. While this certainly sounds reasonable enough — who could be opposed to balance? — the consideration of industry "interests" when teaching established environmental science like climate change often serves to obfuscate that science. If there is a genuine debate within the environmental science community, that should certainly be emphasized in the classroom, but attempting to "balance" scientific arguments with the inclusion of industry arguments — or any other interest group — is to conflate political arguments with scientific ones. As science historian Naomi Oreskes emphasizes, "balance is a political concept, not a scientific one. It really has no place in science." Inserting industry perspectives into the teaching of climate science in our classrooms effectively transforms a scientific debate into a political one. It would be akin to having students consider the contribution of tobacco farming to GDP in a lesson on the health effects of smoking. This is not to claim that science education should not engage with the social and environmental worlds of which science is a part and in which scientific discourse attempts to intervene. Indeed, curricula across the country have explicitly moved towards the integration of science and technology with society and environmental education (or STSE). However, the integration of STSE should not prioritize the adoption of perspectives that speak from the narrow interests of one industry.

The social sciences ought to also be teaching about climate change and considering the politics, economics and societal impacts and/or responses to climate change and climate change policies. These are appropriate spaces to consider the kinds of interests involved both in obstructing and advocating for climate change action. Here industry perspectives could be included so long as their underlying motivations and consequences are also critically assessed. Instead the uncritical inclusion of industry perspectives without consideration of industry's underlying interests and its history in obstructing climate action through these third party programs and materials works to further disguise industry's agenda.

Yet these materials do not only serve to obfuscate climate science, our research demonstrates that these third-party provided materials also promote a very distinct form of "market-environmentalism" to students and teachers that

prioritizes market-based solutions and individual voluntary action over state-intervention and collective action as the best means to respond to climate change. Indeed, the third-party educational materials we reviewed focus entirely on individual student actions as the best means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — such as purchasing LED lightbulbs, low-flow shower heads or bicycles — with no discussion of industry responsibility for emissions or its documented culpability in delaying climate action. Similarly, when these materials do discuss political action, it is almost exclusively devoted to how best to enshrine these individual actions into law, such as encouraging carpooling, curbside recycling or municipal bans on idling cars. This pervasive focus on individual responsibility in these industry-sponsored materials confirms environmental writer Sami Grover's observation that contrary to popular belief, "fossil fuel companies are actually all too happy to talk about the environment. They just want to keep the conversation around individual responsibility, not systemic change or corporate culpability."

This is not to disparage such individual actions — they are laudable in their own right — but if students are encouraged to believe that these actions are the extent of what is necessary to effectively combat climate change, they will not only be sorely misinformed but sorely disappointed. With just 100 fossil fuel corporations responsible for more than 70 percent of GHG emissions since 1988, no climate change response worth its salt can fail to address the inordinate power of the fossil fuel industry. Due to decades of inaction, only state governments have the power to force the kinds of deep and rapid emission reductions on industry that will be required to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Moreover, only the state has the resources necessary to build the kind of sustainable energy and transportation infrastructure that allows us as individuals to make environmentally responsible choices. Ditching my personal automobile only becomes viable if there is a robust and effective system of public transportation for me to choose instead. But only mass collective action and popular pressure has the power to compel governments to act against what are often very powerful established interests. The fossil-fuel industry has long promoted this type of market-oriented environmentalism in lieu of state-led intervention and more stringent regulation that might negatively impact their bottom-line. Yet despite almost 30 years as the

dominant mode of environmental regulation, market environmentalism has been an abject failure, with key environmental indicators in catastrophic decline over this period. As the realities of climate change and environmental degradation become more visible and alarming, today's students who will have to live with its impacts are becoming more and more motivated to "do something," as the global growth of student-led climate strikes attest. The market environmentalism promoted by organizations like SEEDS and Inside Education have attempted to channel this legitimate desire by youth to "do something" into relatively non-threatening and ultimately ineffective modes of voluntary environmental practice. Ultimately, these educational materials and programs do a disservice to students, as they evade the issue of corporate power altogether, while engendering a fantasy that small changes in personal consumption habits have the power to effectively address the planetary-scale threat of climate change. As renowned climate scientist Michael Mann argues, such lessons fail to "give our kids the tools to rise to the immense challenge they will face as the climate change generation." ●

This article is based on research from a report by CCPA Saskatchewan: Crude Lessons: Fossil Fuel Industry Influence on Environmental Education in Saskatchewan by Emily Eaton and Simon Enoch as part of the Corporate Mapping Project

Emily Eaton is an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. Her work concerns the political economy of natural resource industries, just transition, and the political ecology of oil.

Simon Enoch is Director of the Saskatchewan Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. He holds a PhD in Communication & Culture from Ryerson University with research interests in corporate social responsibility and political ecology.

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This is not to disparage such individual actions but if students are encouraged to believe that these actions are the extent of what is necessary to effectively combat climate change, they will not only be sorely misinformed but sorely disappointed.



A question of educational justice

Good afternoon. My name is Barbara Silva and I am with Support Our Students Alberta, a public education advocacy organization! We are a citizen's action group committed to fighting for a universal, accessible and well funded public education system.

The other day, in an interview a journalist asked me if we are mad at this government — I'm here today to say that we are not mad.

We are furious.

We are furious on behalf of the child who wakes up sick every morning — worried about navigating a school where lack of support makes them feel unseen, and unheard.

We are enraged for parents who depend on transportation, hour long bus rides in lieu of costly

before/after school care, whose costs have just doubled.

We are shocked that families are expected to fundraise for basic resources, like books, furniture, technology, playgrounds.

We are outraged that music teachers, phys ed teachers, art teachers, language teachers are now considered educational luxuries.

We are fuming, that part way through the school year, children who have built trusting relationships with their teachers will have those relationships broken in January due to cruel cuts.

We are furious that in the last four years, over one billion taxpayer dollars have left the public system to subsidize the private one, and that right now





the United Conservative Party is debating if that funding should actually increase.

This is now a question of educational justice.

So don't ask us to compromise.

Don't ask us to negotiate at the expense of Alberta's children.

We see the plan.

We know where this is taking public education.

We know this is about breaking the unions, weakening the public service and dividing communities.

We know that while the UCP debates a 100% voucher right now, we already have a 70% voucher system in Alberta.

We know they want you to focus on a teacher's two months off, instead of the 10 months of dedicated, committed work they put in year over year.

They think teaching is a vocation.

We know it is a calling.

They want you to see education as an individual commodity.

We know it is a common public good.

There are those who want to attack public education at every opportunity.

We will meet him there every time, to defend it.



We are here to say we are public education proud.

We are community builders, not breakers.

We support students.

We support teachers.

We support public education and we will not stand by and let it be sold to the highest bidder.

This is *the* moral issue of our generation — how we stand up for children's right to public education.

Today is just the beginning. Join us.

Choose public education.

This is based on a speech given by **Barbara Silva**, co-founder of SOS-AB, at the Rally for Public Education in Calgary on November 30, 2019. The video, along with closed captioning, is available at <https://vimeo.com/376576481>. For more information about Support Our Students (Alberta), please visit www.supportourstudents.ca/. (All photos courtesy of SOS-AB)



Justice obscured

The “great equalizer” argument isn’t about education or equity

Chuka Ejeckam

The commonly-deployed adage that ‘education is the great equalizer’ is widely used in political discourse. It has become shorthand for the belief that access to educational resources, especially in the early childhood years, drastically improves individuals’ life outcomes. Those who attend well-resourced schools in their early years — and, critically, have access to educational resources and experiences outside of their time at school — have a higher likelihood of graduating high school, attending post-secondary education, finding and maintaining employment in adulthood, and have higher average incomes. Political figures and pundits argue that to decrease inequity and inequality in socioeconomic outcomes and circumstances, access to education is essential.

In many ways, this is true. Children who have access to educational resources do typically go on to fare better in their lives than children who do not. However, citing education as ‘the great equalizer’ doesn’t tell the whole story. In fact, this claim obfuscates some of the most important aspects of inequity, and the steps that must be taken to reduce and eliminate it.

First, by raising education as ‘the great equalizer,’ political figures and pundits effectively downplay society’s broader obligation to proactively lessen inequalities — inequalities that are inevitably attached to historical and ongoing structures of dispossession, marginalization, and subjugation.

The ‘great equalizer’ claim ignores the fact that the groups in our society which experience the most inequitable lack of educational resources experience the most inequitable lack of *all* resources, public services, and support systems — Indigenous and First Nations students in Canada, for example, face an educational funding disparity of hundreds of millions of dollars. Such disparity makes completing high school and pursuing post-secondary education significantly more difficult for many young people. The claim also obscures the marginalization that certain groups experience *while in school*. Black students are disproportionately suspended and expelled from school, and are disproportionately likely to be pushed into applied-education streams, rather than academic streams which seek to prepare students for university.

Secondly, the ‘great equalizer’ claim arguably implicitly asserts that education should be pursued specifically for the purpose of improving one’s economic circumstances. This reinforces the narrative that students should select educational programs most likely to secure high-income employment, ignoring entirely the self-actualizing benefits of pursuing education, and the innumerable benefits to society produced by practices other than the pursuit of wealth.

While the first aspect of the claim has largely deterrent policy implications — in that it could dissuade policymakers from pursuing measures which would lessen the surrounding inequalities that impact students’ likelihood of completing high school and continuing on to post-secondary — the

second aspect of the claim can be actively enacted in troubling ways. This can be seen in the policy announced by the Conservative government in Ontario, which makes funding to educational institutions contingent, in part, upon indicators that include the job placement rate of their graduates. The full list of criteria that will be used to evaluate schools' performance has not been revealed, but the Training, Colleges, and Universities Minister has identified that graduation rate, graduate employment, graduate earnings, experiential learning, 'skills and competencies,' research funding and capacity, and community impact will be considered. The amount of funding directed in this manner to Ontario universities and colleges sits presently at 1.2 and 1.4 per cent, respectively, but will rise to 60 per cent by 2024. The government has also replaced free-tuition programs for low-income students with a mix of grants and loans, and has stated that funding will also be contingent on compliance with its new 'free speech' policy.

This decidedly employment-centric perspective of post-secondary education policies (which is certainly not limited to Ontario — Alberta's Blue Ribbon Panel also recommended performance-based funding metrics) is often combined with the stated need to prepare graduates for the 'jobs of the future,' which implicates the trades as well. While the labour environment is certainly changing, this view effectively cedes control over that change to employers and corporations, rather than recognizing that workers and broader society can use collective power to make those changes

serve everyone, not just those who seek only to profit from it.

What's more, a host of problems arise when considering metrics which incentivize colleges and universities to prioritize streams of education that are especially desirable to employers. In many ways, it functions as a means of using public institutions to bear the costs of training workers, to the benefit of private-sector employers. It also forces us to consider what sorts of research, experiential learning, skills and competencies, or community impacts will be considered valuable by a government that accused student unions of "crazy Marxist nonsense."

A number of socioeconomic forces that influence a student's likelihood of graduation, let alone their areas of interest, are replicated and reinforced by application of metrics that prioritize market-based forces and employer demands. In a worst-case scenario,

colleges and universities might be hesitant to take on students who, as a result of their political or educational interests, or even as a result of their life situation (including caring for dependents or other significant obligations) could negatively impact the school's funding.

Further, this funding structure has implications for new and young professors, who — along with the insecurity they experience in their academic employment — will now have to contend with institutional funding being tied to the workplace- and economy-based expectations and demands placed on the students they have taught. A noted impact of employment precarity is heightened levels of stress and anxiety, which does immense harm to the person experiencing it, as well as increasing societal health care costs, and negatively impacting students.

There's no question that, in the long term, automation will have a significant impact on how we conceive of and perform work. In fact, this has already been leveraged by employers demanding that both work and education become less comprehensive, and more segmented into a series of isolated tasks.

This has already impacted the trades. In 2003, the BC Liberal government introduced a modularized trades training structure in British Columbia — a system which trained students and young workers in a more task-specific model, as opposed to providing a comprehensive education in the students' respective fields. For example, rather than offering a comprehensive program which would provide an individual with certification as a carpenter, the modularized training system offered a progressive set of learning modules which provided certification as a former, framer, and finishing carpenter, and so only cumulatively offered training in the full trade. The system also relied upon employers to identify skill requirements and develop training programs themselves, diminishing the education and training role of the labour movement (an additional benefit to employers).

The long-term effects included a decrease in completion of full-trade certifications, a stratification in the number of registrations across trade sectors, and an immediate increase in rates of workplace injury to a level four times that of tradespeople in Ontario. While injury rates in the trades are almost always higher than those of workers in university-related professions or office-based workers, the underlying point stands; the benefits of a comprehensive education are difficult to fully quantify, and the negative consequences of modularizing education at the behest of employers are difficult to fully predict. This is especially relevant in fields deemed least susceptible to automation — the fields of education

The 'great equalizer' claim reinforces the bootstrap myth, placing the onus upon those on the lower rungs of social and economic ladders to raise themselves up, rather than arguing that we, as a society, must seek to reshape the structures which produce and entrench such grievous inequality.

and care provision — where teaching and aiding ‘the full person’ exponentially increases the value and benefit of the service.

The education system alone cannot solve inequities and inequalities that are structurally embedded in our society. In implying otherwise, the ‘great equalizer’ claim reinforces the bootstrap myth, placing the onus upon those on the lower rungs of social and economic ladders to raise themselves up, rather than arguing that we, as a society, must seek to reshape the structures which produce and entrench such grievous inequality. These are structures which underpin and inform our politics to this day, and curtailing the harm they propagate through generations cannot be accomplished with a single policy or institution. The only ‘great equalizer’ available is a mass social movement seeking to reshape society in service of justice, rather than profiteers.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to pursue an education that teaches them about the world, about themselves, and helps them find their place in the stupefying and inscrutable cosmos of existence. Increasing access to education is certainly positive, and increasing funding to educational institutions to eliminate tuition fees and improve access to resources and opportunities during post-secondary education can reduce inequality. However, education should be considered an essential aspect of well-being and self-actualization, not merely — and certainly not primarily — a means to economic security. ●

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PHOTO SOURCE: SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS (ALBERTA)



Falling behind

Prioritizing care and well-being of children in Nova Scotia

Alec Stratford

In Nova Scotia, child protection social workers are going above and beyond their duties to try to hold a system together that has suffered from a lack of resources, the role of professional care in our society being undermined, and a focus on searching for “efficiencies” rather than best practices to foster human-centered connection.

The Nova Scotia government is determined to mark its success by the growth and expansion of the economy which theoretically will benefit all; however, this has resulted in political leaders dismissing any evidence demonstrating overall well-being continues to deteriorate.

Clearly, provincially and nationally the well-being of our children and youth is not being properly prioritized or adequately supported. For example;

- Child poverty remains stubbornly high and continues to rise. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia reported that child poverty increased from 18.1 per cent in 1989 to 21.5 percent in 2016.
- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death of Canadian children and youth, according to the Raising Canada report. Over the last 10 years, there was a 66 per cent increase in emergency department visits and a 55 per cent increase in hospitalizations of children and youth due to mental health concerns. In Nova Scotia alone, 806 children were hospitalized for mental health concerns in 2016.
- The child protection system disproportionately involves children, youth and families who

are Indigenous, black, or visible minorities, as indicated in a 2018 report by the Canadian Association of Social Workers.

- UNICEF ranks the well-being of children in Canada at 25th out of 41 affluent nations. Canada is at the bottom of the rankings for challenges that may seem inconceivable — child health and safety, child poverty, hunger and abuse.

These realities have had a profound impact on the ability of teachers, social workers and other staff to support communities, and help improve the education, emotional and social well-being of children. Yet the Nova Scotia government continues to implement an organizational and management change strategy that will transform crucial services without increasing overall financial resources to schools’, families and community services.

The promotion of austerity as the supposed “solution” to our supposedly “failing” public services has resulted in the erosion of the well-being of Nova Scotia’s most vulnerable children. Children in institutional care often lack an attachment with a consistent caregiver, which has ramifications for physical development and language. This has major consequences: inadequate care and protection threaten children’s well-being and stops them from developing and learning to their full potential. Inequities are further perpetuated when services required to provide meaningful care and protections are unavailable. Because many children who experience a lack of care or protection commonly come from already

marginalized groups, the stigma and discrimination they have experienced is further reinforced by an inadequate support system.

With the aim of transforming child protection services, the government implemented over 80 amendments to the Children and Family Services Act in 2016, broadened the definition of a child in need of protective services, included youth 16–19 years of age, and tightened court timelines. Social workers and community organizations reported their concerns with the legislative changes prior to implementation. Their concerns included increased caseloads, the readiness of staff and community organizations to implement the changes and the ability of families to make necessary changes given the tightened court timelines. Most importantly concerns were raised that the goal of the amendments would not be met if the Nova Scotia government failed to increase community supports such as housing, food security, child care and access to meaningful income, which remain essential to ensuring that vulnerable families, children and youth maintain overall well-being.

This has led to high caseloads and challenging workloads for social workers, and large class sizes and complex classroom needs for teachers, creating conditions which make it extremely difficult, if not impossible to provide quality care and protection for at-risk families, youth and children. Family structures can be complex and require authentic and empathetic relationship-building to develop meaningful solutions; this is heightened for marginalized families.

These concerns have been compounded by shifts in the provincial education system. In January 2018 Nova Scotia replaced seven local school boards with one provincial advisory council. The stated aim was to centralize services, reduce costs and create more efficiencies in the delivery of education; however, shifting decision making from communities to top-heavy bureaucracies is a neoliberal trait where government services are treated like a business, rather than focusing on the needs of the people they serve, and the policies that generate better outcomes.

This crisis is driven by lack of political focus on the policies that lead to greater well-being. Nationally we have failed to keep pace with complex social needs, and over the past 20 years have reduced overall social spending, choosing instead to prioritize the interests of the affluent. Social expenditures in Canada fall well below the OECD average: 17.2 per cent of GDP compared to 21 per cent. This also represents a drop from the 1990s, when Canada was at 20.4 per cent. The impact on Canadian and Nova Scotian well-being has been dire.

As economists continue to point out, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can go up without affecting working and vulnerable Nova Scotians:

GDP in Canada has steadily grown over the last two decades, but only the incomes of the richest 20 per cent of Canadians have actually increased. When success is judged by economic growth, political leaders respond with policies that value balanced budgets and competitive taxes, but as we've seen over the past 20 years, the well-being of the entire population has been jeopardized as the benefits stubbornly refuse to "trickle down" as we were promised. The claim that economic growth and expanding GDP will benefit all of society has been debunked many times now, most notably by the very people who invented it: the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

And yet the claim continues to be made, despite overwhelming evidence that this market-prioritizing dogma is at the root of:

- Rising inequality and the continued class divide, which has allowed the voices of oppressed to go unnoticed, eroded trust, and increased anxiety and illness for all;
- Governments enacting austerity policies (expanding corporate influence in the process) attempt to cut the cost of care, institutionalize new management systems, and centralize government services, leading to highly top-down bureaucratic systems;
- Entrenchment of the patriarchy, which devalues the work of professional care — predominantly done by women;
- Managerialism that devalues and deskills professional competence, and creates a framework which aims to run government services like a business searching for efficiencies rather than promoting human connection.

To address these trends, and their impact on the ability of Nova Scotians to receive the services and care that they rely on, our political goals require a fundamental paradigm shift. And this means ensuring that the goal of improving well-being is equally important as the goal of developing a strong economy. There is momentum; earlier in 2019 the government of New Zealand implemented its first ever well-being budget, which at its core recognized that their sole focus cannot just on growing the economy, but on enhancing the quality of life for all its citizens. This could be a gamechanger for how we define progress, and how we achieve it.

Nova Scotia — indeed, all of Canada — needs a similar focus. ●

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Quebec's (sadly) distinct education system

Stéphane Vigneault

Le Mouvement L'école ensemble was launched by parents in 2017 to address connections between public financing, equity and school segregation, an issue that no government in Quebec has ever wanted to tackle. Until now.

We Quebecers like to pride ourselves on having some of the most progressive public policies on the continent. So anything that does not support this (mostly true) narrative is unwelcomed. But it's time to acknowledge that, when comparing provincial funding models, Quebec's system of education is not only the most unfair, it is also the least efficient. A report containing never-seen-before OECD data comparing provinces on equity was made public in October 2019 by the Mouvement : Quebec is dead last on every indicator.

The high degree of structural unfairness and inefficiency in Quebec's education system has been in *la belle province's* political blind spot for half a century, but things are changing: more and more people, including key influencers in politics and the media, are starting to admit we have a serious problem.

How did we get here?

The Quiet Revolution

The Quiet Revolution was in motion when the Department of Education was created in 1964:

prior to that point, the Catholic and Protestant churches had been in charge of education but, with the baby boom, the government was struggling to keep up by building new schools. And the Catholic Church still wielded enormous power in the province.

In 1968 the Union nationale government struck a deal to fund private schools (mostly former "collèges classiques" where the few francophones who had access at that time to secondary education were educated) with taxpayers' money. The Parent Commission, tasked by the provincial government under Premier Lesage to make recommendations in order to modernise Quebec's education system, backed this decision. As former commission member Guy Rocher recently recalled in an interview, the Commission came close to officially opposing the public funding of private schools, but the inherent give-and-take of such an exercise and the fear that a minority report would weaken the overall exercise eventually allowed the Church's position to prevail.

What was the Catholic Church gain soon became Quebec's loss; this public financing of private education would prove to be a one-way street to school segregation and its consequences.

A Vicious Circle

This public money allowed subsidized private schools to continuously increase their share of

the school market. Only 5% of secondary school students attended private schools in 1970: today, more than 22% of them do so. It should be noted that 93% of the province's private school students are in subsidized private schools, which charge tuition fees and screen applicants, further reinforcing socioeconomic segregation.

But rather than opposing the fiscal privilege granted to subsidized private schools, public institutions and education ministers instead decided to compete with private schools on their own turf: selection. Public schools officials wanted the same competitive advantage private schools had, i.e. the capacity to offer parents an exclusive environment for their children.

And so, in the 1990s, "projets particuliers" (selective public schools, or classes within schools) were created, with modes of selection that are still used to filter out kids who aren't the right "fit": registration, exam fees, exams, tuition (anywhere between \$100 and \$10,000), auditions, letters, mandatory parental involvement, etc. With a number of different focuses — international, sports, arts or alternative programming — the new "public" schools proved extremely popular with parents. Not only were most of them cheaper than private schools, they offered a comforting loophole for left-of-center parents who wanted the benefit of private-like schooling without actually leaving the public system.

The Department of Education does not make public any detailed picture of selective schools' attendance and, likewise, there isn't any public data on the socioeconomic composition of selective public schools.¹

In a 2007 report, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation² estimated the proportion of pupils in selective public schools at 20%, describing this figure as "conservative". Testimonies the Mouvement has received suggest this figure is much higher today.

As a result of this socioeconomic "skimming", "regular" public schools have an over-representation of students with special needs who tend to require more support. Particularly in an era of underfunded and under-resourced schools, this composition of the "regular" public school classroom makes subsidized private and selective public schools more attractive to parents. And the vicious circle becomes even more entrenched.

Consequences

This three-tier school system led the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation to sound the alarm in a 2016 landmark report, *Steering the Course Back to Equity in Education*. The Conseil explained that "in all provinces or regions of Canada, students in disadvantaged schools have performed less well than those in privileged schools, but this

difference is much higher in Quebec." The report clearly states that something is rotten in the state of Quebec.

Its findings are worth quoting extensively (emphasis added):

The socio-economic status of Canadian students appears in effect to have relatively little influence on their score (OECD 2014). However, in every subject measured by PISA, **the difference in achievement between students from schools in disadvantaged areas and those in affluent ones continues to be markedly more significant in Québec than in other Canadian provinces or territories**. And yet social programs in Québec are considered to be more generous than in other provinces. The analysis also shows that **the stratification of the offer in compulsory education — brought about by a proliferation of selective special programs and private schools — is leading to an unequal treatment that tends to favour the more fortunate**. In other words, those who most need the best learning conditions are not benefitting from them, and this runs counter to the very essence of equity.

Rather than reducing social inequality, however, the Québec education system operates in ways that contribute to some extent to perpetuating it. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with learning disabilities are overrepresented in public classrooms [...]. In addition, families from disadvantaged communities tend to be less informed about their rights or lack the capability to assert them. Thus, despite countervailing measures in place in these communities, the education system has barely made a dent in reducing these contextual inequalities.

Competition in education goes hand in hand with the belief that not all schools are alike, and is feeding a **crisis of confidence that is weakening the public education system**. This crisis reinforces the tendency to group students by educational and or socio-economic profiles, **resulting in a form of exclusion that is opening the door to a multi-tiered school. Thus a gap is growing between communities**, with some institutions or classrooms viewed as less conducive for learning (shunned by those families who can) and working conditions more challenging (shunned by those teachers who can).

This issue is one of fairness or equity — or, in this case, *unfairness* and *inequity*. Disadvantaged and marginalized students (and this is true around the world) tend to perform less well academically



PHOTO SOURCE: LE DEVOIR WEBSITE

Moving Forward

Le Mouvement L'école ensemble was created by Gatineau parents in June 2017, in the leadup to the October 2018 provincial election, to advocate for an equitable system of public education.

Our goal is to have political parties include our two main demands in their platform:

- 1) *Put an end to all direct or indirect private school funding and*
- 2) *Put an end to the selection of students in the public system for selective special projects, at both primary and secondary levels.*

Our longer term goal (#3), once the unified public system we are calling for is put in place, is to consolidate aid to struggling students and develop an enriched learning environment for students who are high achievers, ensuring all kids are well-served and adequately supported within a common classroom.

We asked CROP to poll Quebecers on our three proposals and the results, released in January 2018, were overwhelmingly in our favour: almost 75% of Quebecers were opposed to public funding for private schools; 65% wanted an end to student selection through admissions exams for public schools.

When we launched our movement, the term *school segregation* was always in quotation marks in the press. This is slowly changing. And as a result of our hard work and good timing, elected officials took a stand on school segregation in the National Assembly—a first!—bringing education critics of both the Parti Québécois and Québec Solidaire together on the same stage.

We received endorsements from a range of groups including the Federation of parent committees and the Commission scolaire de Montréal (the biggest school board in the province, and a unanimous vote at that!)

During the last electoral campaign, we organised, the night before the debate, a conference in Montreal with Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg. It gave the 150 assembled at the École nationale d'administration publique a taste of what a unified system could be. In Pasi Sahlberg's words, "In the 70's, Finns wanted to use education to even out social inequality. We discovered that equity also brings about excellence."



PHOTO SOURCE: JOURNAL DE MONTRÉAL WEBSITE



PHOTO SOURCE: TVA WEBSITE

Top Montreal launch, June 2017 (Stéphane Vigneault, Anne-Marie Boucher) **Middle** Joint press conference with Alexandre Cloutier (PQ) and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (QS)

particularly absent the necessary supports. In a fairer system, such as Finland's, this difference in performance is mitigated. But in an inequitable system like Quebec's, inequalities at the starting line remain until the finish line. PISA researchers summarised the issue in October 2018's *PISA in Focus* newsletter: "Socio-economic status has a strong influence on students' performance, but in more equitable education systems more disadvantaged students perform well."

With more than 42% of the province's school-children segregated (22% of children chosen by the subsidized private sector schools in addition to the [at least] 20% of children screened by public selective schools), we should not be surprised by Quebec's poor results and their consequences:

- A quarter of secondary school students drop out.
- Dropouts cost taxpayers \$2 billion in annualised dollars according to a 2009 BMO study.
- A quarter of teachers leave the profession during their first five years in the labour market.
- 53% of 16–65 year-olds in Quebec have low or insufficient literacy skills.

So why are we ignoring this situation?

Political Mythology

Until now, two myths have allowed the private school lobby (the Fédération des établissements d'enseignements privés [FEEP]) to avoid any serious attack on its privileges. The first claims that subsidized private schools actually save taxpayers money. The second one states that private schools are simply better and therefore need to continue their exemplary work (to form the next generation of leaders, and to inspire public schools). These myths are held as facts by millions of Quebecers although they are built on sand.

Private Schools Save Us Money? Really?

According to Quebec's Department of Education, private schools receive 60% of their budget from taxpayers, and the remaining 40% comes from private school parents. Private school proponents claim that if private schools were nationalized, the remaining 40% would also have to come from taxpayers and this would prove too great a burden for the public treasury.

But the legendary 60% figure disguises reality, because it does not compare apples with apples; it does not acknowledge the higher cost of supporting special needs kids who are overrepresented in the public system, and it does not acknowledge that because public education is a universal commitment, all kids must have access to it and all teachers must be paid fairly, regardless of population density or location.

So, what's the right number? The best-known estimate came from the group of experts chaired by the former Quebec Ombudsman, Ms. Champoux-Lesage, who examined education financing in 2014. The group estimated that the cost to the state of a subsidized private student was 74.8% of that of an equivalent public student in high school, 63.9% in elementary school and 63.6% in preschool.

But to that direct funding we must also add *indirect* funding through tax credits. According to a study by a Université de Sherbrooke professor, tax credits for donations to private schools cost us between \$16 million and \$24 million per year. If we split the difference and add \$20 million to direct funding, we reach an astonishing figure of 79% of public funding for *private* secondary school students. In other words, almost eight out of every 10 dollars needed to educate subsidized private school pupils comes from public funds.

That's a long way from the often quoted 60%.

But the private schools lobby also conveniently forgets that if its schools were not publicly subsidized, their students would not cost³ the public purse a penny — another potential saving that must absolutely be taken into account. In Ontario, where private schools are not subsidized, 5.6% of secondary level students (in 2016) attend those schools, at zero cost to taxpayers.

In fact, we have calculated that eliminating the public subsidy to private schools and integrating private school students into public schools would save Quebec taxpayers \$14 million each year (for secondary schools). And this says nothing about long-term gains (lower drop-out rates, better social cohesion) for our economy as a result of making the public system more efficient and more fair though redirecting of all public funding earmarked for private education towards public schools.

Private Schools are Not Better

The second myth is perhaps the most powerful; that private schools are simply better than public ones. Statistics Canada studied this in a 2015 report, and concluded that "Students who attended private high schools were more likely to have socio-economic characteristics positively associated with academic success and to have school peers with university-educated parents." In other words, private schools are not better: private school students have fewer challenges and obstacles, so what is at issue here is the selection of students and the resulting school segregation.

The myth that private schools are better is ingrained in the public conscience. Annual Fraser Institute rankings, dutifully reported by media anxious to help parents "shop" for the best possible schools, reinforce this idea. And even some lower-income parents sing the praises of

public subsidies for private schools. We occasionally receive feedback on social media from some financially-squeezed families saying that they don't take vacation so they can send their kids to private school—that it's a matter of "priorities." And isn't this the First Law of Being a Parent: wanting the best for your child?

Although the Department of Education does not publicize information concerning the income of private school parents, the Mouvement L'école ensemble analyzed data from Quebec children participating in the PISA exam and found that there are few low-income children in private schools. In fact, there are six times more disadvantaged children in public schools than in private ones (29.8% versus 5.6%). While this six-fold figure should have triggered an emergency debate in the National Assembly (like it did in France after famous economist Thomas Piketty wrote about France's similar numbers in *Le Monde*), the ugly truth is that had we been able to extract numbers that isolated regular public from selective public schools, it's likely that the situation is even worse.

It's also notable that, to access this data, we had to go through PISA servers in Paris to get a better portrait of forces at play in Quebec's education system, but the results were not particularly surprising: we already knew (thanks to a private schools lobby report) that subsidized private families have a median income 184% higher than that of public families.

When presented with these numbers, we can, like the current Education minister Jean-François Roberge, say they tell us nothing new and maintain our unofficial school segregative policy. Or we can fight back for the common good.

Change is Coming

Attitudes toward school segregation are changing. Social acceptance of entrance exams, tuition fees, expulsion of unwanted students or other methods of screening children is falling. Last spring, education minister Roberge introduced Bill 12 which sought to clarify what additional costs schools can and cannot charge to parents, after a lawsuit launched by a parent who refused to pay a fee for her child's recorder. Thanks to the rising awareness of the causes and implications of

school inequity in the province, all three opposition parties, including the Liberals, usually a vocal status quo force on the matter, took on the issue of tuition in selective public schools.

In the end, the majority CAQ government managed to pass its bill, putting for the first time in law that *the requirement for the state to provide free public education does not apply to selective public schools*. But the debate was intense. Le Mouvement joined other citizen groups calling on the Minister to focus Bill 12 on general fees—for recorders and the like—and set up a public commission to study tuition in selective public schools along with all matters relating to school segregation. All three opposition parties supported the idea. The Minister did not but, in the process, he was forced to admit his department had no clear portrait of the attendance of selective public schools nor any socioeconomic data about the students who attend them and publicly mandated his department to provide him with this information.

There are few things more difficult for politicians than taking away a privilege from current and potential voters. But the arguments against school segregation are backed by facts and science, and by the majority of Quebecers—and the odds against change are shifting. Distinguishing ourselves in Canada with the unfairness currently built into our education system needs to end.

And for the first time, it appears that it may. ●

Stéphane Vigneault is the coordinator of le Mouvement L'école ensemble, works in the art sector as a consultant, and lives in Gatineau QC.

Le **Mouvement L'école ensemble** campaigns against school segregation in Quebec. You can sign its petition at www.ecoleensemble.com. Individuals and organizations interested in helping the association achieve its goal of hiring a full-time employee can donate online.

Notes

1. Good socioeconomic data for the public system in general is not available. There are two public school socioeconomic rankings publicly available (SFR and IMSE), but they are poorly constructed indexes in which kids bring in their postal code's characteristics instead of their household's. Private schools are excluded from these indexes.

2. The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE) is a public, arm's length advisory body for the Minister of Education and Higher Education.

3. (Editor's note) Andrew Scheer, until recently leader of the Canadian Conservative Party, had voiced his intentions to provide parents who send their children to private schools with a tax credit of up to \$4,000 per child from the federal government if he was elected Prime Minister. He reversed this pledge before the election.



Testing, testing

A provincial scan of K-12 standardized assessment in Canada

Dylan Kelly

Standardized tests, a politically popular policy for politicians and some external groups, are a form of assessment which cover a particular topic and are meant to apply the same to every student at a certain level/grade. The results are presented as objective assessments of student success in specific areas of education.

Proponents argue that standardized assessments provide information to governing bodies about the education system to determine “achievement gaps” and propose various remedies (resources or focus) that might improve the students’ ability to succeed (or at least improve test scores). Standardized testing is positioned as, at least theoretically, immune from indicators such as race, gender and class, and would therefore remove barriers to higher education by “leveling the playing field” for test takers. This form of assessment is promoted as more market-based or consumer-friendly: standardized test scores allow parents to track their child’s progress in various areas to determine if the school is succeeding.

A number of arguments have been raised in opposition to a reliance on standardized testing to assess students’ educational performance, in part due to the inability of this form of assessment to recognize or “score” topics that are not easily standardized — creativity, critical thinking, or outside-the-box approaches to problem-solving.

Although standardized assessments claim to be objective performance measurements of students’ abilities, the very act of “sorting” students has deeply inequitable origins where race, gender and class are concerned. Socio-economic status affects education outcomes including standardized test results, which suggests that “success” on standardized assessments is significantly impacted by family wealth¹ and access to educational opportunities that, with the underfunding of education, are increasingly out of reach for students based on location and family income. That standardized tests apply equally to all students is problematic because certain students have different learning styles or special needs and may not perform well on these high-pressure assessments. Minimal accommodations made for students with Personal Learning Plans are no real solution when it comes to mandatory tests.

Another common concern is the issue of teaching to the test, where teachers will deprioritize or forego other classroom content to prepare students for the format and content of the standardized test. This suggests that these assessments are not directly linked to the content and learning objectives of a provincial curriculum, as teachers have to commit class time to teaching content (or even test-taking skills) not covered or prioritized during the regular school year. A related issue is the reduction of actual learning time in class in favour of test preparation, because at some level teachers and schools are being

assessed through students' performance on standardized tests as well.

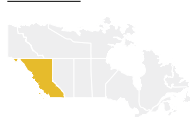
When student scores on a standardized assessment are linked to perceived teacher quality—as they generally are—it puts tremendous pressure on educators, whose reputation is now linked to student performance on an assessment method that is deeply flawed, and also creates a high-pressure situation for students, which itself can impact test performance.

This pressure only intensifies when assessments are a graduation requirement or contribute to a portion of the student's final grade. Test results can also have implications for a student's self esteem and identity, as a failure on graduation requirement tests can lead students to question their future in education and may ultimately contribute to the decision to drop out of school altogether.²

Test scores also lend themselves to superficial school rankings which reinforces the “good schools = good test scores” narrative. Rankings of this sort often overrepresent private schools in the top-scored schools without fully controlling for factors including higher family income, more extracurricular activities and much smaller classes. It's also become a useful hammer in the anti-public school toolkit, meant to “convince people” of problems with the public-school system³ and to advocate in favour of a more private, market-friendly model.

The association of student success, as determined by standardized assessments, with the language of work-place preparation is also problematic as it prioritizes shorter-term workplace demands over students pursuing educational interests that may not have an obvious or immediate employment-based application. This could have significant implications for student engagement if workplace demands and educational interests do not coincide.

In Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction, which provides for some variation between provinces when it comes to content, structure, and assessment methods. Despite this ability for differentiation, all provinces have embraced—in one form or another—standardized testing as a method of assessment.



British Columbia

British Columbia conducts various standardized tests on K-12 students through Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) in grades 4 and 7; in the early 2000s the FSA for grade 10 was replaced with provincial exams.⁴ The stated purpose of the FSA, which corresponds to provincial curriculum, is “to help the province, school districts, schools and school planning councils evaluate how well students are achieving basic skills, and make plans to improve student achievement.”⁵ Grade 10 provincial assessments for numeracy were introduced in 2018, a grade 10 literacy test starting in 2019/2020, and a grade 12 literacy test in 2020/2021.⁶ The stated purpose of these Provincial Graduation Assessments (a passing grade is required to graduate high-school) is to ensure students have developed skills of numeracy and literacy as defined by the provincial curriculum, as well as the ability to apply, “knowledge, reason, and communicate effectively as [students] examine, interpret, and solve problems.”⁷

Government policy changes regarding provincial standardized testing are unclear: the 2017 Ministry of Education mandate letter does not mention student assessment or use language generally associated with standardized testing (accountability, metrics, assessment).⁸ Despite this, the Provincial Graduation Assessments demonstrate that the current BC government's goal is to not only maintain but enhance the amount of standardized testing in K-12 education, and continue the way in which this form of measurement is associated with assessment of student achievement.



Alberta

In Alberta, there are three types of K-12 standardized testing: the Student Learning Assessment (SLA), the Provincial Achievement Test (PAT), and Diploma Examinations. The SLA is administered at the commencement of grade 3 for literacy and numeracy to identify areas of student success, as well as where achievement gaps exist so teachers know where more work is needed to be done.⁹ The SLA has been optional since 2018, based on a teacher's professional opinion as to whether it is best for their student's learning and development in the class.¹⁰ The PATs are administered in grades 6 and 9 in English/French language arts, math, science, and social studies; the stated purpose of these assessments is to show Albertans

if students are meeting provincial standards each year, and to help schools and authorities monitor and determine where improvements are necessary.¹¹ Diploma Examinations are taken by students enrolled in grade 12 courses, and are a factor in a student's admission to university or college, making up 30% of the course's final grade. The stated purpose of the Diploma exams is to assess student achievement relative to the curriculum objectives, and to provide an assessment standard which remains consistent over time and across the province.¹²

Going forward, specific changes proposed by the recently-elected United Conservative Party are new literacy and numeracy assessments for grades 1, 2 and 3, and reintroducing the PAT for grade 3 students.¹³ Premier Jason Kenny has also indicated his interest in reinstating the value of the Diploma Examinations at 50% (up from the current 30%).¹⁴ This suggests that, overall, the current Alberta government is heading down a path of increased standardized testing for K-12 education, both in the number of tests administered and in the grade value attached to them.



Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan's K-12 education system the only form of standardized testing is the Departmental Examinations which are completed by students in grade 12 courses who have been instructed by a non-accredited teacher, homeschooled, or who are taking these classes as adult learners. The exam makes up 40% of the final grade in the course, and is designed to compensate for the lack of qualifications of the non-qualified instructor who would otherwise provide 100% of a student's evaluation.¹⁵

Back in 2013, the Saskatchewan education minister announced an education plan which included annual testing for every student; however, the government quickly backed away from this proposal after concerned teachers and parents pointed to a lack of consultation on the program.¹⁶ The Education Ministry Plan for 2019-2020 references accountability as a way to improve student achievement, and the use of measurable outcomes to identify student levels in reading, writing, and math¹⁷ — topics commonly the subject of standardized assessments in other provinces. Overall, Saskatchewan does not outline a plan to introduce provincial standardized tests; however, the language used, coupled with previous attempts to introduce assessments suggests this direction may be pursued by the current government.



Manitoba

Manitoba has various standardized tests throughout K-12 education, starting with the Grade Three Assessment in numeracy and reading, a Grade Four Assessment in French Immersion, and a Middle Year Assessment for grades 7 and 8 which covers math, reading, writing, and student engagement.¹⁸ The purpose of these assessments is to inform parents (and the provincial education system) as to where students' level of achievement is at respective to their program objectives and grade level.¹⁹ In grade 12 there are Provincial Tests for various courses which make up 30% of the student's final mark; these are meant to obtain information about a student's level of knowledge and understanding relative to the stated objective set by provincial curriculum documents.²⁰

The 2018 mandate letter for the Ministry of Education and Training does not once mention learning, and only talks about 'development' in economic terms: the focus is on meeting the needs of the labour market and Manitoba industry. The only mention in the mandate letter of K-12 is regarding the goal of improving outcomes.²¹ In the absence of a policy shift, we can only assume the prominent role standardized assessments currently play in K-12 education will continue.



Ontario

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) administers grade 3 and grade 6 assessments in reading, writing, and numeracy, as well as a grade 9 test for numeracy which, as a graduation requirement, contributes to 10% of a student's final math mark.^{22,23} The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), administered in high school, is also a graduation requirement. It requires a 75% passing grade, while a fail requires the student to retake the test the following year; a second failure means the student takes a literacy course in grade 12. The goal of such standardized tests in Ontario, as stated by the EQAO, is to provide a measurable result of student achievement in accordance with the Ontario curriculum.²⁴

The plan released by the current government regarding education included a commitment to modernizing the EQAO, and more effective use of data while focusing on equity. Interestingly, other themes the government indicates it wants to pursue, including parental engagement and citizenship, are all to be assessed from within this

frame of EQAO-based standardized assessment.²⁵ In particular the data angle seems the most important to the current government. The new chair of the EQAO board is an unsuccessful Progressive Conservative candidate, and the position has been increased from part-time (at \$5,000 salary) to full-time (at \$140,000 salary).²⁶ The current PC government demonstrates a direction of continued assessment of K-12 students.



Quebec

Quebec students take standardized tests called Compulsory Examinations in grades 4 (French assessment), 6 (math and English assessment) and 8 (Secondary II, French assessment). The test results contribute to 20% of a student's final grade in the specific course, and the stated purpose is to evaluate learning in particular subjects.²⁷ Students write Ministerial Examinations in grade 10 covering science, history, and math; in grade 11 there are English and French assessments, the purpose of which is to demonstrate achievement of the program objectives in accordance with the Administrative Guide 2015 Edition.²⁸ The Ministerial Exams constitute 50% of a student's final mark in the subject, and a pass on all exams is required in order to graduate.²⁹

Quebec's provincial government has focused heavily on school board elimination, and has not made changing standardized testing policies in K-12 education a part of its stated mandate, suggesting that the status quo for assessment and data use will likely continue.



New Brunswick

New Brunswick's grade 2 English Reading Assessment, is currently being modified to focus more on literacy.³⁰ Additional tests occur in grades 4, 6, and 10 where students are assessed in reading, math and science.^{31,32,33} Another secondary school assessment, the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA), designed to test students' reading skills in accordance with provincial curriculum, is a graduation requirement; a "below appropriate achievement" mark means the student must take the English Language Proficiency Reassessment in a later grade.³⁴ The final form of standardized testing is the Provincial Examinations for various high school courses; a passing grade (60%) is required to get the course credit.³⁵ The stated purpose of these various provincial

assessments is to monitor student achievement so that teaching and learning can be improved, while also informing the public about the education system's well-being.³⁶

The current government in New Brunswick was elected in 2018, but their provincial party platform provides a sense of their policy regarding standardized assessments (under the heading "have decisions made by teachers in classrooms, not politicians"³⁷); to restore provincial testing cancelled by the previous government, and to prominently display test results on school and department websites — which suggests that the data collected from assessment results is especially important to the provincial government's education agenda. (Education and Early Childhood Development Minister, Dominic Cardy, also talks of using test score data to inform decision-making,³⁸ but what has been left out of the discussion of data are the classroom assessments of students that teachers carry out regularly.) Overall, it appears that continuation of standardized tests will continue for the New Brunswick's students.



Nova Scotia

The administration of all assessments in Nova Scotia, whether international, national, or provincial, is done by the Program of Learning Assessment for Nova Scotia (PLANS), a branch of the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Development. The first set of standardized tests, Nova Scotia Assessments, take place in grade 3, and cover numeracy and literacy. Students in grades 6 and 8 in both English and French Immersion programs are assessed in reading, writing and mathematics.³⁹ In grade 10, students complete the Nova Scotia Examinations in math (for both English and French Immersion programs), and English (for English students only). These secondary school examinations contribute to 20% of a student's final grade in said course.⁴⁰ The directives of PLANS are as follows: develop/administer program assessments to determine curriculum effectiveness, conduct student assessments to assist students to achieve outcomes, provide information to the government regarding achievement for education decision-making, help teachers understand assessment principals/practices, publish accountability reports for all assessments/achievements to teachers and public.⁴¹

The Education Plan (2015) justifies its focus on data and test results by raising concerns about Nova Scotia's national and international test scores, and intends to modernize education in the province by using student assessment results

to address achievement gaps and other issues.⁴² The Education Reform Act (2018) reiterates the importance of evaluations to ensure accountability and to measure the performance of the education system.⁴³



Prince Edward Island

In Prince Edward Island (PEI) K-12 student assessment is called the Provincial Common Assessment Program. The first set of tests—the Primary Literacy Assessment (PLA) and the Primary Mathematics Assessment (PMA)—occur in grade 3. Grade 5 French Immersion students take an Elementary Literacy Assessment (ELA), and grade 6 students take an ELA in addition to an Elementary Mathematics Assessment (EMA). Grade 9 students write the Intermediate Mathematics Assessment (IMA) which is worth 10% of their overall report card mark. Grade 10 students write the Secondary Literacy Assessment (SLA), and grade 11 includes a Secondary Mathematics Assessment (SMA) for certain math courses which makes up 25% of the final grade.⁴⁴ The stated purpose of the provincial testing is to indicate current student achievement relative to their grade level, which then is used to improve teaching, professional learning and decisions about resource allocation in education.⁴⁵

A review of PEI's Provincial Common Assessment Program completed in February 2019, prior to the election of the current government, advocates for a continuation of various standardized assessments due to supposed general support, and in order to be consistent with models adopted by Canadian jurisdictions and other notable countries.⁴⁶ That said, the current government ran on a commitment to “[r]educe the frequency of provincial standardized testing,”⁴⁷ though there was no commitment to their elimination.



Newfoundland and Labrador

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is currently developing new Provincial Assessments for the 2019-2020 school year to cover English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3, 6, and 9.⁴⁸ The stated purposes of NL's Provincial Assessments is to compare student achievement to curriculum outcomes, and to provide the data to schools, teachers, and the government to inform teaching and learning decisions in

education.⁴⁹ The next set of standardized tests are the Public Examinations for various grade 12 level courses, which contribute to 50% of a student's final grade in each class. The purpose of these Public Examinations is similar to the Provincial Assessments: to evaluate the cognitive domain of the course through student achievement on an exam based on curriculum outcomes.⁵⁰

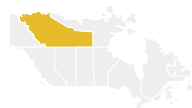
The Provincial Assessments were created for the 2019/2020 school year by the current government (re-elected in May 2019), indicating an ongoing commitment to the results and objectives of standardized testing. However, assessments, testing, or examinations in education were not mentioned in the current government's campaign platform,⁵¹ suggesting that the current policies will continue unchanged.



Yukon

The Yukon is similar to British Columbia when it comes to the type of standardized assessments used: a Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is administered to students in grades 4 and 7 in writing, reading and numeracy. The stated purpose of the FSA is to provide a valuable indicator of subjects in which individual students to understand where more focus is needed, and to create a snapshot of how well the education system is meeting students' needs.⁵²

Neither the party platform of the current government from the election, nor the mandate letter for the minister of education, mention the current form of assessment or introduce any new standardized tests for Yukon students.^{53,54} However, the 2018 “Yukon Government Performance Plan” mentions the FSAs and repeats the stated purpose of this assessment.⁵⁵ While this plan produced by the Yukon government does not mention introducing new standardized tests, it reaffirms the belief that the FSA is useful and will continue to be administered in K-12 education in the Yukon.



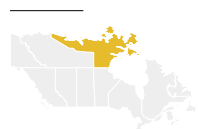
Northwest Territories

The current K-12 education system in the Northwest Territories is based on Alberta's, including the various standardized tests. The first set of standardized tests in NWT is the Alberta Achievement Tests (alternatively the Provincial Achievement Tests), which take place in grades 3, 6 and 9 covering subjects like English and French language arts and mathematics. The stated goal of

administering these assessments is to determine if student learning is at the expected level, ensuring curriculum standards/objectives are met, informing the public on student success and identifying areas where students can improve.⁵⁶

The second form of standardized testing in the Northwest Territories is the Alberta Diploma Examinations, which take place for certain grade 12 courses and make up 30% of the final grade in said class. The stated purpose of these exams is to certify student achievement is at the expected level and to maintain certain standards for the education system.⁵⁷

The mandate letter to the minister of education, culture and employment does not mention plans for new standardized tests, but it does emphasize an accountable education system, specifically by making accountability a directive of the Inclusive Schooling Directive, and by the implementation of a comprehensive accountability framework.⁵⁸ The repetition of the term 'accountability', commonly associated in education with the use of standardized testing, suggests the government plans to continue using the current standardized tests, and the data they provide.



Nunavut

Nunavut's education system, like NWT's, is based on Alberta's K-12 learning, which also means the same standardized tests are used. While Nunavut does not conduct the Alberta Achievement Tests, the Alberta Diploma Examinations take place in this territory for select grade 12 courses and counts as 50% of a student's final mark. The purposes of the Diploma Exams are as follows: to demonstrate best practices in educational assessment; to meet the needs of students, parents, teachers and the public; and to ensure better quality teaching and learning.⁵⁹

Nunavut has been criticized for its education system being insufficiently inclusive (a comprehensive external review was conducted in 2014-15). In 2016, in response to concerns being raised about the practice of social promotion, the education minister defended the system's rigour, called for more parental involvement, and suggested increased standardization would make it easier to deliver inclusive education.⁶⁰ There has since been a change in government leadership but no recent statements on whether increasing the number of standardized assessment might lead to different practices, according to the most updated Nunavut government website for the education department with Minister David Joanase. While the new minister has not made any statements

on increasing the number of standardized tests in Nunavut, the current government has demonstrated a willingness to continue with the already existing examinations.

Opposition

There is significant organizational opposition to the role and emphasis of standardized testing, and a number of provincial groups have mounted information-based campaigns to provide concerned citizen and parent groups with resources to push back against the standardization agenda. Some of the more vocal opponents are teacher federations or informal educator and parent alliances including the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario,⁶¹ the Alberta Teachers' Association, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, Educators for Social Justice—Nova Scotia, and the Boycott EQAO Facebook group which often provide information regarding concerns with standardized assessments.

While the most effective method of opposing standardized testing is to receive an exemption from the school, not all students are in a position to do so. For those who choose to opt-out, or for parents who choose this on their child's behalf, different educational requirements can make this a challenge, particularly if the test is part of a child's final grade or a graduation requirement. In provinces or grades where this is not the case, opting out may be a more realistic option.

The BCTF provides a form which parents can fill out to withdraw their child from writing the FSA. Such a form ensures a clear process for parents, students and educators, and eliminates the confusion and guesswork experienced in other jurisdictions where the process for self-exemption is less transparent and consistent because it may be decided at the school level.⁶²

The fewer students who participate in these standardized provincial assessments, the less representative and valuable the test data. This begs the question: at which point is the data so invalid that governments and third-party institutions will have to change how these assessments are conducted, or if they should be considered a valid assessment method at all?

Conclusion

The role of standardized assessments in education appears to be a policy direction embraced, to varying degrees, by provincial governments of all political stripes. However, concerns continue to be raised by educators, parents, and community groups about the usefulness of this tool as a method of determining education quality and student engagement. A number of provinces have experienced more concerted opposition;

the recent public consultations led by the current Ontario government revealed low levels of support for this form of assessment.⁶³ Other provinces, notably BC, have clearer processes for opting out, which eliminates guesswork or even the outright fear some parents and students may feel at challenging provincial education policy. One thing is certain: in the neoliberalization of public education, standardized assessment, and resistance to it, is certain to play a prominent role. ●

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As educational policy continues to rapidly evolve, we would welcome from readers any updates that may have been proposed or implemented after this research was compiled but prior to publication.

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Our universities/ our selves

Seven ideas to lift us up and bring corporatization down

Claire Polster

These days, the issue of mental health is receiving a lot of attention in our universities as elsewhere. This is due to a rise in rates of psychological distress among staff and students and increased efforts to support those suffering from it¹. While this issue is absolutely important, at times I fear that too much attention is being placed on people's mental states, as opposed to the social structural conditions that give rise to them. Not only may this lead to misdiagnoses of peoples' troubles and to ineffective treatments for them, but it may also allow people to be blamed or pathologized for problems they did not cause and cannot resolve on their own. This was the case at several of the highly corporatized U.K. universities I visited in 2017, where I saw posters asking faculty members if they were feeling stressed, and advising them of counselling and other services the university made available. These posters were deeply troubling, for instead of acknowledging and redressing the brutal working conditions that were making people unwell², administrators were implying that difficulty coping with them was a personal failing for which faculty members should seek help.

While it would be valuable for those concerned with mental health on campus to attend more to its relationship to university corporatization³, in

this article, I want to suggest that those concerned about corporatization would do well to attend more to the issue of mental health, broadly understood as mental or inter/personal well-being. Many if not most analysts of university corporatization, myself included, have tended to focus on how the process transforms the structures within which people interact, rather than on how it transforms the dispositions of those who do the interacting. This is a serious omission, for, in a multiplicity of ways, corporatization dispirits and divides those who work and learn in the university, cultivating insecurity and self-interestedness instead of confidence and solidarity. This deprives us of crucial personal and collective resources we need to undertake and sustain resistance to corporatization, and thereby entrenches the process. If we see inter/personal dis-ease not simply as a side effect, but as an integral feature, of corporatization, it follows that, as part of our efforts to oppose the process, we should directly confront this issue. That is, we should develop strategies that rebuild and reinvigorate our spirits, commitments, and connections and, by lifting us up, help bring corporatization down.

Of course, raising spirits and rebuilding connections are not sufficient to reverse university corporatization. It is also true that these goals can be achieved indirectly, as byproducts of more direct challenges to corporate structures, such

as occupations, strikes, legal proceedings, and others. Nonetheless, given that these objectives may be less threatening and more appealing to members of the university community, and that they can increase the likelihood that other acts of resistance will succeed, there is good reason to pursue them. Indeed, because even the impulse to resist is unlikely to be sustained in a demoralized and fragmented university community, one might argue that right now, such efforts should even be prioritized.

In what follows, I offer seven ideas to fortify our resolve and resources to resist university corporatization. Most of these were shared with me by participants in a study of responses to corporatization in Canada and the United Kingdom⁴. While respondents offered many more wonderful ideas, I chose these for three important characteristics they share. First, for the most part, they are relatively easy to implement, in that they do not require much in the way of time or other material resources — though they do require courage and determination. Second, despite their simplicity, they pose potentially powerful challenges to corporate values and practices in the university, by laying bare their flaws and offering glimpses of healthier alternatives. Finally, all of these strategies are moving, both in the sense that they may stir feelings deep within us and, in so doing, help free and mobilize our energies to act. Although there is much to recommend these strategies, not all are suitable in all universities at all times. I offer them less as prescriptions for action than as means to inspire other creative initiatives that strengthen our capacity to make our universities otherwise.

One of the simplest yet most inspired ideas I heard was shared by a professor who, on a whim, placed a guitar in his department's lounge. This led to several guitar playing and singing sessions among department faculty and staff. This very modest act (and variations on it) can profoundly challenge corporatization's corrosive effects on our spirits and relationships. Perhaps most significantly, it defies the instrumentalism of the corporate university, by encouraging people to take time "out" and to do something for its intrinsic rather than utilitarian value. This break from the university's regime of time and the pleasurable experience of the moment can wake people up to the relentless productivism under which they work and to the toll it takes on their spirits, bodies, and/or minds. It can also arouse a desire to relate to their work with more ease and joy while heightening their displeasure with those institutional pressures and demands that prevent them from doing so. Further, in giving themselves permission to enjoy — not simply endure — in the university⁵, faculty can recover a sense of their autonomy which is routinely diminished in the corporate

university. This, in turn, may restore some of their self-conception as public-serving professionals as opposed to nervous employees and help stoke indignation over being treated themselves as the instruments of administrators' goals.

A further benefit of this action is its potential to re/build connection within the university. The experience of being and singing together can bring into sharper relief the loneliness and isolation that many faculty and others feel due to a lack of social interaction (as more people eat lunch in their offices behind closed doors, interact on-line, and/or work from home) and a growing tendency for colleagues also to relate to one another as means to their personal ends. At the same time that it may strengthen the desire for more and richer engagement among colleagues, this action can also generate the recognition and good will that open channels for it to take place. As with all the actions I will discuss here, this one may produce additional spin-off benefits that radiate throughout the institution. For example, the organic and authentic nature of the experience can help people see through if not challenge other aspects of the corporate university that undermine community and connection. These include the growing number of manufactured social events (like town halls and coffee breaks with the President) which carefully manage and monitor collective interactions, and the diminishment of common spaces (including university clubs and, ironically, department lounges) where more spontaneous interaction can occur.

A second excellent idea comes from an article challenging the growing use of ranking measures in corporate universities (including performance indicators like league tables and research impact factors, and professional designations such as member of elite academic society or holder of distinguished research chair) which feeds both the audit culture and the culture of stardom in the institution⁶. As part of a suite of strategies to resist these measures, the authors suggest that university members introduce speakers to audiences (and colleagues to colleagues) not with a list of their accomplishments and awards, but by addressing how their research has made a difference and why they are passionate about it⁷. In so doing, those making the introductions problematize and implicitly critique the relentless competition that sustains and advances corporatization. They also prevent participants from engaging in competition, if only for a moment, by withholding from them information they need to rank the person being introduced. This simple yet subversive act allows people to open more fully to the content of others' speech, without continually evaluating whether it exceeds or falls short of what one would expect from the holder of a particular position or award. It also allows them to relate differently to the speaker

themselves and to approach them as someone with particular intellectual or social interests as opposed to a rival who is more or less successful than they. In turn, this experience may spill over into peoples' relations with others, reminding them that other colleagues too are not mere occupants of—or stepping stones to—a superior or inferior status, but are intrinsically valuable human beings with deep curiosities and commitments, much like themselves.

As well as helping to level and nurture interpersonal relations, such introductions can lift individuals' spirits. They may lead them to reconnect to what they value about their own work, instead of dwelling on the awards and accolades they have—or have not—received. They may also free them from the stress that comes from judging themselves in relation to the speaker (to determine whether or not they could do better than s/he who is ranked above or below them), allowing them to relax more fully into the presentation. The relief and refreshment that come from suspending the obsession with one's relative status can open space for people to recover a sense of their work as an end in itself and/or form of public service as opposed to a means of self-preservation or aggrandizement. This may also raise awareness of, and opposition to, other university practices that incite and reward competition, such as incessant inducements to pursue acknowledgements and awards, and splashy recognition events which shame and threaten some under the guise of appreciating and celebrating others.

Another laudable idea that is being implemented in at least one Canadian university is to hold in advance of every Senate meeting, a meeting between faculty members who sit on the Senate and the Executive of the faculty association. The aim of these meetings is to review the Senate's agenda, identify matters that might affect the association's and/or its members' interests, and develop collective responses to them. This practice can support well-being in a number of ways, not least of which is by combatting the individualization and individualism that sustain corporatization. In uniting faculty around a common goal, these meetings may lessen feelings of powerlessness and insignificance that are produced and reinforced by increased managerialism in the corporate university. These meetings may also lend greater meaning and purpose to academics' service work and thereby revitalize their investment in, and energies for, collegial governance. This positive change can beget others. For instance, it can discourage if not prevent the more cynical and opportunistic approaches to university service (such as treating it as a personal choice or as a means of self-advancement) that are promoted by the corporate university at the

expense of the individuals who adopt them and/or the collectives to which they belong.

Such meetings can also strengthen relations on campus. They do this directly by creating a community among the participants who acquire all the supports and obligations that community entails. They may also do this indirectly, by reminding those who sit on Senate (and other collegial bodies) that they are there not as rootless individuals but as representatives of various constituencies to whom they are accountable—and by encouraging them to act accordingly. At the same time that they foster more interpersonal connection, these meetings provide opportunities for faculty to re/learn important collective skills that have atrophied or been suppressed in the corporate university⁸, and to develop the confidence and fellowship that come from using them. This may motivate other faculty, staff, and students also to mobilize and organize to shape the university, instead of acquiescing or accommodating to the corporate status quo.

A fourth means of bolstering spirits and relations in the corporate university is to boldly affirm traditional and public-serving academic norms and values, as was done by those who produced the University of Aberdeen's Reclaiming Our University Manifesto⁹. This collectively generated document not only denormalizes corporate discourse and values, but, in offering an inspired and inspiring alternative vision of the university, offers a powerful antidote to the resignation to corporatization that pervades university campuses. These affirmations give those who are newer to the university the language to name, and means to think systemically about, what may seem to be personal discomforts or difficulties with the corporate status quo. They also validate the critiques that longer serving members have learned to quell to better cope with the institution and/or avoid derision or repudiation. Affirmations like the Aberdeen Manifesto can further lift peoples' spirits by rekindling those higher ideals and aspirations that first called them to the university, but are routinely sacrificed or trampled by corporate imperatives and exigencies. This may not only revive their longing for more fulfilling and meaningful academic lives, but also restore their conviction that such desires are right and achievable.

Both the process and product of such initiatives can build social capital on campus. As it did at Aberdeen, the process may allow people to engage and find common cause with members of the university whom they would otherwise not meet nor expect to ally with, and to discover and appreciate talents and experiences of colleagues whom they already know. It can also nurture solidarity and trust, for example, by enabling people to acknowledge—and together overcome—some of their fears of retaliation that

often hold opposition to corporatization in check. In bringing them together in something beyond and outside of themselves, this process also offers people a rich experience of belonging, which simultaneously highlights and lessens the isolation and vulnerability they often feel. This may reinforce their sense of individual and collective agency and also their feelings of responsibility to one another and to the university community as a whole.

A fifth idea is to craft or champion declarations, such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment¹⁰, and to pressure university administrations to sign on to and be accountable for them. Though it shares some similarities with the previous idea, this one aims to change one particular feature of many universities through public campaigns, rather than to change the guiding vision of a single institution using its own internal processes. Such campaigns promote well-being on campus, particularly by helping people overcome the profound disempowerment that is cause and consequence of corporatization. They do this by dramatically reorienting individuals' stance in the institution, allowing — indeed requiring — them to act not as subordinates who ask superiors to consider their requests, but as equals and stewards of the institution who demand that it do better. The renewed appreciation of their own power, and the assurance and pride that come from exercising it, can reinvigorate those involved in these campaigns and dislodge deepseated beliefs that resisting corporatization is futile. It can also raise others' awareness and concern about ways they not only comply with, but internalize corporate expectations and, in Foucauldian fashion, domesticate and passify themselves.

Such campaigns produce many of the same interpersonal benefits that were addressed in relation to the previous idea, and extend connection and community across universities within and beyond national borders. Both the receiving of support and resources from university activists outside their institution, and the giving back of these to them, may boost the courage and determination of each university group in a virtuously circular manner, and spur others to undertake similar (or new kinds of) campaigns as well. Additionally, the production and promotion of these declarations may unite those inside the university with activists outside of it who support or share their goals (such as divestment and other forms of disengagement from fossil fuel industries). This can infuse fresh hope and vitality into these campaigns and those involved with them.

Whereas all the ideas presented thus far involve taking action inside corporate universities, the sixth involves supporting different kinds of institutions, specifically “free” universities, such as the Free University of Brighton¹¹. More so than any of the

previous ideas, free universities may enhance well-being by prefiguring non-corporate higher education and offering people a living example, if not full-on experience, of it. Free universities are especially beneficial for those who teach and learn in both corporate and free institutions. As one such informant noted, the pleasures and rewards of participating in an institution that truly accords primacy of place to teaching and learning can validate, in a visceral way, individuals' opposition to corporate higher education, and reinforce their conviction that it can and must be opposed. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, freedom from those corporate practices that corrupt and undermine higher learning make the free university a “space of resilience” for those who teach and learn in corporate institutions, which restores their spirits and capacity to resist them. Free universities also cultivate genuine collegiality and community among and between their teachers and learners who are the main decision-makers in these institutions. These relations, and the more respectful and humane policies that stem from them¹², further support the well-being of those who straddle both institutions and give them motivation and tools to transplant some of these positive conditions into corporate universities.

Those who do not participate in free universities may be uplifted by them nonetheless. For instance, colleagues' descriptions of governance practices in free universities can restore their own commitments to collegialism and institutional democracy (particularly as these descriptions call into question the value and necessity of swollen university administrations). More generally, colleagues' accounts of education offered and conducted freely and solely for the love of knowledge and the public good can renew their own dedication to the academic calling and the higher purposes it serves. It is worth noting that free universities may not only raise the spirits, but also the ire of those in corporate universities, by shining a light on the injustices and harms they endure, such as the unconscionably high fees that students pay for an increasingly impoverished education. So long as it is channelled in appropriate ways and at appropriate targets, this anger too may positively affect the dispositions and relations of those who work and learn in corporatized institutions.

The last idea is a clever twist on the corporate mapping projects that activists at many institutions have used to expose and critique university/industry partnerships of various kinds¹³. It involves “unmapping” corporate campuses to uncover and recover spaces that are or were intentionally non-corporate and public-serving, such as anti-oppression resource centres, childcare cooperatives, and community research units¹⁴. Unmapping projects may move

people by attesting to the continued presence of public-serving values and practices on campus and pointing them to places where they can enact and extend them. They may also rejuvenate people, by affording them opportunities to work *for* something they believe in, rather than *against* things they oppose. Further, in recounting the histories of the spaces they denote, “ummaps” can show that current struggles may be no more difficult than were those of the past, thereby lessening the sense of overwhelm that challenging corporatization can evoke and eliciting greater tenacity from its opponents. These accounts can also unearth an array of inventive if not irreverent strategies and tactics that were used to advance public-serving initiatives in the past, surprising and delighting those who oppose corporatization and igniting their creativity and imaginations.

Finally, unmapping projects can build relations on campus, both among those who do the actual unmapping and those who are called either to support existing initiatives or to resurrect others that have ceased operations. Additionally, they may link those who are involved in the present with those who were involved in the past (allowing the former to learn from, and put their own spin on, the latter’s legacy) and connect them also to future members of the university community, as it is primarily for their sakes that these initiatives are undertaken. In forging bonds of solidarity and support that extend across time as well as space, unmapping initiatives can provide a bulwark against the privatization and self-interestedness that advance corporatization, and help revive the academy’s public-serving ethos and mission — two of the most grievous casualties of corporatization. They may also help repair relations between the university and those members of the general public whose trust in and loyalty to the institution have been compromised by corporatization’s numerous harmful effects¹⁵.

Taken individually, and even collectively, the above ideas are clearly insufficient to undo the corporatization of our universities. Nonetheless, these ideas, and others like them, have considerable potential to undermine some of the conditions that underpin it. Corporatization is not only produced and sustained by changes to the policies and structures within our institutions: it is also produced and sustained by changes within our selves. Attempting to revive our aspirations and expectations as members of public-serving institutions and also to reestablish connection and solidarity within and beyond the academy is therefore neither trivial nor secondary work. Rather, it constitutes both a direct and indirect challenge to corporatization, undoing some of the inter/personal damage that holds it in place and paving the way for additional acts of resistance to follow.

Paradoxically, while the kinds of actions proposed here may be easier, in objective terms, to undertake than are other forms of resistance to corporatization, mustering the hope and energy to initiate them may be more difficult, precisely because of corporatization’s demoralizing and divisive effects on our spirits and relations. I have no doubt that many readers who have persisted to this point will be more inclined to dismiss or forget the ideas presented here than to try them out, let alone invent any others. Yet, if even one of these ideas sparked any feeling of joy, recognition, or rightfulness in you — as all of them did in me — I urge you to hold fast to this feeling and to act on it in whatever ways you can. For these sparks can light the way toward greater ease and well-being not only for ourselves, but for all others currently struggling in and with the corporate university. ●

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Notes

1. See, for example, the 2016 Canadian release of the National College Health Assessment at http://oucha.ca/pdf/2016_NCHA-II_WEB_SPRING_2016_ONTARIO_CANADA_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.PDF and Karen Foster and Louise Birdsall Bauer, *Out of the Shadows: Experiences of Contract Academic Staff*. CAUT, 2018.
2. See, for example, Liz Morrish, *Pressure Vessels: The Epidemic of Poor Mental Health Among Higher Education Staff*. HEPI Occasional Paper 20, 2019.
3. I use the term “corporatization” to refer to the longstanding and ongoing process in and through which universities work more for, with, and as businesses. For a detailed discussion of this process and its impacts, see Claire Polster and Janice Newson, *A Penny For Your Thoughts: How Corporatization Devalues Teaching, Research, and Public Service in Canada’s Universities*. Ottawa: Our Schools/Our Selves, 2015.
4. I conducted this study from 2016–2018. My interviews in the U.K. were carried out in the Winter of 2017 in collaboration with Dr. Sarah Amsler of Nottingham University.
5. I take this phrasing from A. Smith and F. Webster as cited in Oili-Helena Ylijoki, “Entangled in Academic Capitalism”, *Higher Education*, 43(3), p. 300.
6. The audit culture refers to the growing use of standardized metrics to evaluate and reward academic performance. The culture of stardom refers to the creation within the academic profession of highly valued and privileged tiers of academic stars and superstars and the various dynamics this sets into motion. Both of these cultures generate a range of dysfunctions which harm individual and collective well-being. For more on this, see Deborah Rhode, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Scholars, Status, and Academic Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006 and Marc Spooner and James McNinch (eds.), *Dissident Knowledge in Higher Education*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2018.
7. Nancy J. Adler and Anne-Wil Harzing, “When Knowledge Wins: Transcending the Sense and Nonsense of Academic Rankings”, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2009, 18(10), p. 92.
8. These skills include how to use or uphold the institution’s rules of order and how to craft motions — and strategies to get them passed.
9. The Manifesto (which rests on four pillars of freedom, trust, education, and community), as well as information about its history and current status, may be found at <https://reclaimingouruniversity.wordpress.com>.
10. This declaration, which is available at <http://sfdora.org/read>, calls for improvements in the use of research metrics on the part of individuals and organizations, including universities. In recent years, pressure from faculty and others has resulted in a growing number of universities signing on.
11. Free universities provide, at no cost, education that is decided on and provided by local people in free public spaces. They aim to reclaim education as a public good that is accessible to everyone. Although I focus here on ways in which free universities can fortify spirits and relations in corporate universities, I do not mean to imply that they are simply a means to this end. On the contrary, they are important and valuable institutions in their own right which provide many benefits to their participants and the broader society.
12. For example, at the Free University of Brighton, instructors are actively prevented from taking on excessive workloads in order to ensure that they don’t burn out. This consideration and care contrast sharply with the disrespect and exploitation to which faculty — especially precarious faculty — are routinely subjected in the corporate university.
13. See, for example, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/challenging-mcworld-second-edition> p. 19.
14. See, for example, Ryan Hayes, *Unmapping the Corporate Campus: Cartography of a “Free University of Toronto”* available at <http://www.blog.ryanhayes.ca/university-notebooks>
15. For discussion of some of these effects, see Jennifer Washburn, *University Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*. New York: Basic Books, 2005 and Jamie Brownlee, *Academia Inc.: How Corporatization Is Transforming Canadian Universities*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015.



Familiarity breeds resistance

Harris-era parents know there's nothing innovative about Ontario's education cuts

Erika Shaker

I came of age as an activist and researcher when Mike Harris was elected Ontario premier. His education minister, John Snobelen, famously a high school dropout, was much more comfortable referring to students as “clients,” parents as “customers” and teachers as “front line service providers,” and spoke about “creating a crisis” to justify overhauling the system.

And so we got labour unrest, gutted public infrastructure, and a funding formula designed to pull over \$2 billion out of public education. This has resulted in a number of trends which have only grown more prevalent: an insufficient basis of funding or other resources to meet the needs of all kids, particularly students for whom English or French was not a first language, or kids with special needs. Increased normalization of private financing to inequitably address the shortfall through fundraising, user fees, corporate and community handouts...which exacerbates the problem of how already-vulnerable communities are further marginalized. And continually deteriorating infrastructure, on top of a \$16 billion backlog.

When elected, the Liberals implemented some good policy: full-day kindergarten remains a positive addition, though absent the wrap-around

care it proved less transformative than it could have been. An updated Health and Phys-ed curriculum update was also welcome (though it became a political football in the provincial election, to a large extent the government reinstated it after cancelling it). And certainly the money the Liberals provided for various projects and top-ups was welcome, after years of deliberate and what seemed to be almost gleeful underfunding.

But things we consider to be a fundamental human right and a public good can't be provided through good will and temporary or quick-fix pockets of cash. They require codified policy, long term financial guarantees, and measures to ensure accountability.

Because the Liberals did not address the structural flaws of the Funding Formula, student needs still went unmet, and the systemic underfunding continued. So, when a government was elected that, on top of a flawed funding formula, further under-resourced public education, limited services, and in their media comments tried to pit teachers and unions against parents and students, we have what we're currently seeing across the province.

For parents of a certain age — like me — this all feels very familiar. Except now it's being done to our kids.

Currently we have a population increasingly disenfranchised, dealing with inequality and precarity which makes it even more difficult for people to build community and engage with each other, let alone be as involved in their kids' education as they would like. And because of overlapping vulnerabilities, this impacts some families and communities more than others. We also have the deliberate undermining of programs that exist to help mitigate this disengagement, or the money required to keep them operating in a dependable way.

To counter this disengagement we need to ensure that we are talking with and listening to each other, because this is the only way we can advocate for well-funded, high quality, publicly accountable schools, where kids' needs are met, and where educators and education workers have the resources required to meet kids where they're at, and communicate effectively with parents and caregivers. This commitment to broad engagement is fundamental to pushing back against the cuts that will not serve any of us well, and will disproportionately hurt those who are already most marginalized and vulnerable.

So long as the current funding formula remains in place, schools and kids will continue to be under-resourced, even if the government of the day is less right-leaning. This is why we need to reject arguments that maintain turning back the clock to just before this current round of cuts is good enough. It's not. And while I am deeply concerned about the direction of any Funding Formula review that this current government might undertake, we need to start thinking about not just protecting the schools we have now — which leave so many people out in the cold — but building a movement to advocate for the schools we need and that our kids deserve.

These days the government's rhetoric and policy direction is getting a rough ride. As a recent Environics poll makes clear, parents understand that larger classes do not build resilience. All school boards are experiencing cuts in total operating funding, in per pupil funding, or both. Mandatory e-learning does not create more choice for students. A market-based service model is extremely detrimental for kids with autism. Limiting course options for kids is short-sighted and contradictory. In five years there will be 6,000 to 10,000 fewer teaching positions (depending on which government number we're using). CCPA Ontario's Ricardo Tranjan mapped this to show what this means to communities across the province.

My partner — who I met during the Days of Action — and I have two kids; one in high school, one in elementary. They provide me with all sorts of opportunities to live my research and question my assumptions.

They've also given me insight into how differently kids learn, what works well for them, what doesn't, and how that can change. And, this provides me with a number of opportunities to really think about how I, as a parent, best work with their schools to support them.

Both my kids have had excellent ECEs, educators, education workers and administrators. These are people who have worked hard, listened well, and as patiently as possible navigated larger than optimal classes and the additional demands of school plays, school clubs and team sports.

My eldest is creative, but a fairly traditional learner. She takes instructions exceedingly well, has a good sense of what's expected, navigates social situations with aplomb, is emotionally mature, and has always been able to advocate extremely effectively for herself.

My youngest is less predictable, more out-of-the-box, with less patience for "playing the game," some of which of course has to do with how we socialize boys and girls differently. He needs more time to express himself clearly, more time to settle, and more breaks. Adults and caregivers require more time and patience to navigate his leaps of logic (and recover from their laughter at his quirky sense of humour).

I know my daughter will be shortchanged by what's being done to public education. My son, however, won't just be shortchanged. He will be damaged academically and socially by these cuts. He's more likely to be that kid who will get caught in the shuffle, whose silent signals of discomfort or confusion — that often look like disinterest — can go unnoticed in a larger classroom; whose requirements for a more flexible approach while he gets comfortable with his surroundings and what's expected of him are less likely to be met. And not because educators and education workers and schools aren't operating with the best of intentions, but because of the erosion of the system's ability to care for and meet the needs of those kids who are already more vulnerable.

Of course, we'll mitigate that to the best of our ability, with meetings and tutors and extracurricular activities and extra attention that the school can simply no longer provide — not for lack of trying, but because of the higher number of kids each educator and education worker is responsible for. He's one of the lucky ones. But access to a human right — and education is a human right — should never be about luck.

And surely our kids deserve more than, at best, being merely shortchanged. ●

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Poverty and education in a Winnipeg suburb

Jim Silver and Kate Sjoberg

There is overwhelming evidence drawn from decades of research in countries all over the world that poverty is a crucial factor in producing poor educational outcomes. The higher the poverty, the lower the educational outcomes. If governments were serious about wanting to improve education in Manitoba, they would take meaningful steps to drive down poverty levels.

Although poverty is particularly concentrated in Winnipeg's inner city, large pockets of severe poverty exist in various suburban neighbourhoods as well; three elementary schools in south St. Vital provide a clear example. Poverty levels in the neighbourhoods surrounding these three schools in the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) are on par with those in the inner city.

Despite evidence that the three schools themselves are excellent, their outcomes are well below the average for the LRSD. This should not be a surprise; even before they start, the children's readiness for school is far behind the Divisional averages. Poverty — complex, multi-faceted poverty that includes various forms of oppression and causes multiple types of damage — is the problem.

To improve educational outcomes for children experiencing poverty we need a coherent and

long-term anti-poverty strategy led by all three levels of government that includes reparations to Indigenous citizens and measures to support the success of all families. That is not happening, and low-income children suffer as a result.

In the absence of an effective anti-poverty strategy driven by the three levels of government, the Louis Riel School Division is working with neighbourhood organizations and parents to implement an innovative community development (CD) strategy, what we have called a "whole community" strategy, aimed at strengthening families and building community. The theory is that stronger and healthier families and communities will produce improved school outcomes.

The approach taken by the School Division has been to meet with and listen to parents and others who live in the community to try to determine what they believe is needed to strengthen families and build community. This is a CD approach.

Building on what community members have said, much has been accomplished in the past 18 months since an initial report was delivered to the LRSD. These are some examples:

- The co-location at the previously almost-empty Rene Deleurme Centre (RDC) of the EDGE Skills Centre, offering academic upgrading and EAL programming to almost 400 adults; the Morrow Avenue Childcare Program,

which will soon have 100 childcare spaces and will use the highly effective Abecedarian approach; and the Neighbourhood Immigrant Settlement Program, which last year worked to meet the needs of 800 newcomers. These programs and their co-location at the RDC are strengthening families and the community.

- The establishment at Lavallee School of Winnipeg's first new Boys and Girls Club in 15 years. The community recommended this after-school program for children. Research shows that Boys and Girls Clubs improve children's likelihood of success at school.
- The implementation of new Indigenous programs aimed at cultural reclamation to strengthen families and build community. An example is the Red Road to Healing program, which responds to the trauma so closely associated with complex poverty.
- The creation of a parent-mentor program modeled on a highly successful program in Chicago, which brings a select number of parents into each of the three schools to work alongside teachers and to undergo life skills training. This program, now working on its third cohort, is proving to be highly successful.

These new initiatives have been added to what is already a strong array of programs offered by the LRSD and by community organizations in the area, all of which serve to support what community members consider the outstanding work done by teachers in the classrooms of the three schools.

The engagement of community members in prescribing and creating new supports and shifts in approaches is driving community renewal, cultural resurgence and vitality. It is building healthier families and communities. Children growing up in healthier families and communities are *far* more likely to succeed in school.

This study has made clear two important things:

First, poverty has a dramatic and adverse effect on children's education. Any serious effort to improve educational outcomes in Manitoba must address the issue of poverty. This is not being done at all satisfactorily by governments.

Second, local school boards can play a significant role in reducing the negative impacts that poverty has on educational outcomes. The LRSD is being innovative in using a community development approach and working in partnership with community organizations and parents to strengthen families and build healthier communities. This is not a quick fix approach. However, in time, healthier families and communities will create the context in which children will thrive in school. The three schools included in this study are excellent; the problem is the poverty. The School Division deserves credit for understanding this, and taking action. ●

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