

## President's Message: Facts and Ideologies

In recent days, our government has made several moves affecting teachers, teaching, and education in general. The first was to abandon the 20K3 initiative exactly one year before it was to take effect citing the fact that this program, which had not yet started, was ineffective at achieving its goals. The next was to introduce legislation restricting the bargaining rights of all public-sector workers, including teachers. A looming financial crisis is cited as the reason for this legislation. More recently, the Pallister government issued a request for proposals (RFP) to build four schools using a public-private partnership model (P3). Our premier is quoted as saying "The P3 model has proved to be very successful across Canada and in Saskatchewan in particular for such project..." There is so much to say about these policy decisions, but let's just take on that first one for now. I will save comment on the others for future newsletters.

In these days of Google searches and research via Twitter it is easy to find a study showing that class size doesn't matter. In many of these, student outcomes are measured with state sponsored standardized tests which do little to evaluate learning and comprehension. To be fair, it is just as easy to cherry pick a study which says class size does matter. Faced with this dilemma, the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) recently conducted a study of studies\*. NEPC examined numerous research projects which had scrutinized class size from many different angles. They found that not only did smaller class sizes increase student outcomes, this effect was especially marked in the lower grades and among disadvantaged children. Their conclusion: **"while lowering class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost-effective policy overall particularly for disadvantaged students. Money saved today by increasing class sizes will likely result in additional, substantial, social, and educational costs in the future."** They also concluded that the optimal class size was between 16 and 18 students.

When policy decisions are made contrary to the facts, then one must conclude that these decisions are ideological and every ideology runs with its own narrative. If politicians repeat a narrative often enough, citizens slowly come to regard it as fact. When faced with decisions based on ideology rather than facts I assert that we should do what teachers do best: educate. MTS leadership will continue to work with the Minister of Education to bring him up to speed on the many nuanced facets of public education. We, on the other hand, meet voters every day. Now, more than ever, it is important to remain informed and up to date on the issues. We can counter the current narrative with facts and data. We can discuss a new narrative, backed by research, to say that a better educated population, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is better for Manitoba both socially and economically. The current narrative talks about education as a cost, we need to replace this with the idea that it is an investment.

\* Mathis, William J. (2016). The Effectiveness of Class Size Reduction.  
National Education Policy Center:  
<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-9%20Class%20Size.pdf>

IDEOLOGY



## The Other President's Message

On May 8, 2017, on behalf of all Manitoba teachers, MTS President, Norm Gould, made a presentation to the Legislative Committee on Bill 28. Here is some of what he had to say. The full text of Norm's comments can be found on the ITA website. [www.interlaketeachers.ca](http://www.interlaketeachers.ca)

My name is Norm Gould and I am the President of The Manitoba Teachers' Society, representing over 15,000 public school teachers from across this province...I am here tonight on behalf of teachers to denounce the imposition of Bill 28: The Public Sector Sustainability Act. Bill 28 is a betrayal of promises and commitments made by this government, and in particular, by a Premier who claims to have respect for collective bargaining as a former teacher and 'union guy'... Every day, Manitoba's teachers work with our province's greatest resources, our students. Every student is unique; some speak different languages at home, some are adjusting to a new life in Canada and some have special needs that require them to learn differently. Today's classrooms are more complex than ever and teachers are there on the front lines doing their best to make sure every student develops the tools they need to learn and grow. What is proposed in Bill 28 is disrespectful to teachers and all Manitobans. Time and time again we have been told that "all hands on deck" are required to deal with the fiscal challenge, but in reality only one sector in Manitoba is being forced to pay the price – the public sector. Five months ago, I was honoured to be invited to join other public sector unions at a meeting with the Minister of Finance and his officials to strike what was called the Fiscal Working Group. We were optimistic that we would be able to work with government to develop options to improve the government's fiscal situation, but it quickly became clear that the government had no intention of listening to or working with Labour as they refused to provide pertinent information, answer our questions or respond to our recommendations... As is the case with other public sector unions, The Manitoba Teachers' Society remains committed to working with the Manitoba government to address these fiscal challenges in an authentic, meaningful way. But, sadly, if the last 5 months are any indication, commitments to work with labour on the part of this government are nothing more than lip-service and false platitudes. I have sat at those meetings with the government officials. We tried to provide alternative options and strategies for this government to help them return to balance within eight years. Labour committed to work collaboratively with the government and to work in good faith at the bargaining table to seek solutions with our employers. Unfortunately, our proposals and openness to work with the government were repeatedly dismissed. So now here we are collectively urging you to defeat this bill so that we can try to find a solution that is based on collaboration and good faith and not on division and confrontation.

### MTS Annual Golf Tournament

- Saturday, June 10, 2017 1:00 pm Shotgun Start
- Presented by the Western Teachers' Association at Minnewasta Golf Club, Morden, MB
- \$110/golfer – includes 18 holes, ½ power cart, and dinner
- Individual golfers and foursomes welcome
- Lots of great prizes available!
- Entry deadline is May 27, 2017
- First 36 paid teams guaranteed spots
- Entry information and form available from your local president.