

Speaking Notes

for

Nancy Allan  
Minister of Education

On the occasion of the

Manitoba Chambers of Commerce Breakfast

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7:30 AM

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**Introduction:**

- Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.
- As Manitoba's Minister of Education, I am pleased to be here with you today. The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the people in this room play an important role in Manitoba's continued success.
- Our government has long recognized that our business community and our education system are key pillars in Manitoba's prosperity. We cannot have a thriving economy if we don't do a good job in educating our children.
- For 11 years, our government has put a strong education system at the very centre of our economic strategy, and we believe it is paying off.
- In the last 12 months, over 16,000 new jobs have been created in Manitoba, contributing to the country's lowest unemployment rate (5.2 %).
- A recent Maclean's Magazine article titled "The Manitoba miracle" declares that, "Manitoba has emerged as the shining star of Canada's recession and subsequent recovery". (Maclean's, Dec. 6, 2010)
- Maclean's further details the strengths of our economy: a steady construction sector, "massive housing developments and stunningly low unemployment", an "eclectic mix of businesses and services at

its core” and an “aggressive” immigration strategy through the Provincial Nominee Program. (Maclean’s, Dec. 6, 2010)

- The last 11 years have seen significant progress in making our education system more responsive to the needs of students, teachers, parents, and our province as a whole. The demands of our modern economy require that we continue to develop our education system to meet the challenges of tomorrow.
- Today, I want to share with you our government’s vision and priorities for education in Manitoba.

### **Education Funding:**

- As we speak, officials in my department are busy working on our schools funding announcement for the next school year. We want to promote excellence and academic success, as well as fairness for taxpayers.
- Since 1999 our government has increased operating funding for schools by 42%.
- Our plan puts schools and students first while keeping our education system affordable for taxpayers.
- We have invested more than \$643 million in schools capital since 1999, an increase of \$302.5 million from the 90’s. In that time, we have built 17 new schools, 12 replacement schools and completed over 74 additions and renovations.

- We have met our commitment to increase school funding above the rate of economic growth every year since 1999.
- Last year's funding increase to public schools, despite difficult economic times, demonstrated our government's commitment to education,
- This is a stark contrast to the 90's when school funding was either frozen or reduced for 5 consecutive years.
- It is important that our education system remain affordable. Therefore, we have asked for cooperation and restraint from school divisions to ensure that expenditures are managed carefully and taxes remain low relative to other jurisdictions. I would like to thank school divisions for working with my department officials to keep education property taxes down.
- We are providing funding to encourage divisions to keep taxes down. The number of divisions that have accepted the Province's support to keep education property taxes down has grown each year – from 17 in 2008, to 20 in 2009, to 23 this past year.
- The province has a strong record in terms of property tax relief:
  - According to Statistics Canada, we are the only province in Canada to see property taxes remain stable over the past decade.
  - Our education property tax credit gives Manitobans \$265 million in annual savings.

- In 2006, we completely eliminated the residential Education Support Levy, saving homeowners \$100 million a year.
- We increased the farmland tax rebate to 75% in 2009. This saves farmers \$32 million a year.

### **Our Priorities for Education:**

- We have lots of challenges facing us in education, but these challenges also provide us with opportunities to work together and build a better future for all Manitobans.
- We know that our skilled workforce is valued by Manitoba employers. We are working hard to ensure that the workforce of tomorrow is more skilled, more focused, and more competitive to ensure that Manitoba remains one of the best places to do business in the world.
- Manitoba's graduation rate has risen substantially in recent years from 71.1% in 2002 to 80.9% in 2009. We know how important it is to keep young people in school, and to focus our resources where they are the most needed. Yet we also know more needs to be done.
- That is why in our last funding announcement we provided \$600,000 for the new Student Success Initiative pilot project in Winnipeg, Lakeshore and Kelsey school divisions. This program is targeted at supporting students to help them stay in school and graduate by providing them with teacher mentors. I'd like to thank these divisions

for partnering with us by providing some of their own money and resources to enhance the program even further.

- At the middle-years level, the focus is student engagement, academic success and transition into high school. At the high-school level, the focus is completing credits, graduation and transitioning into employment or post-secondary education.
- We have also committed \$3 million for innovative community-based education programs for at-risk youth – particularly in literacy - through Bright Futures, including \$425,000 for Pathways to Education in partnership with the Royal Bank of Canada. Our government has tripled funding for Bright Futures since it was introduced in 2008.
- The Senior Years Apprenticeship Option lets students start an apprenticeship while still in high school. It links Senior Years school instruction with on-the-job apprenticeship training.
- In the classroom, we are targeting our supports to where they are most needed, particularly Aboriginal and at-risk students.
- Support for special needs students and their families has been a particular concern of our government. In 2005, we introduced the Appropriate Educational Programming Act to ensure that all children receive an education that is appropriate to their needs and that whenever possible education occurs in a neighbourhood school with their peers.

- Despite budgetary constraints, we continue to increase funding specifically targeted to support the education of special needs students. Since our government took office in 1999, funding for special needs students has increased by 50%.
- Recognizing the increased role of immigration in our education system, and the pressure it is putting on classrooms, funding for English as an Additional Language has increased by 284% since 1999, from \$2.5 million in 1999 to over \$7 million in 2010.
- We are encouraging young people to make healthy choices and be physically active because we know physically fit students will be more successful at school.
- Our government is having great success with our Technical Vocational Initiative (TVI). The program was developed to revitalize technical vocational education in our province. The main goal of the initiative is to make a technical vocational education relevant and attractive and thereby address labour market needs and help develop a skilled workforce through appropriate education and training programs.
- We are helping students build the skills they will need to enter the workforce and start their careers here in Manitoba. Improving training and education opportunities are the key to keeping Manitoba on the right track.

- Our \$12.7 million investment in the Technical Vocational Initiative since 2004 connects students with cutting-edge technology, exciting partnerships and the potential for future successes in the trades and high-tech sector.

### **Aboriginal Education:**

- The existing contributions – and future potential of – Aboriginal people to our workforce is fundamental. It's imperative that we provide quality educational and training programs to Aboriginal students.
- My department established an Aboriginal Education Directorate (AED) to ensure that Manitoba's education and training systems are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples.
- We are working with our education partners, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, on a number of actions to improve Aboriginal education province-wide.
- For example, our government is providing a \$7 million Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant to assist school divisions with programs that target academic success for Aboriginal students.
- We also recognize that to improve Aboriginal education we need to engage Aboriginal parents and communities. We are providing funding through the Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents Fund to encourage and support initiatives that enhance

Aboriginal parents' engagement in the public education system. The program supports 39 projects province-wide that focus on Aboriginal language and culture to build partnerships with Aboriginal parents and communities.

- With our partners, we are undertaking a number of initiatives. For example, with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre we implemented a School Improvement Project in four First Nations communities to improve English Language Arts and Math learning outcomes.
- It is important that our educators have an awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture. To this end we now require that student teachers complete a mandatory course on Aboriginal history and perspectives as part of their teacher training.
- My department is also developing learning resources about the residential school experience and the treaties.

### **Early Childhood Education:**

- Early childhood education has been a priority of our government since we were first elected in 1999. Our vision is to build a seamless education system, from early learning to post-secondary.
- In this regard, we have introduced a number of initiatives to support families, parent-child coalitions, school divisions, and community

organizations in their efforts to ensure that our children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

- Our government, through Healthy Child Manitoba, provided over \$3.3 million in funding for Parent-Child Centred Coalitions in last year's budget. There are 25 funded coalitions province-wide, and 12 family resource centres, focusing on positive parenting, learning and literacy, nutrition and physical health, and school readiness.
- Through Healthy Child Manitoba, we have also expanded Families First home visits to reach more families - from 450 families in 2000 to 1,444 in 2009. These visits support parents in building a strong relationship with their child, while sharing information and suggesting activities to help them grow up healthy and happy.
- In addition, we introduced the Prenatal Benefit, which provides financial assistance for healthy nutrition during pregnancy to about 4,000 low-income women per year, 29% of whom are First Nation.
- Since the program launch in 2001, over 42,000 women have received benefits totaling over \$15 million.

***Preparing Students for Success Act:***

- In the last session, I had the distinct honour of introducing the "*Preparing Students for Success Act*".

- With this Act, our goal is to work with students, parents, school boards and educators to develop a new way of looking at the importance of high school completion. Our aim is to give young people every possible opportunity to succeed.
- We will now require young Manitobans to remain in school, an adult learning centre or a recognized workforce training program until they have reached 18 years of age, or until they have graduated from high school.
- Currently the law requires young people in Manitoba to be in school until they are 16 years-old.
- This new legislation will require that students remain in school or in a recognized training program until they are 18 years of age, unless they graduate sooner.
- The legislation would require that school boards continue to establish and enhance policies and procedures to support students remaining engaged in school or in activities and programs which provide educational benefits. Policies and procedures will be established to assist pupils with difficulties attending school, and regulations under the Act will outline the format and timing of absence reporting from schools to parents and school attendance officers.
- Our goal with this legislation is to ensure that there is an environment where students who are having difficulty are more

engaged with what they are doing in their school or training program. In the long run this should make all classrooms more productive.

- Nothing is more important to our future prosperity than keeping young people engaged in school and in their education.
- Parents, educators, and communities all have a part to play in building a stronger education system.
- My duty as a minister, the task of schools and school divisions, and our responsibility as a society is to equip students with the best skills and qualifications possible. We don't want doors to be closed to them.
- We want all students to have the opportunity to graduate from high school or a good workforce training program.
- We need to recognize that the modern world requires more education and skills. The level of education that was sufficient decades ago no longer meets the requirements of our modern economy.
- The qualifications for entering most occupations have become more demanding. Most apprenticeship programs at the colleges now require grade 12 for admission.

- A young person with less than a high school education is very limited in the careers and occupations he or she can pursue.
- A high school diploma or the equivalent is the key to post-secondary education and further training.
- And all the statistics clearly show a strong link between dropping out and unemployment, poverty and crime.
- Over the past decade we have made a lot of progress, with improved high school graduation rates, a one-third increase in post-secondary enrolment, expanded skills training opportunities in our colleges, and a doubling of the number of registered apprentices.
- This is a great improvement, but there is more work to do – and I believe that the historic change set out in this Act is an essential part of the foundation for our shared goals of increasing graduation rates and equipping students to participate in the modern economy.
- In a Winnipeg Free Press article of November 24, 2010, Lloyd Axworthy, President of the University of Winnipeg, calls this new legislation “a defining moment in resetting the concept of learning and education in Manitoba.”
- We need to give our young people every opportunity to succeed. We need to ensure that students are adequately prepared for work or further education.

- And we also need to realize that the educational system itself must also face modern realities and be flexible and creative in its approaches to improving school completion and graduation rates.
- That is why we are placing more of an emphasis on a mix of alternatives, or pathways, to graduation and post-secondary education or the world of work, rather than simply trying to force young people to stay in situations that aren't working.
- Now, we are under no illusions that these goals can be accomplished quickly or easily.
- We anticipate that this is a multi-year initiative because we are trying to effect a culture change - a change in the expectations we have both of students and of ourselves.
- And I know that some may object – saying that keeping kids in school when they don't want to be there will just accomplish nothing and won't be fair to the other kids in the class.
- We want to be fair to all students and their families. The expectations for appropriate classroom behaviour have not changed. Teachers and principals will still have the authority to maintain proper discipline and academic expectations in the classroom and the school.
- And we are not saying that 16 and 17 year-olds must stay in a school or a program that is simply not working for them – or others.

- Many students will want go to education and training programs that are more appropriate, rather than simply being kept in a traditional classroom.
- Also, this is not about being punitive. Fines are there to encourage parents and students to comply with the legislation.
- But I fully recognize that fines alone won't do the job. I believe the challenge before us is to engage students better so that they want to show up to class.
- And we already do have many good alternative approaches for students right now, in many school divisions, in adult learning centres, in the high school apprenticeship program.
- For example: Neelin High School – Off Campus is an initiative of The Brandon School Division started in 2007. It is an alternative school setting for students who do not function well within the traditional high school setting and who are at risk of quitting their education. 230 students are currently registered in the program, including 25-30% of whom are Aboriginal students. This program is a tremendous success and just one example of the good work being done by education leaders across the Province.
- In addition, the legislation will require government to include child care facilities in any new schools that are being constructed.

- This supports the government's commitment under our Family Choices plan to invest in converting surplus school space into child-care centres.
- Having child care centres in schools helps our young people get an early start on their education, while making it easier for parents to balance family needs.
- We are also taking steps to maintain the academic integrity of our school system and make sure that our students learn good work habits and the lessons of accountability and responsibility.
- In November, I introduced changes to the Province's policy on student assessment. The new policy recognizes that there are consequences for inappropriate behaviour such as handing in assignments after the deadline without a good reason.
- We also updated the policy that decisions around the promotion or retention of a student are made at the local level, by professionals in cooperation with parents and that students have access to the supports they need whether they pass or fail. This policy gives teachers and principals, the people who know students best, the authority they need to decide what is in the best interests of their individual students in terms of promotion and retention.
- I anticipate that these changes will reassure parents and communities that schools are responsive and that high academic

standards are being maintained and enhanced in the education system.

- In response to the concerns of parents, we are moving to make certain aspects of the school system more parent-friendly. The success of our students depends upon the involvement of parents, families, and the community as a whole.
- We have been working with our education partners to develop a parent-friendly report card written in plain language for use in all public schools, so that parents get the information they need to be full partners in their children's education.
- An Oversight Committee, comprised of representatives from each of the key educational partners - Manitoba Teachers Society, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba School Boards Association, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, Manitoba School Board Officials - has been established to guide the work of departmental staff in the development of the report cards.
- We intend to pilot the report card in schools during the 2011/12 school year and to implement the new report card province-wide the following year.
- In cooperation with school divisions, we are in the process of implementing common in-service days within school divisions to help families co-ordinate work and care schedules. We have made

significant progress with this initiative thanks to our education partners who have been very supportive in making this possible.

**Conclusion:**

- In closing, I wish to commend the work of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce and the dedication your members continue to show to the well-being of our communities.
- As members of this association, your example can teach others about public service and commitment to the community.
- The success of our students – and the education system as a whole – affects us all.
- Education is the great equalizer in our society.
- Education has led many individuals out of challenging circumstances toward a more accomplished future.
- I look forward to working with each and every one of you because the result will be a stronger, more prosperous Manitoba for all of us.
- I wish each of you continued success.
- Thank you.