

Presentation to Hanover School Division, June 29, 2016

Good evening,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present to you tonight.

My name is Norm Gould and I am the President of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, a 97-year-old organization that represents over 15,000 public educators across Manitoba.

We are dedicated to safeguarding the welfare of teachers, the status of the teaching profession and the cause of public education in Manitoba.

A priority of our members is to provide a quality public education and to foster a safe learning environment so that all Manitoba's 183,000 public education students, including the over 7,700 students here in the Hanover School Division, have the tools, supports and environment that they need to learn and grow.

One look at the Hanover School Division website or by reading your **Learning Matters** newsmagazine and anyone can see the dedication and commitment to exciting, engaging programming offered throughout the school year and for your upcoming summer camps.

I would like to acknowledge the great work that Staff and Trustees of the Hanover School Division have done to create an innovative, inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Take for example... Hanover's very own Christopher Koop won the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in 2009.

Over the years, the population of new Canadians settling in southeast Manitoba has exploded.

As our communities have grown, the faces of the students in our classrooms have diversified.

And with this diversification comes new complexities that create challenges and opportunities for students, teachers, parents and you.

Your contributions to making the Hanover School Division a leader in embracing cultural diversity have been well documented locally and have not gone unnoticed across Manitoba.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts and courage of those parents and students who stood before you at recent meetings and told their stories and encouraged changes to divisional policies that could result in even more inclusive and safer learning environment for all Hanover students.

Successes of the LGBTTTQ civil rights movement in North America and the more prominent role openly gay people are playing in the public eye have heightened the awareness of the necessity for our schools and communities to be more responsive and reflective; faster than some of us are prepared or ready for.

We know it is hard. We aren't downplaying or dismissing what you as school trustees and the community wrestle with. We totally understand and recognize that change isn't easy. We get that this topic triggers emotional reactions in some people.

Ten years ago, LGBTTTQ-inclusive education was a topic seldom discussed in Manitoba; we have learned over these years that the absence of those discussions have caused a lot of pain for students, families and communities.

The suicides of some bullied LGBTTTQ youth have forced us all to think about what we need to do - as teachers, as principals & vice principals, as community members and as parents - to ensure that all students can be who they are in a safe and nurturing learning environment.

We have asked ourselves: how can we take tragic events and use them as catalysts for change; to prevent similar horrific events from paralyzing our communities?

Recognizing that schools need to be a safe place for students in order for them to succeed, these tragic events led to the development of policies aimed at curbing the harassment of LGBTTTQ students and the creation of inclusive school environments.

The connection between decisions made in the Manitoba Legislature and the classrooms across this great province begins with you.... the trustees representing your community.

You are the leaders who author divisional policies, put in place the supports for your classrooms, and have the vision for the types of schools and communities that you want, and in fact need, in Hanover that reflects the diversity of your growing community.

The Hanover School Division's mission statement says it all, *"Hanover is a student-centred school division striving for excellence while developing skills and promoting values for a productive and wholesome life."*

Earlier this year, The Manitoba Teachers' Society was proud to support the academic research from the Universities of Winnipeg, Manitoba and Colorado for the release of the final report of the **Every Teacher Project**. We have brought copies for each of you to support your conversations and decision-making.

The **Every Teacher Project** was an online survey of Canadian K-12 educators that explored perceptions and experiences of "LGBTTTQ-inclusive" education, including curriculum, policies, and practices that have positive and accurate information about LGBTTTQ people as well as issues related to gender and sexual diversity.

The project surveyed thousands of educators from across Canada in 2013, including 1,400, or nearly one in ten, Manitoba teachers.

The results of the **Every Teacher Project** demonstrated that there is considerable support among Manitoba educators for LGBTTTQ-inclusive education, however....

... there is a corresponding trepidation on the part of teachers in terms of training and preparedness in fulfilling their role; and has led to a follow-up project established to help develop those classroom tools necessary to assist teachers in creating a warm and welcoming environment for all students.

We at The Manitoba Teachers' Society recognize that the situation in Hanover School Division isn't easy. It's hard. There are many conflicting interests and perspectives at play here.

But, at the end of the day, we are all here for the same purpose.

Just as your mission statement recognizes that programming in Hanover School Division is 'student-centered'....

... It is about all children having every opportunity to be successful, to be included, to be respected each and every day... and most importantly safe in their classrooms, in their hallways, and on the playground at their school.

We, as Manitobans, are used to supporting one another and we are quick to help our neighbours when the need arises, by providing a helping hand.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society is here tonight to extend that hand of friendship and collaboration.

We are offering our services, our expertise, our connections and our commitment to work alongside Hanover School Division.

The value of relationships in communities all across this province cannot be understated.

We are here to work with you

... so that we can get closer to achieving what we all want...

...a safe and inclusive learning environment where all our students have the supports they need to learn and grow.

Change doesn't come easily and we cannot control when change is going to happen...

...But we can control how we react to change when it is thrust upon us and decide who will walk beside us along this journey.....

I hope that we will be able to work together to affect that change and that you can trust in The Manitoba Teachers' Society to be there with you.