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CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
MANITOBA OFFICE

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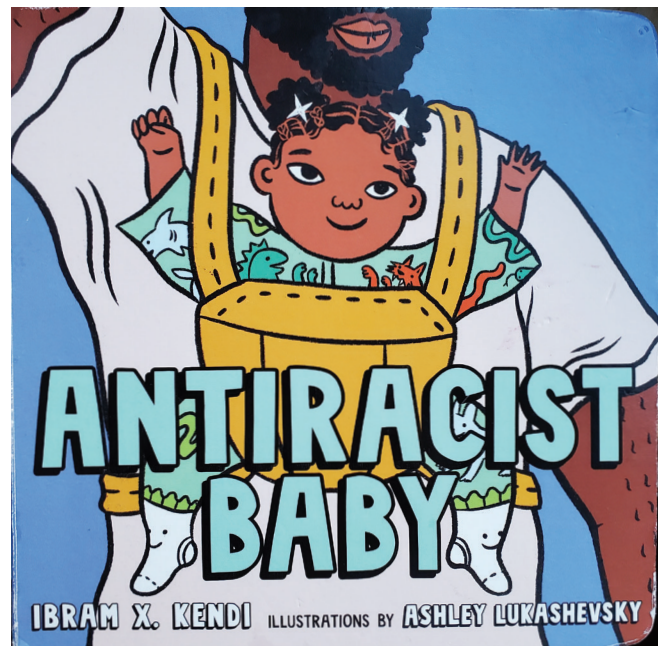
# Bill 64: The Public Education Modernization Act is Racist

*Elisabeth Brault*

ONE OF THE books I ordered after George Floyd was killed is called 'Anti-Racist Baby', by Ibram X. Kendi. It is a list of actions parents can take to teach their kids to be anti-racist. The third point in the book is 'Point at policies as the problem, not people'. So, here we go. Let's point at a proposed policy.

It's easy to get lost in all the problematic aspects of Bill 64, especially as a teacher. It becomes a 'can't see the forest for the trees' situation. We need to step back and look at the forest.

I'm very concerned about the Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE), and I'm going to tell you why you should be, too. This is the body the





Province is proposing that will represent the interests of the public (specifically parents) regarding Education. The Province of Manitoba Better Education Starts Today information states repeatedly that 'Parents have oversight of the (Education) system', and PACE is how they aim to embody that.

PACE is made up of volunteer parents. Each new education district in Manitoba gets to elect one parent to this board. The province's proposal and assurance in their literature is that PACE will report directly to the Minister of Education and the Provincial Education Authority (body appointed by the government). PACE will oversee curriculum development, what is taught and not taught, and what is considered 'sensitive content' and how that should be taught or not taught.

Ok, so they want input and insight from parents. Setting aside the issues of a non-professional oversight board made up of volunteers, let's look at some numbers. All of these stats are from either Statistics Canada or the Manitoba Government and are all easy to find online.

Each new district gets one representative on the PACE. Here's how that breaks down in terms of number of students each elected parent represents:

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## New Proposed School Districts Enrolment as of 2019

- Winnipeg 100,388
- Frontier, Kelsey, Flin Flon, Mystery Lake 12,280
- Beautiful Plains, Park West, Rolling River 5,865
- Mountain View, Swan Valley, Turtle River 5,195
- Fort La Bosse, Southwest Horizon, Turtle Mountain 4,070
- Brandon 9,004
- Portage La Prairie, Pine Creek 4,539
- Prairie Spirit, Prairie Rose 4,457
- Garden Valley, Western 6,411
- Evergreen, Lakeshore 2,489
- Interlake, Lord Selkirk 6,924
- Hanover 8,218
- Sunrise, Whiteshell 4,821
- Seine River 4,513
- Borderland, Red River Valley 4,514

Notice anything?

*Winnipeg has more students than all the other school divisions combined and they get ONE vote.*

Every other representative has an average of just under 6000 students and families in their charge.

Now, let me give you some more numbers. According to the 2016 census, Manitoba is home to 216,850 ‘visible minorities’ (this is the official term in Canada and I am not a fan of it; I can’t tell you how many times in my teaching career I’ve had to tell my students that all of them were the ‘minority’ and I, the lone white person in the room, was the ‘majority’). Of those, 193,055 live in Winnipeg. If you’re quick, you can do the math that *89% of Manitoba’s ‘visible minorities’ live in Winnipeg.*

According to the same census, 84,305 of Manitoba’s 223,310 Indigenous folks live in Winnipeg. *That works out to 38% of the Indigenous population.*

*With the two numbers combined, 63% of Manitoba’s Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) live in Winnipeg.*

Let that sink in.

Ibram X. Kendi is a leading anti-racist scholar from the US and in his work points to the importance of policy. He says that policy and legislation can be either racist, or anti-racist. There is no such thing as neutral.

Given the numbers above, it's crystal clear that, *in addition to grossly under-representing Winnipeg students in general, the proposed governance model for education in Manitoba is racist. It aims to silence urban BIPOC voices and amplify rural white ones.* It is so incredibly blatant, it's horrifying. If you've ever wondered how systemic racism works or what it looks like, Bill 64 is a textbook example. To be very crystal clear, on the other side of the coin from systemic racism is the encoded and subtle-but-not-subtle value of white supremacy.

I've talked to a few teachers, parents, administrators who try to comfort me in my outrage by saying 'the PACE won't have any real power anyway. It's a lame duck'.

Here's the thing: it doesn't matter.

The PACE doesn't need to have any power. A homogeneous and unrepresentative group of volunteer parents is a perfect cover for any decision or change the Provincial Education Authority wants to make: they can say "We're not going to teach human sexuality and consent in school any more. We're going back to abstinence education.' And when teachers and administrators protest the government can respond with 'That's what the parents want! Look at PACE!'

With each new government, the government appointees on the Provincial Education Authority will change. They will represent the interests of the currently elected government (and that is its own major issue, as has been pointed out by others). The 15 education districts and PACE, though, that's a much harder egg to unscramble. How does a new government, no matter what its party or ideological leaning is, make meaningful change that ensures BIPOC voices will be heard? Further combine rural districts and re-split Winnipeg ones? Costing all of us more taxpayer money?

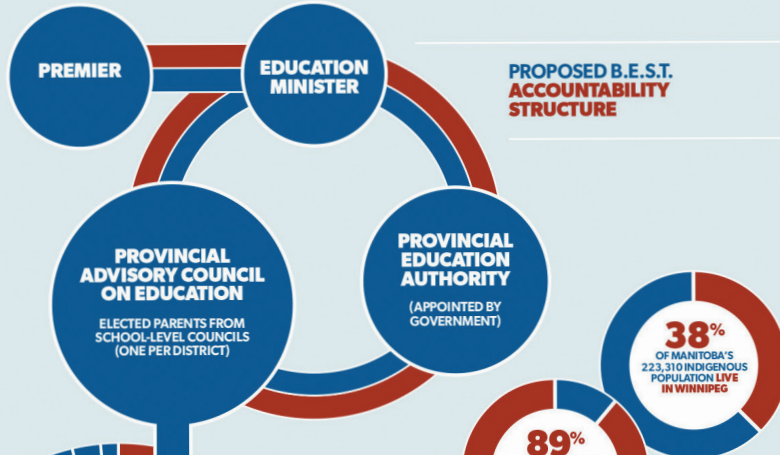
I'm not opposed to combining divisions — I think there is a lot of unnecessary duplication of roles with so many different divisions. I don't even think it's necessarily a bad idea for Winnipeg to be one division; more unites us than divides us as educators and students. I think the school system COULD use some updating and streamlining; it's been 100 years since the Public Schools Act was passed. Things are different now.

But make no mistake, 'Bill 64: The Public School Modernization Act' is about *keeping power in the hands of the powerful*. It is not about improving student achievement, or improving teacher effectiveness. *It is about silencing voices. It is about making it as difficult as possible for BIPOC parents and therefore students, to have their voices counted.*

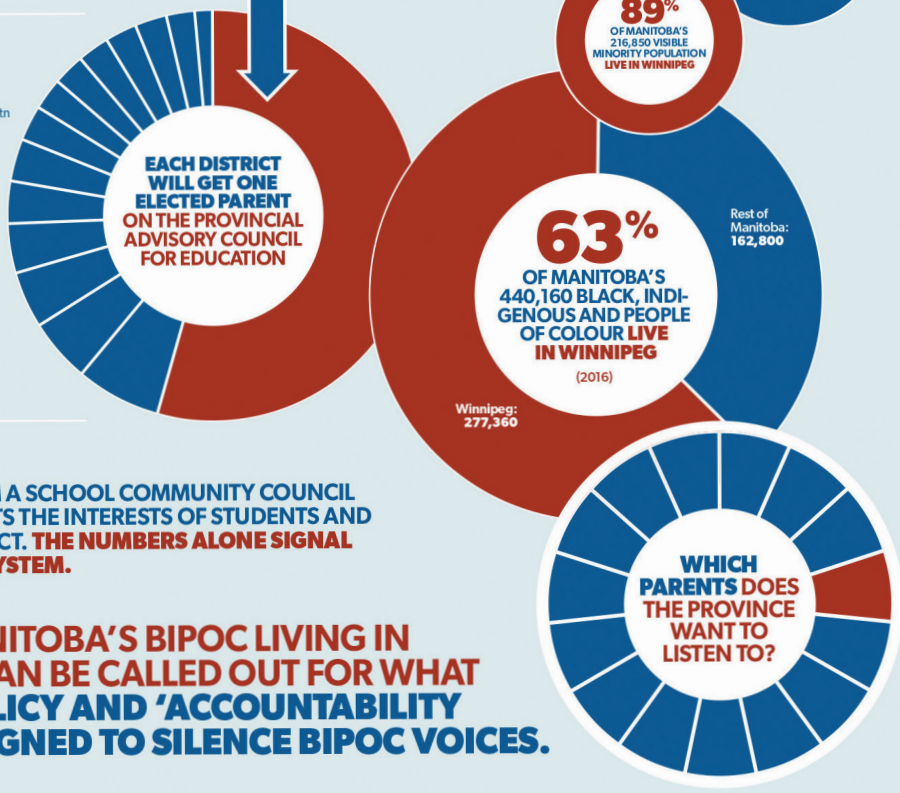
A few years ago, I had a student in Grade 9 English whose parents did not want him to learn about The Holocaust or Residential Schools. I said 'Residential Schools are non-negotiable'. They went to the principal. The Principal said 'Residential Schools are non-ne-

**“Parents have oversight of the system.”**

– BETTER EDUCATION STARTS TODAY (B.E.S.T.) STRATEGY REPORT



ENROLMENT (2019)	PROPOSED SCHOOL DISTRICTS
2,489	Evergreen/Lakeshore
4,070	Fort La Bosse/Southwest Horizon/Turtle Mtn
4,457	Prairie Spirit/Prairie Rose
4,513	Seine River
4,514	Borderland/Red River Valley
4,539	Portage La Prairie/Pine Creek
4,821	Sunrise/Whiteshell
5,195	Mountain View/Swan Valley/Turtle River
5,865	Beautiful Plains/Park West/Rolling River
6,411	Garden Valley/Western
6,924	Interlake/Lord Selkirk
8,218	Hanover
9,004	Brandon
12,280	Frontier/Kelsey/Flin Flon/Mystery Lake
<b>100,368</b>	<b>Winnipeg</b>



EACH PARENT ELECTED FROM A SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL IN THEIR DISTRICT REPRESENTS THE INTERESTS OF STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS IN THE DISTRICT. **THE NUMBERS ALONE SIGNAL A GROSS INEQUITY IN THE SYSTEM.**

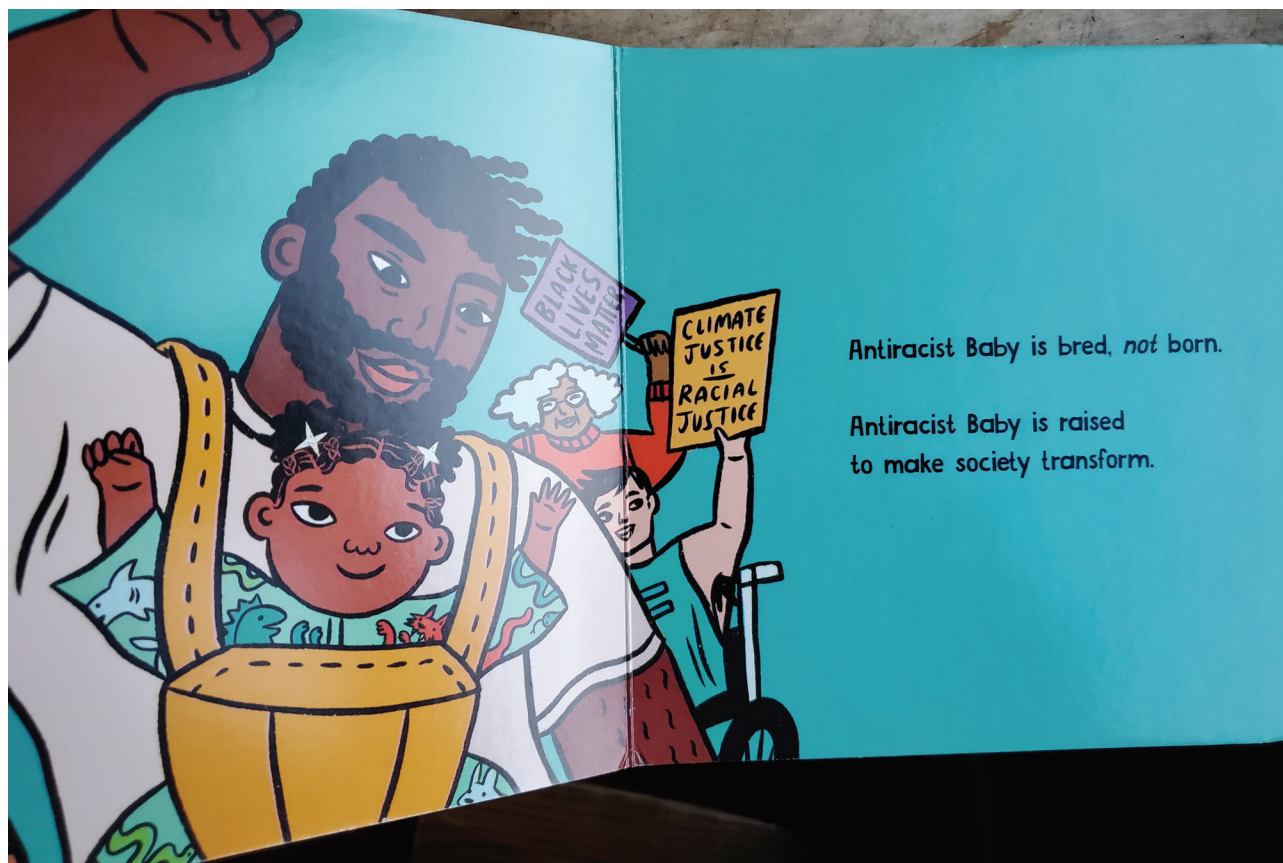
**WITH 63% OF MANITOBA'S BIPOC LIVING IN WINNIPEG, THIS CAN BE CALLED OUT FOR WHAT IT IS: A RACIST POLICY AND 'ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURE' DESIGNED TO SILENCE BIPOC VOICES.**

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gotiable'. They went to the superintendent. The superintendent said 'Residential Schools are non-negotiable'. The student learned about Residential Schools.

Would we get the same result in a public school if that parent, who was very motivated and sat on our school's parent council for the six years her children attended our school, went to the PACE with its huge under-representation of BIPOC parents?

I didn't find statistics on how many LGBTQ2S\* people live in Winnipeg vs. surrounding areas, but it's a pretty safe bet that per capita, Winnipeg has a higher concentration



Antiracist Baby is bred, *not* born.

Antiracist Baby is raised  
to make society transform.

of people who identify as LGBTQ2S\* than rural areas. It's another group this government appears eager to silence under the guise of 'sensitive content'.

Every single year I teach trans students. EVERY. SINGLE. YEAR. Are these kids, their very existence, are they 'sensitive content'? How will these students, and parents of these students, be represented on the PACE?

The 'Better Education Starts Today' literature repeats over and over that "parents want more say" and "parents will have oversight on the system". *When you take a closer look at WHICH parents they are lifting up and which they are pushing down, it is chilling. Put this bill in concert with Bill 57 "The Critical Infrastructure Protection Act" targeting peaceful Indigenous protesters, and we should all be terrified by the direction this government is taking our province.*

*This proposed change is a foundational one that will be expensive and messy to correct later. It will determine the direction of our Education system for years and governments to come. It enshrines racist policy into racist law. Bill 64 will give control of public schools to white parents and keep BIPOC and LGBTQ2S\* parents out of it.*

*PUBLIC SCHOOLS are supposed to teach the PUBLIC and should represent the families that use them.* Public Education has always been a vehicle for creating the kind of citizens a country or province wants. Does the Manitoba government fear an informed, anti-racist, anti-homophobia electorate, education system and citizens?

To quote 'Anti-Racist Baby', 'Anti-Racist baby is bred, not born. Anti-racist baby is raised to make society transform.'

We just completed Winnipeg's first Anti-Racism week. *If you, like me, are trying to learn how to be anti-racist, and if you, like me, are trying to raise anti-racist babies, take action. Share this. Share the infographic.* Send them both to your MLA, your current School Trustee, your kid's teacher, your kid's principal, your friends, neighbours and on social media. **SHARE IT EVERYWHERE.** Let's take a stand against racist policy, white supremacy, and a government that doesn't think we'll notice.

Let's hold the Manitoba government accountable for their blatant biases and racist policies.

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Elisabeth Braul has taught at various Winnipeg inner-city schools over her 12 year career and is learning how to be anti-racist.



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