

A SAFE RETURN TO LEARNING



An Alternative Plan for Manitoba Schools



There is nothing more important than the safety of our kids. As Manitoba begins to reopen from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial the province invest in schools so that students, teachers and staff are safe and healthy.

The value of Manitoba's schools, and the educators who work in them, has never been more apparent than during this pandemic. School is where children and young people find confidence, learn skills and build the foundation for a successful career.

The safe return to school should be a top priority for Premier Brian Pallister. With less than a month before the start of school, Manitoba students and their families deserve a plan that works.

That is why our Official Opposition team is making five recommendations to Mr. Pallister's Conservative Government that will help our schools return safely and successfully.

Our plan focuses on capping class sizes at 15 students to ensure physical distancing and hiring more teachers, EAs and support staff to ensure students get the one-on-one attention they need after months of remote learning.

We are calling for an additional provincial investment, with support from the federal government, of \$260M to hire 400 additional teachers over the next school year, expand classroom spaces, buy PPE, protect workers, strengthen mental health services and restore transportation services.

The Pallister Government has so far failed to put forward a plan that invests in measures to ensure classrooms are safe and students are supported this Fall. They have not committed any additional funding to make class sizes smaller, implement safety measures or help kids recover from gaps in their learning. What's more, the Premier laid off 8,000 people who support our children in the middle of a health care pandemic and threatened to slash school budgets by up to 30%. We know more cuts are coming - the province wants to repeat the cuts and chaos they made to healthcare in our schools with its education commission.

The Premier needs to recognize the new reality. He should scrap his education review and follow these recommendations to keep students safe.

We're listening to parents, teachers, staff and students. Our plan will help our children return safely to the classroom to learn and thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wab Kinew".

WAB KINEW

Leader of the Official Opposition

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INVEST IN SAFE SCHOOLS



1

SET A PROVINCE-WIDE CAP OF 15 STUDENTS PER CLASSROOM AND SET A GOAL TO HIRE 400 MORE TEACHERS OVER THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR.

\$50 MILLION

A 15-student cap on every classroom will help students and staff to physically distance. If a student or teacher were to test positive, public health officials could more easily conduct contact tracing and implement transmission control measures. By working to hire 400 more teachers over the next school year, the province can ensure classes stay small and reduce the burden on teachers who have faced high workloads because of the pandemic. The need for French immersion teachers should also be considered and the province should increase the substitute teacher pool to prepare for teachers staying home if they have symptoms. This will also help allow all subjects in the school curriculum to be taught safely.

2

INVEST IN OUR SCHOOLS' INFRASTRUCTURE WITH ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM SPACE.

\$80 MILLION

To allow students to physically distance and accommodate a 15-person cap, the Conservative government should commit to renting or building temporary and permanent classrooms across our province. These rooms can include spaces in libraries, community halls, conference venues and vacant business spaces. The province should ensure no on-site childcare program loses space as a result of this measure.

3

INVEST IN PPE FOR SCHOOLS, MORE CLEANING SUPPORTS, AND PROTECT WORKERS.

\$60 MILLION

Schools are expected to ramp up cleaning services and provide personal protective equipment and sanitizer, yet the Pallister Government has failed to make available necessary emergency funding to support them. The province should hire additional custodial staff for schools, invest in personal protective equipment and help schools buy extra cleaning supplies like sanitizer. If an educator or someone in their family has symptoms, they must be able to stay home to protect students and to recover.

The federal government has announced funding for Manitoba to implement protected, paid sick leave for all workers but the Pallister government has so far refused to implement it. People who work with our children should not have to choose between the safety of students or their jobs —the Pallister government must guarantee that all those who work with our children can access protected, paid sick leave.

INVEST IN SAFE SCHOOLS



4

INVEST IN MENTAL HEALTH, STUDENT SUPPORTS AND TECHNOLOGY.

\$20 MILLION

In the middle of a pandemic, the Pallister government fired thousands of educational assistants (EAs) and school staff. These staff play an essential role in supporting students, including children with enhanced needs, those with language barriers or those who face socio-economic barriers to learning. EAs also support the school community by running services like breakfast programs.

The province should commit to immediately hiring back these educators to help keep schools safe, work with students who need extra supports and connect with students who must continue to learn from home. The province should also hire more clinical staff like social workers and psychologists to help support mental wellness. Along with teachers, these staff and EAs are essential in helping students safely return to school. The province must also invest in technological supports for remote learning.

5

INVEST IN MORE BUSES AND DRIVERS SO THAT STUDENTS CAN GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY.

\$50 MILLION

The Pallister Government should invest in transportation services by purchasing and renting more buses as well as rehiring bus drivers to support student transportation across the province and to support parents with limited transportation options. The province should work with schools to support active transportation options for families.

