

Misleading messages undermine education

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WE'VE only just started the 2023-2024 school year, and many of my colleagues and I have already put in a month of 10-12 hour days planning for our new reality of ever-changing demographics and the increasing numbers of students populating our classrooms across the province.

During my drive home this past week, I spent time deep in thought calculating and recalculating various options and classroom configurations to reduce class sizes. In the background, the radio was on when I found myself in disbelief as I listened to a public service announcement by Manitoba's Progressive Conservative (PC) government.

I was immediately, deeply saddened with their messaging. It was incredibly divisive and came with no hint of support.

Their attempt to portray themselves as champions of education and families is nothing short of misleading and shameful. It's time to shed light on the dissonance between their words and actions.

One of the most glaring examples of this dissonance is the government's approach to public education by the undermining of education professionals. They lead parents to believe that they don't have a say in their children's education, when in fact schools have strong partnerships with parents as outlined in the Public Schools Act Section 55.3(1).

Educators strongly rely on parents as being their children's biggest advocate. Together we are a team and work hard to nurture this relationship.

Further to this there is an undertone in public service announcements that parents are not aware of curriculum, when in fact it is public and available online. It's public! You can find it at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/index.html>. It is not a secret.

A variety of professionals are brought together to co-create curriculum in Manitoba. The key is that those professionals come from the education profession. Educators are the professionals who know best about teaching and learning. And, for the most part parents trust the system. And the trust is not broken because educators are not doing their job, it is broken because of divisive statements that create doubt.

The PC government is creating divisiveness. This is far right thinking. This is harmful to society.

One does not tell a doctor or lawyer how to do their job. It seems misguided to assume that any individual is qualified to tell a teacher how to teach. Similarly, parents trust the education system and its professionals to provide the best learning environment for their children. The PC government's attempt to undermine this trust is not only misguided but also detrimental to society.

Furthermore, the PC government's public announcements contain elements of misinformation that erode trust in our education system. Misleading messages create confusion and harm students and their families.

This is far from the responsible governance Manitobans deserve.

Education is far more than curriculum and assessment. As Dr. John Wiens (former principal, superintendent and dean of education) aptly puts it, "The only real justification for public education is for preparing citizens for democracy."

It is about nurturing values, fostering critical thinking, and instilling a sense of social responsibility. Everything else can be done without public schools, but the integral role they play in shaping democratic citizens cannot be replaced.

The Manitoba PC government's divisive actions contradict the principles of public education and the democratic process itself.

Manitobans deserve a government that genuinely values education and invests in it as the most critical stepping stone to a brighter future for all.

Instead of sowing division and promoting misinformation, our government should be fostering unity and prioritizing the well-being of its citizens. You would think rather than knocking public education into the ground they would talk about how they would support our most valuable commodity ... our children, the future.

Manitobans should not be fooled by empty promises, smoke, and mirrors. The PC government's public service announcements are a disservice to the people they are meant to serve. We deserve better than these cheap political antics.

It is time for Manitobans to demand transparency, accountability, and a genuine commitment to education from our government. Our children's future and the strength of our democracy depend on it.

Support public education. Support the future.

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