



President's Message

As with many of you, I subscribe to various news feeds. Some of the interests I flag are politics and education, so it was not surprising when a video featuring each of these topics arrived on my phone. The first video featured Trump Spokesperson Kellyanne “Alternative Fact” Conway reminding Americans that President Obama had placed a six month ban on Iraqi immigration following the Bowling Green Massacre. In fact, Obama introduced tighter background checks on Iraqi travellers after two Iraqi refugees were arrested in Bowling Green, Kentucky for sending resources to Al-Qaeda. (source: MSNBC, USA Today, and essentially all of Twitter). The other video centered around a teacher who has a different handshake for each student in his grade 5 class. Each morning the students line up outside his door and receive each their own special, unique, and quite involved, handshake before entering the classroom ([LINK](#)). When asked why he does this, he responded by saying that it brings joy to the classroom. From the video, it is clear that it brings joy to him as well. It is our job to work through the facts, ideas, and misconceptions of the world with our students. This is sometimes frustrating, often rewarding and, I hope, on occasion, joyful. A few months ago, I wrote about teacher engagement. In that article I posited that part of wellbeing is doing activities in class that not only engage our students, but also are interesting, engaging, and might I now add joyful, to us. Remember to be well.

Quiz Night

Thank you to all who attended Quiz Night; you made it a great success. Apologies again for the “Game of Thrones” questions, but it was either that or “Noteworthy Star Clusters of the Andromeda Galaxy.” I would like to thank especially the members of the ITA Executive who helped stage the event. Thank you also to the man who made it his business to know what other people don’t know, our retiring Quiz Master, Don Horbas.

I hope to see you all again next year.

Pink Shirt Day

Pink Shirt Day is on Wednesday, February 22; the Day of Pink is on April 12; two organizations, one idea. A poster sold by Day of Pink states: “Wearing a pink shirt doesn’t stop bullying; you do.” And that is, after all, the essence. Whether you participate in one, both, or neither of these events, reporting and ending harassment and bullying is a duty we all must share. The school division has put in place policies to deal with harassment and bullying whether it occurs between children, between adults, or between children and adults. Children have the right to learn in a safe environment and adults have the right to work in one. The first step in taking action is reporting. When it comes to student to student interaction, teachers have numerous resources on which to call. When bullying behaviour, perceived or actual, comes from an adult, the issue becomes significantly more sensitive. Teachers who are aware of events or behaviours which might fall into this category are encouraged to seek the guidance of an MTS staff officer to determine the best course of action. Such contact is completely confidential and is the first step in creating safety.

Budget News

The Provincial Government recently announced a roughly 1% increase in education funding across the province. This increase is not, however, spread universally nor evenly. Some divisions, such as Seven Oaks, are experiencing a large enrolment increase, and will see their funding go up. Other divisions with flat or decreasing enrolment will see provincial funding go down. The Interlake School Division is in this latter category. The division is guaranteed to receive 98% of the funding the province provided last year. Even so, this is more money than our division would receive if the province followed its funding formula known as the Funding of Schools Program (FSP). The government subsidizes the FSP with what is called a Formula Guarantee. Over the past five years, the ISD was given a 100% Formula Guarantee; in other words, the province promised to supply 100% of the funds that it had provided the previous year, even if the FSP calculations came out less; for next year, we are guaranteed only 98% of 2016/2017 funding. The fact that the province needs to subsidize its own funding formula suggests that the FSP is broken. It is primarily in equalization payments that the FSP falls short. School boards raise funds based on residential and business property assessments. Some divisions have more assessment per pupil than others. According to FRAME data from the 2014/2015 school year, Fort la Bosse had an assessment base of \$633,000 per student from which to draw, while Kelsey had only \$138,000. The ISD finds itself typically in the middle with an assessment base of \$383,000 per pupil (source: 2014/2015 FRAME audited statements). The government has tried to mitigate these discrepancies with an equalization formula. The equalization formula adds additional money to divisions with lower assessment bases in an attempt to level the taxation playing field. Unfortunately, the equalization formula only provides 66% equalization rather than the full equalization that would seem logical. By my calculations, had the province been supplying full equalization over the past five years, provincial funding to the ISD would have climbed steadily, there would have been no need for the formula guarantee, and local citizens would be paying an ever-decreasing portion of the ISD expenses.

When we include inflation, the Interlake School Division has been taking funding cuts from the provincial government for many years. The most recent cut in funding is sharper than the previous ones, but is part of a long-term trend. In my observation, it seems this new government is set on eliminating the Formula Guarantee and letting funding flow from the FSP. This would be fine if the FSP contained a full equalization provision. The reality, however, is not so.

The Board of Trustees will be navigating this reality as they design their budget for 2017/2018. The 2017/2018 ISD Proposed Budget will be presented at an open house from 5:30 to 7:30PM on Thursday, February 23rd, at École Stonewall Centennial School.

MTS Workload Survey

The MTS Workload Survey mentioned in the January newsletter is finally upon us. For all the reasons mentioned previously, please fill out the survey so that we and MTS can have solid data as we move into a new era of provincial funding.

