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RETTA RECORD

The official newsletter of the River East Transcona Teachers' Association
Special Election Edition

Supporting Public Education With Your Vote – Jennifer Russell, President RETTA

(with permission from Frank Restall – LTRA)

Even though the last decade has been marked by modest salary increases and relative labour peace, RETTA 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 decade, 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 P.D. days. During the 90's, teachers lost 18% of salary to inflation. 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" – Richard Wright. However, as we approach October 4th, what can RETTA 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 October 4 (or earlier at an advance poll) support public education and member welfare by casting your ballot alongside the 1300 members of the RETTA and the 15000 members of the Society.

The following advertisement will appear in the Herald on September 28, 2011.

River East Transcona Teachers' Association

Working to make a difference in students' lives



Strong public schools benefit all Manitobans



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During the 2011 provincial election campaign, ask your candidates their views on these issues:

Smaller classes

Smaller classes mean more time to:

- Work one-on-one with each student
- Give children with special needs the attention they require
- Communicate and work with parents

Manitoba teachers recommend:

As a first step, reducing class sizes in Kindergarten to Grade 3 to a maximum of 20 students.

Safe and inclusive schools

- Waiting lists for specialized assessments and clinical supports such as psychologists are too long.
- Whether it's bullying or cyber bullying, teachers working directly with parents is the best way to address these issues.

Manitoba teachers recommend:

Shorter waiting lists for specialized assessments.
Educating the public regarding the impact of bullying.

Growing expectations

- Services should be in place for new Canadians to ensure their children get the best start possible.
- Students who have medical or behavioural challenges need supports and resources so that they can be successful.
- Information technology, Aboriginal perspectives, sustainable development, and citizenship are among the many topics that teachers are required to integrate into their lessons.

Manitoba teachers recommend:

Provide resources and supports for newcomer students and families to help them successfully establish themselves in Manitoba.
Ensure that funding and supports for students who have special needs reaches the classroom.
Ensure teachers have time, training and resources to incorporate new programs in the classroom.

On October 4th, vote for strong public schools to help Manitoba students succeed.

River East Transcona Teachers' Association