



Election 2016



Why this election is important

By Norm Gould, MTS President

By now most MTS members, and likely the general public, have seen the TV commercial, billboards and ads encouraging support for public schools.

Reaction has been generally favourable, although some people have said they can't escape the commercial either on TV or online. They can pretty much recite the words by now. Sorry, but that's actually a plus in that it means our message is getting around.

Some people, however, have suggested the message is a subtle or subliminal message for Manitobans to vote for a specific party in the April 19 provincial election.

Not true. The message is neither subtle nor subliminal, but very clear: our kids need more support, not less.

We think any party that agrees and commits to that sentiment is deserving of support. We believe in policies that support public education, no matter which party is proposing them.

The commercial, which we've put on hold during the election campaign period, also mentions that some politicians have talked of cuts to education. The ad mentions this because it has been a theme in many provinces and U.S. states and, bluntly, we don't want it happening here.

Again if any party pledges to support, not cut, education, it deserves support.

This campaign was designed after months of talking to parents and teachers across Manitoba about the state of public education and what concerns them most about their children's and their students' future.

What we heard was many, many of those involved in our focus groups and polling were concerned about continued – and increased – support for public schools. That concern becomes more acute with the uncertainty that precedes any election. Parents and teachers especially spoke about the increased needs in today's classrooms. They saw that it's not the same as when they went to school. They crafted the message. The campaign features a real Manitoba teacher. You can meet her on page 10 of this issue.

As a teacher, Lauren Marshall lives the reality of the commercial in every classroom. She sees the changes in Manitoba classrooms. We are richer as a society thanks to the arrival of so many new Canadians over the last number of decades, and most recently the Syrian refugees. This does, however, have an impact on classrooms.

Newcomers to Canada have different needs, as do First Nations students who arrive from remote communities, as do kids with special needs and those who live in poverty and those who face the challenges of poor nutrition and disruptive home lives. And teachers are the ones with the responsibility of meeting and fulfilling those varying needs.
(cont'd on next page)



Why This Election Is Important

I teach. I vote.

(cont'd from front page)

All these factors affect our ability to provide Manitoba's students the quality public education they deserve. Sustained funding by school boards, and ultimately the provincial government, is necessary to ensure that our teachers have the support to meet the needs of their students and that students have the support to achieve their goals.

To be fair, Manitoba has been relatively calm compared with the fights over education funding and direction in other provinces. Discordant relationships in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec have resulted in court fights, strikes, and cancelled extracurricular activities that have disrupted school years and class time for students and teachers. We don't want that happening here.

And our goal at the moment is to give our members and the general public as much information as possible to ask the questions of candidates and initiate discussions to help ensure there is support for the goals of students.

We have, in *The Teacher*, published articles from interviews with all the three main party leaders to get their views on the importance of education and teachers. And to get them on the record. Some of what was said was enlightening, but the leaders weren't ready to get into specifics until closer to the

election.

We will use our website to keep running list of the promises on public education being made by the parties as well as any other election-related material that is relevant or, on occasion, what is simply interesting.

Our website material will expand on what we have done in *The Teacher*.

We started back in December with the first of the three leaders' interviews and with this issue of *The Teacher* we are providing as much material as was available a month before the election.

As in other elections, we organized a leaders' event to elicit as much information as possible from the candidates about their views on public education and what policies they might be planning to implement. During the last election it was a leaders' debate. This time we planned a virtual town hall.

While we don't expect all teachers to vote the same way. Indeed, our polling shows our members are not of one mind, we know that the votes of 15,000 members can make a difference. The overall result in a Manitoba election can rely on a few thousand votes in a few select ridings. And, we know, more than 90 per cent of our members vote in elections, so what you say or ask of your local candidates or the leaders does matter.



MTS Townhall

Teachers show up for MTS virtual town hall, PC leader bows out

Many of the more than a thousand teachers who participated in the MTS virtual town hall on the election appeared disappointed that Progressive Conservative Leader Brian Pallister bowed out of the event.

When it was announced at the beginning of the forum that Pallister had informed MTS he would not be participating, members took to Twitter to express their displeasure:

- Disappointed that Brian Pallister decides that he has better things to do than to engage in a discussion with MB teachers.
- @Brian_Pallister concerning to teachers on #mtstownhall that you're not available for teachers in their questions about ed in MB
- Agreed. It feels like we @mbteachers aren't valued as voters.
- I'm disappointed that Brian Pallister is not available. Education is an important to all Manitobans.
- Pallister no-show at @mbteachers #mtstownhall. Considering his record on teachers, I'm not surprised.
- If I supported PCs I would have not voted after his non-show up.

All three party leaders had been approached last year about participating in the one-hour telephone town hall and all three had given verbal assurances they would.

Both NDP Leader Greg Selinger and Liberal Leader Rana Bokhari took the opportunity to criticize Pallister for not taking the time to answer questions or speak

with Manitoba's 15,000 public school teachers. The forum was only available to public school teachers, not the general public.

"The single biggest threat to education is the folks who didn't show up tonight – Brian Pallister," said Selinger.

Bokhari called it an insult and showed a lack of concern for teachers.

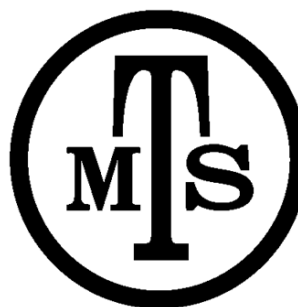
During the town hall, both Bokhari and Selinger answered questions on issues from Aboriginal education to standardized tests to poverty and amalgamation of school divisions.

Selinger focused mainly on the work the current government has done in funding education to the rate of economic growth and beyond even as other provinces have cut education spending. He again expressed his opposition to standardized tests and said he would not force amalgamation of school divisions.

He said what's more important is keeping small schools open, something he predicted the Progressive Conservatives would not do.

Bokhari emphasized that she would listen to teachers and all other groups working in the education field in developing policies.

As well, she said a Liberal provincial government would be in the best position to help in Aboriginal education because it would have the best relationship with the federal Liberal government.



**The
Manitoba
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Party Promises



Liberal Party

Liberals Announce Fiscal Plan, Will Cap Education Funding Increases at 2.5%

<http://www.manitobaliberals.ca/liberals-balanced-fiscal-plan/>

Liberals commit to increasing physical education in schools

<http://www.manitobaliberals.ca/liberals-committed-to-sound-body-sound-mind/>

New Democratic Party

NDP Announces Cap on School Fees

<http://todaysndp.ca/news/ndp-will-make-life-easier-parents>

NDP promises \$125 million investment in Manitoba public schools

<http://todaysndp.ca/news/ndp-will-invest-help-every-student>

Progressive Conservative Party

PC's will invest \$7 million into Read To Succeed program

<http://www.pcmanitoba.com/>

[pallister pcs to improve student literacy through read to succeed](#)



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The Provincial Election and YOU



“As a rule, memories fade with the passage of time” – Richard Wright

Even though the last fifteen years have been marked by modest salary increases and relative labour peace, SRTA members continue to actively advocate for teachers, students and public education. Advocating for education is a preeminent role for members and the most important way that this advocacy can be demonstrated is by casting a ballot on Election Day. All of us must vote in order that the voices of educators are heard. The voices of members on Election Day have indeed shaped education in the past.

Since 1999, the tone of the government’s approach to education in Manitoba has changed. While there have been challenges for educators over the last fifteen years, these challenges pale when compared to the 1990’s. However, many current members were not employed during the 90’s and therefore did not experience the educational turmoil of that decade. As Election Day approaches, we must not be complacent. Our collective memory can recall the times of the turbulent 90’s when funding to education in this province was cut back and the public system seemed to be under constant attack.

The 90’s witnessed erosion in working conditions for members. Teachers received salary roll backs through the loss of PD days. Through the years 1995-1997, the real salaries of teachers decreased 6% due to the actions of the government which froze education funding. Restrictions were placed upon the collective bargaining process that undermined a free and open negotiating process (Bill 72). As funding was cut back, workloads for educators increased with the introduction of standards tests, the 200-day school year (with a pre-Labour Day start) and the ever increasing demands to do more with less. Seven hundred teaching positions were lost and class sizes increased. The government of the day seemed to be less concerned with supporting teachers and best practice and more concerned with fiscal restraint.

Being in the frontlines, members were vocal opponents to the actions of the government and the negative impact these actions were having in the classroom. MTS suspended all standing and ad hoc committees to focus efforts in opposition to Bill 72. The MTS AGM used an afternoon session to march to the legislature in order to visibly demonstrate our opposition. On a Saturday afternoon, teachers from around the province rallied at the legislative grounds to protest the cutbacks and the serious implications of these cut backs to the classroom. This rally of educators from around the province in the mid 90’s was a testament to how passionately teachers support public education and each other. It also illustrated the effectiveness of collective action. Members were able to focus the public’s attention upon education which became a major issue in the next election.

This period in time is part of our collective memory. “As a rule, memories fade with the passage of time”. However, as we approach April 19th, what can SRTA members do to prevent history from repeating itself?

- reflect upon the impact a government can have upon education and member welfare
- research the candidates’ positions and each party’s platform
- be informed about the issues and, given the opportunity, ask questions of the candidates
- be a passionate professional and ensure that education is a major issue of the campaign
- be a tireless advocate of the public school system
- provide a strong voice for the concerns of teachers

On April 19th (or earlier at an advance poll) support public education and member welfare by casting your ballot alongside the 346 members of the Seine River Teachers’ Association and the 15,000 members of The Manitoba Teachers’ Society.



Thousands of kids to cast ballots in Student Vote Manitoba

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Democracy is stronger when everyone's voice is heard

Elections Manitoba created this website to help teach children and youth about elections and to encourage them to become citizens interested in making a difference in our community.

Part of being an active, engaged citizen is taking part in the electoral process.

Many who don't live in democratic nations are willing to risk their lives in the struggle to get the right to vote and choose their leaders. Remarkably, although we have that right in Canada, the rate of voter participation has fallen over the years. This is true in both federal and provincial elections. In the 1990 Manitoba election, 69% of those eligible voted compared with 55.77% in the last provincial election (2011).

How do we turn things around?

There are many reasons why people don't vote. But research shows that children who grow up with voting role models and in households that are involved in community issues and elections, are more likely to vote when they become adults.

Talk to your children about voting

More than anyone else in their lives, parents have the greatest influence on their children. When you talk about the electoral process with your children and bring them with you when you vote, you're teaching them that voting is important. You're teaching your children to be contributing citizens.

About Elections Manitoba

Elections Manitoba is the independent office of the Legislative Assembly that is responsible for running provincial elections in Manitoba. Elections Manitoba is neutral and non-partisan. The job of Elections Manitoba

