

2023

MANITOBA ELECTION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT





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Introduction

Manitobans Will Go to the Polls by October 3, 2023

Manitoba's provincial election dates are regulated by legislation which sets fixed election dates so that elections occur on a more regular timeline (usually every four years).

However, this does not mean that the election will always occur on that specific date.

The lieutenant governor has the constitutional power to call an election, on the advice of the premier, at any point before the fixed date.

The fixed date legislation only gives the date by which the election must happen, which is not necessarily the same as the date of the election.

Based on this, the next Manitoba provincial election will occur on or before Oct. 3, 2023.

Join the Conversation

There are many conversations going on around the province about the upcoming provincial election. Will it be a spring election? Will the government drop the writ after delivering the budget? Why are so many incumbent MLAs not running in this election?

People are talking about candidates and the kinds of policies and promises they hope to see in the parties' platforms. This is an opportunity to connect with colleagues, neighbours and friends and work together on shared priorities, to deliver collective community impact in an election period.

Educators are on the frontlines of education and are in a unique role when it comes to speaking about issues in the public school system. Manitobans value this knowledge and insight and regard educators as the most trusted spokespersons on public education. According to the 2023 MTS public poll, 75 per cent of Manitobans consider teachers to be reliable sources of information.

Ramp Up Your Political Involvement

Manitoba educators have a long history of lobbying all levels of elected officials through activities like writing letters and participating in rallies – typical and obvious forms of activism.

However, all educators engage in quiet activism every day through the measures they take to compensate for the lack of funding and resources in their schools – less obvious to the public, but crucial to the delivery of public education.

For educators, political involvement comes down to shared values and ideas about how the public education system should work to ensure successful outcomes for all students.

Put simply, political involvement is a way to influence legislation and government policies. Political involvement is issue based.

Fifty per cent (50%) of Manitobans say that the provincial government is on the wrong track when it comes to providing quality K-12 public education. So, who can put government on the right track? Educators!

What Does it Mean to be Non-Partisan?

Partisan political activity is the direct or indirect promotion of a specific party or candidate, or the direct or indirect opposition to a political party or candidate.

As a private citizen, there is no requirement to be non-partisan. Individuals can openly campaign for and support any political party. However, when members engage in advocacy work on behalf of MTS, the actions must be political rather than partisan, as the Society is a non-partisan organization.

Here are a few examples of political and partisan activities.

POLITICAL ACTION	PARTISAN ACTION
Do not endorse candidates in partisan races.	Expressly advocate for or endorse a partisan candidate.
Work on issues guided by MTS values, mission and position statements.	Campaign against a specific party or candidate.
Engage with candidates and elected officials from all major parties equally, making sure questions are phrased in a neutral manner.	Encourage voter registration for a particular party.
Encourage voter participation for everyone, regardless of their political persuasion.	Fundraise for specific candidates or coordinate any election activity with a campaign or political party.
Share stories through media and social media on specific issues. Make sure that these articles are from credible sources and that the information is accurate.	Develop and/or distribute promotional material such as campaign speeches, slogans and pamphlets for a candidate or a political party.

Support Voter Engagement

Did you know, that only 55 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the last provincial election (2019)? That's down from the 2016 Manitoba general election, when 57.4 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots.

Low voter turnout is a serious issue during elections and lack of representation, especially by marginalized groups, means a large portion of the population goes unheard and unrepresented.

For Locals, this is a great way to get involved in the political process by sharing information about issues and priorities in the public education system and encouraging voter turnout, while maintaining a non-partisan role.

A study by Nonprofit VOTE on non-partisan voter turnout groups found that groups who provided information around voting including voter guides were more effective at getting people out to vote.

Some of the common questions around voting that you can help answer include:

- Where do I vote?
- When do I vote?
- When and where do I vote if I can't make it on election day?
- What identification do I need?
- Can I still vote if I'm not registered to vote?

Especially with young people ages 18 to 24, the confusion around how to cast their ballot acts as a major deterrent to voting. Statistics Canada puts them as the group that's least likely to vote in a provincial election.

If you can cut out that confusion, there is a higher chance people are going to vote.

Elections Manitoba is a great source for up-to-date information on FAQ voting related questions.

Encourage Voter Participation

Make it Personal

Voters and like-minded supporters respond best to other people, whether in their community, workplace, or friends and neighbours. Getting groups of like-minded people involved can help you spread the word and boost your get out the vote campaign. Make sure you explain why this election is important, tying it back to the issues your Local, members and constituents care about.

Designate a Day

Either for a big early voting push or for people to register — or both — make it an event for your Local where people engage in the political process together and feel part of your community. This is a great opportunity for sharing information about public education concerns and priorities.

Remind People About Important Dates and Events

Take a proactive approach to helping members and voters stay on top of all the election information. You can remind your members about advance voting dates and locations, share Local candidate information, and upcoming debates and town hall meetings.

Voter Education

Priority Issues

Voter education is a vital step in ensuring that voters are given the information necessary to make an informed choice.

The Society's submission to the **Manitoba's Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education** and its two pre-budget reports **Beyond the Status Quo: Funding the Schools Manitoba Students Need** and **Education Funding Submission 2023/24** outline the priorities of the province's 16,600 public school teachers and includes actionable recommendations for meaningful improvements to the public education system.

The recommendations focus on:

- Funding successful student outcomes (stable, effective and equitable funding)
- Removing socio-economic barriers to education
- Investing in classrooms (class size and composition)
- Supporting successful inclusion and overall mental health and wellbeing
- Dedicating funds for teacher PLD, recruitment and retention
- Advancing reconciliation in support of TRC recommendations

These recommendations were drafted based on data collected from MTS member polls, MTS public polls, committee discussions, feedback from members and similar sources.

They are representative of MTS members' priorities. In fact, data from MTS polls have a margin of error of +/- 3 per cent and are considered accurate 19 times out of 20.

The MTS reports, referenced above, provide a good foundation for highlighting the main issues that affect public education on a provincial level, as identified by educators.

Using these documents as guides, teacher Locals can “localize” the issues that are presented, giving school trustee candidates and voters a glimpse of the classroom realities in their school division.

See Appendix G for key messages (page 19).

Tell Them What You Want

Frame Your Ask

There will always be competing priorities during election periods. Is it important to be armed with the facts and be clear in the action you are proposing, so when a candidate comes knocking at your door you are prepared to tell them what they can do to earn your vote.

For more than five years, The Manitoba Teachers’ Society has been calling on the government to ensure that public education funding is stable, effective and equitable.

What do we mean by stable, effective, and equitable funding?

Stable: an investment that teachers and students can count on. Every year, election or not.

Effective: resources that support students coming to class with increasingly complex needs.

Equitable: funding that delivers a quality education to all students, no matter where in Manitoba they live, or what their personal circumstances.

That’s the ask – a commitment to stable, effective and equitable funding for public education.

As an educator, on the frontlines of public education, use your experiences and knowledge to personalize the “ask” by speaking about how a properly funded education system will benefit students.

What are some of the specific things that could be implemented in your classroom to improve student outcomes, if funding were not an issue?

Here are some tips to use when framing your ask.

- What’s the issue that you would like to see addressed?
- Why should candidates and parties care? What’s in it for them?
- What solution are you proposing to help improve student outcomes?
- Be specific.

See Appendix G for key messages (page 19).

What Can I Do?

Choosing the Right Tactic

There are many ways educators can engage in the political process during an election campaign. These engagement tactics range from simply raising awareness and sharing information to organizing candidate debates and events to encourage voting.

Here are some questions to get the discussion started and help you determine which tactics will work best for your Local.

How Well Informed is the Public on This Issue?

If the issue is well covered in the media, it may be easier to get candidates to participate in a townhall.

How Well Informed are Candidates on This Issue?

If candidates are clear on their positions, there may be more of a willingness to participate in a townhall. On the other hand, a candidate with little knowledge of the public education system might be more comfortable responding to a questionnaire because it will give them more time and they will be under less scrutiny.

How Much Capacity Does my Local Have?

If your Local has limited staff and volunteer time and resources, organizing a large event like a townhall is just too much. However, using social media to share messaging or keeping members updated through email takes less time and is cost-effective.

Who Are My Allies?

You don't have to do it by yourself. Think about like-minded organizations who might be interested in hosting a joint event.

Do I Have Enough Time?

Candidate calendars get filled up in record time. Make sure you have enough time to execute your plan.

Short on Time and Resources?

Engage Through Traditional Media

According to the 2023 MTS public poll, more than 75 per cent of respondents look to teachers for accurate information on education issues.

This means that educators play an important role in raising awareness about the challenges and concerns that affect their ability to effectively deliver education to Manitoba students.

Here are some quick and low cost, but highly effective ways for communicating educators' priorities:

- A letter to the editor in your local paper
- An opinion piece in your local paper
- Letters to each of your candidates about your Local's priorities
- An ad in your local paper

See Appendix E for tips on engaging through traditional media (page 17).

Engage Through Social Media

Social media is a simple, quick and cost-effective way to help raise the profile of public education. A tweet or a Facebook post can be used to share the impact of six years of underfunding of public education and to raise awareness of issues inside the classroom.

- Use MTS's key messages to inspire your social media posts.
- Localize the issues by sharing examples from your division and school.
- Tag the candidates running in your area.
- Don't forget to use the hashtag #publiceducation and #MBPoli to make sure candidates see your posts.
- Use images and videos. These are key to increasing engagement.

Think before you post! If you are unsure about something you want to post on social media, please reach out to coms@mbteach.org for feedback.

See Appendix D for sample social media posts (page 16).

Request a One-on-One Meeting

A one-on-one meeting with each candidate is a great way to get involved in the political process. Come prepared with a list of priorities and make a clear "ask" of the candidate. Remember to send a follow up email or letter thanking the candidate for the meeting and to remind them of any commitments they made during the meeting.

See Appendix A for an email template on requesting a meeting (page 12).

Got a Bit More Time?

Candidate Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a simple way to gather candidates' views on priority issues. Responses can be shared through email, social media or websites which makes this option cost-effective and efficient.

See Appendix B and C for questionnaire tips and sample questions (pages 13 & 14).

Lots of Volunteers, Time and Resources?

All Candidate Townhall Meeting

An all candidate townhall meeting will give teachers, parents and other voters the opportunity to interact with candidates. Attendees can listen to the candidate views and platforms as well as ask questions. Townhalls can also attract media coverage which profiles the efforts of the teachers' Locals, raises awareness of teacher priorities and encourages voter turnout.

PROS	CONS
Public meetings with larger audiences mean more opportunities for messaging and increased opportunity for media exposure.	Time consuming and difficult to pull off the event with all candidates being present, due to scheduling conflicts or unwillingness to participate.
Opportunity for Local and community members to participate in the electoral process.	Can be expensive.
Opportunity to build your network by working together with community groups.	Questions from the floor can take the discussion off track.
Ability to set the tone of the discussion and control the narrative.	Low probability of gaining commitment on a particular issue.

See Appendix F for tips for planning an all candidate townhall meeting (page 18).

Volunteer for a Campaign (as an individual)

When members engage in advocacy work on behalf of MTS, the actions must be political rather than partisan, as the Society is a non-partisan organization.

However, as a private citizen, there is no requirement to be non-partisan. Individuals can openly campaign for and support any political party.

Volunteering for a political campaign is the perfect role for anyone interested in becoming politically active.

As you learn about the candidates, you may want to lend extra support to one of them, even if they are not running in your constituency.

If so, we encourage you to send them an email and let them know you want to help with their campaign. Even one to two hours of your time, before the election, can make a tremendous difference.



Here are a few ways in which you can get involved in helping a candidate you support:

1. **Door knocking.** You are given a list of addresses in a neighborhood for people who are likely voters. Never been door knocking? Don't worry. Door knockers usually work in pairs, so you will not be on your own. This is an opportunity to answer voter questions and talk about how your candidate's vision for public education aligns with theirs.
2. **Deliver yard signs.** Campaigns get calls and emails from supporters who want signs. If you can deliver yard signs for your candidate, it would be an excellent way to help the campaign.
3. **Give money and raise money.** To earn votes, campaigns must connect with voters. Those connections are phone calls, emails, handshakes at events, articles in the newspaper, eyeballs on signs, etc., and even with a tremendous volunteer base, campaigns need to spend money to make these things happen. If you cannot write a big cheque, you can help with phone calls to potential donors.
4. **Drive voters to the polls.** Campaigns can usually connect you to the places where drivers are needed. This is incredibly helpful for people who otherwise would face transportation hurdles that might prevent them from voting.

Request a Meeting

A one-on-one meeting with each candidate is a great way to get involved in the political process.

Subject: Meeting Request – [Local Association Name]

Dear [name of candidate],

On behalf of [Local association name], and in my capacity as [role] of the [Local association name], I would like to request a meeting to discuss the impact of six years of chronic underfunding of public schools here in [constituency].

Underfunding has resulted in loss of programming, larger class sizes, long wait times to access clinician services and more.

The funding of public education directly affects students' opportunities and outcomes.

This meeting is an opportunity to discuss the importance of adequate, equitable and stable funding for our public schools.

Please feel free to contact me to coordinate the meeting or if you have any questions: [email] or [phone].

Thank you,

[name and role]

Questionnaire Tips and Sample Questions

If you can't meet directly with a candidate, consider sending a letter to them outlining our key messages and priorities for the upcoming election.

A questionnaire can be included for the candidate to answer. This is a great way to get a better sense of where the candidate stands on priority issues for educators. This information will be very useful if the candidate is elected.

Email is often easiest, but most candidates will have a physical office open during the campaign period where the letter can be dropped off.

Publish the candidates' responses in your Local's e-newsletter, post on your website, promote the website link on social media or book an ad in your local newspaper, directing readers to your website to view the responses.

Subject: Candidate Questionnaire – [Local Association Name]

Dear [name of candidate],

For six years, Manitoba's public schools have been chronically underfunded, resulting in loss of programming, larger class sizes, long wait times to access clinician services and more.

On behalf of [Local association name], and in my capacity as [role] of the [Local association name], we invite you to offer your comments on your party's plan for public education.

Attached, you will find a questionnaire. The deadline for responses is [time and date]. Your responses will be shared with our membership as well as the public.

Please feel free to contact me to coordinate the meeting or if you have any questions: [email] or [phone].

We appreciate your participation.

Thank you,

[name and role]

Tips for Creating a Questionnaire

1. Identify teachers' priorities over the next four years. Prepare a list of questions based on those priorities. Aim for no more than five questions.
2. Ensure that your questions are clear.
3. Email questions and instructions to candidates. Questions should be sent to all candidates running in your constituency.
4. Make sure you include a deadline for responses. Two weeks is enough time.
5. Ask each candidate to supply a brief biography and photograph to be used alongside their responses.
6. Send a reminder to candidates two days before the questionnaire is due to remind them of the deadline.
7. Edit candidates' responses for spelling and grammar, but do not alter the content.
8. Send an email including the responses and/or directing teachers to the Local's website. Promote the responses on social media, by providing a link to the full document on your website.
9. Share the info with MTS, so that we can expand your reach!
10. Important: You might not receive responses from all candidates. Post the ones that you receive and include a note that states all candidates were contacted and these are the responses that were received by the deadline.

Sample Questions

1. Why are you running for MLA?
2. What are your top priorities for improving public education?
3. What will you do to improve the quality of public schools?
4. What is your plan to provide adequate funding for all public schools?
5. What do you believe are the best ways to evaluate school and student performance?
6. How would you help schools recruit and retain highly qualified teachers?
7. What is your plan for ensuring the development of a more diverse teaching workforce, reflective of the changing student population?
8. What resources and services, beyond academics, do you believe schools and the community should provide to support student well-being and achievement?
9. What is the role of schools in teaching children about topics such as: gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cyber-safety, mental health and wellness, bullying etc.?
10. What can be done to improve student outcomes?
11. How will you improve working conditions for educators?

Other Uses for Sample Questions

Questionnaires are a great way to get answers to pressing questions, but there are usually many more questions that do not make the cut, simply because of the format of a questionnaire.

How can you use and get answers to these and other questions that do not make the cut?

There are a number of ways to communicate with elected officials and candidates to learn where they stand on important social issues like public education. Here are just a few:

- **Ask at the door.** Candidates will knock on your door to make their election pitch. This is a great opportunity to ask some of the other questions that are on your mind.
- **Attend a public meeting.** Bring these and other questions to a local debate, forum or town hall meeting where elected officials and candidates are present.
- **Send a letter or email.** Candidates want to hear from their community and mail is still one of the most popular ways to make your voice heard. Use these questions as the basis of a letter to your candidates and encourage others to do the same. Save a copy for yourself and follow-up with a phone call.
- **Write your paper.** Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper and ask to include these questions in interviews with elected officials and candidates.
- **Use the internet.** Many candidates have official web sites that post information about their priorities and allow constituents to submit inquiries via mail. Use these questions in an email to your candidates.
- **Talk with your neighbours.** Bring these questions to a community meeting or other public gathering. Discussions around these questions can help stimulate ongoing dialogue about what the community wants and expects from public schools.

Sample Social Media Posts

Social media is a simple, quick and cost-effective way to help raise the profile of public education.

Here are some sample posts:

- Had a great conversation with [insert twitter handle of candidate] about the importance of properly funding public education. #publiceducation #MBPoli
- [tag candidates] Inadequate public education funding has led to cuts of student electives, apprenticeship programs, and fewer hires, resulting in larger class sizes. #publiceducation #MBPoli
- Stable, effective and equitable funding for public education will ensure that students are given the tools, resources and support they need to succeed. #publiceducation #MBPoli
- Students, teachers and schools are counting on effective, stable funding to meet their growing needs. Without effective, stable funding, there is no guarantee that crucial programs will exist year after year. #publiceducation #MBPoli
- It is not enough to hold the line. Government must provide stable, effective and equitable funds to continually improve programs and services to students. #publiceducation #MBPoli

Writing to Your Local Paper

Traditional media is a quick and low cost, but highly effective way for communicating educators' priorities.

Here are some tips on engaging through traditional media:

1. Before you start writing. Read the submission info to ensure you are following the length guidelines, meeting the submission deadline, and sending to the right person.
2. Start writing. Use this simple structure.
 - a. Establish your credibility. A simple phrase such as "I have spent the last 20 years teaching at Gillis School" creates a mental image which brings you and your point alive.
 - b. Localize the issue. Use phrases like
 - i. In my experience...
 - ii. I have seen...
 - c. Clearly state your point/concern early in the letter.
 - d. No jargon. Speak plainly and directly so that everyone gets your point.
 - e. Request that a particular action be taken. Encourage readers to vote!
3. Maintain professionalism. The letter should reflect your passion for the issue, and contain crisp, cogent arguments that support your stance. This is not an opportunity to bash your employer or vent.
4. Read out loud. Before hitting send, make sure to read the letter or opinion piece out loud. Your ear will catch things your eyes may not, like run-on sentences and misplaced punctuation. You'll even pick up on "tone" that needs refining. Have someone else read it, too. We are happy to look it over. Send it to coms@mbteach.org.

Where Do I Send It?

Winnipeg Free Press

Winnipeg Sun

Brandon Sun

Community newspapers

What if It's Not Published?

Don't be discouraged. If your letter or op-ed is not published, turn it into a post on your Local website or send via email to your members.

All Candidate Townhall Meeting

An all candidate townhall meeting will give teachers, parents and other voters the opportunity to interact with candidates.

Here are some tips for planning an all candidate townhall meeting:

1. **Select a date and time.** Ensure that no other major community events are scheduled for that date and time. Estimate attendance and check the availability of potential facilities. Ensure that the facility is wheelchair accessible. Book it.
2. **Stream it.** Explore the option of live streaming the event for those who are unable to attend in person.
3. **Extend invitations to the candidates as soon as the election is called.** Obtain firm commitments if possible and make sure you provide guidelines about what is expected from the candidates.
4. **Book an impartial moderator.** Often journalists are willing to perform this kind of service. Other moderators include radio hosts and well-known community members.
5. **Invite parent councils.** In some areas, parent councils alone may constitute a sizable audience.
6. **Promote the event.** Radio stations will generally publicize the townhall as a public service announcement. Newspaper editors may also donate space. Don't forget to use social media to spread the word.
7. **Plant some questions.** Arrange for teachers and parents to ask questions on priority issues. This will help keep the forum moving during lags in discussion.
8. **Broaden the discussion.** When drafting questions, think of what interests your whole audience. Questions of interest only to teachers are best handled through questionnaires.
9. **Notify the media.** Issue an advisory to the media about a week in advance. Follow up with telephone calls a day or two before the forum.
10. **Stay on track.** Ensure that candidates stick to their time limits for introductory remarks. Give candidates a 30-second or one-minute warning before their time elapses.
11. **Closing remarks.** Conclude the forum by allowing each candidate a short closing statement. Reverse the order in which candidates delivered their introductory remarks. It's important to start on time, and end on time.

Speaking About Properly Funded Education

There will always be competing priorities during election periods. Is it important to be armed with the facts and be clear in the action you are proposing.

Here are some key messages:

1. Manitobans want the province to stop the tax cuts and adequately fund public education.
2. Fifty per cent (50%) of Manitobans say that the provincial government is on the wrong track when it comes to providing quality K-12 public education.
3. Manitoba increased the education property tax rebate cheques to 50 per cent of property taxes for \$453 million. To date, the rebate cheques have cost \$578 million. This is money that could have been invested into the public education system.
4. The province is phasing out the education property tax, years ahead of schedule, but has no plan on how to pay for a sustainable public education system.
5. The government is borrowing money to fund rebate cheques, even though most Manitobans would prefer this money be invested in public services.
6. Public education in Manitoba is funded by general revenue and education property taxes. The government has told school divisions they cannot increase the special levy, or division budgets will be clawed back. With property taxes capped by Bill 71, the result is a cut to public education funding.
7. Six years of chronic underfunding has resulted in school divisions struggling to meet the needs of their students.
8. Inadequate funding has led to cuts of student electives, apprenticeship programs, and fewer teachers hired, resulting in larger class sizes.
9. Inadequate funding means bigger class sizes and less one-on-one help for children who need extra attention.
10. Divisions are looking at cutting transportation for students. Students in rural areas are facing increased time on buses — up to an hour each way.
11. Budget cuts mean schools rely more often on fundraising from parents, which discriminates against schools in lower socio-economic areas and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.
12. Most Manitobans don't want the property tax rebate cheques if it means cutting public services such as education funding. A Probe Research study found that most (58 per cent) want the provincial government to keep the money earmarked for the property tax rebate and spend it on needed public services.
13. Students, teachers and schools are counting on stable, effective and equitable funding year after year to meet their growing needs. Without stable funding, there is no guarantee that crucial programs will exist year after year.
14. It is not enough to hold the line. Government must provide stable, effective and equitable funds to continually improve programs and services to students.
15. With record high inflation it costs more to provide the same level of service and programs than the previous year. Divisions are forced to make cuts.



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