

August 2024

# **REPORT** of the **STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**Presented to:**

Honourable Nello Altomare  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning

**Presented by:**

Student Advisory Council



# Contents

Letter to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning	4
Introduction	5
Highlights and Contributions	6
1. Manitoba's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Anti-Racism Policy Framework (October 27, 2023)	6
2. Class Sizes and Poverty in Education and In-School Nutrition (November 27, 2023)	8
3. Smartphone Use in Schools, Pronoun Use, and Promoting the Student Advisory Council (February 13, 2024)	10
4. COVID-19, Emergency Preparedness, and Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools (April 24, 2024)	12
5. Presentation of the Report of the Student Advisory Council to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (August 27, 2024)	14
Conclusion	15
Photo Gallery: August 27, 2024 Student Advisory Council In-Person Meeting	16
Appendix A – 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council Members	17
Appendix B – Terms of Reference	19

# Letter to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning

Dear Honourable Minister Nello Altomare:

As co-chairs, we are honoured to present the *Report of the Student Advisory Council* for the 2023/2024 school year. Over the past year, we have had the pleasure of working with a diverse group of students, encompassing a wide range of educational backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ students. The nuance of perspectives and experiences present has not only enriched our discussions but also furthered our understanding and fostered a deep sense of camaraderie and mutual respect.

We would like to take a moment to extend our thanks to the staff of Education and Early Childhood Learning (the department) who made our work on the Student Advisory Council possible and guided us to achieve our true potential. Their unwavering support in accommodating the unique schedules of every council member, diligently recording our discussions, and ensuring smooth communication was invaluable. They supported us and guided us while allowing us to lead and never let our voices go unheard. We appreciate the consultants for generously dedicating time to share their insights about their roles in the community, which has greatly enriched our understanding and guided our efforts. Additionally, we are grateful to the council members from previous years. All your contributions have been instrumental in our success, and we are truly appreciative. Finally, we would be remiss not to mention the members of our current term's council, for without their dedication, perseverance, and passion, our progress would not be possible.

This *Report of the Student Advisory Council* for the 2023/2024 school year highlights the exceptional work carried out by our diligent members, whose diverse backgrounds and perspectives have enriched our discussions and initiatives, allowing us to build on shared experiences to usher in a time of change and equality. Despite our differences, a shared and guiding interest in the state of Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, combined with our passion for each topic, has unified us, enabling productive and cohesive efforts that we hope reflect the needs and aspirations of *all* students across Manitoba, leaving no voice unheard.

Serving as co-chairs of this year's Student Advisory Council has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. Being selected by our fellow council members to represent the council has been an immense privilege that we recognize and deeply cherish. As we end this term, we are beyond grateful for the opportunity we were given. This council is a crucial step towards ensuring Manitoba's Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system remains committed to accountability, truth, equity, and inclusion for all. Through our collective efforts, we believe we, as the council, but also as Manitoban youth, can create a more inclusive and accepting educational system for future generations.

Respectfully,

**Aadvika Mukherjee**, Co-Chair  
**Precious Ola-Joseph**, Co-Chair

# Introduction

The Student Advisory Council of Manitoba was launched in March 2021 to provide student-centered insights and advice to the Minister on issues related to Kindergarten to Grade 12 education in Manitoba. It is composed of 30 students between the ages of 14 and 18 who have a diverse range of educational, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The primary goal of this council is to provide valuable input and recommendations to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning on matters that directly impact students' education and well-being, straight from the source: the students themselves. This council reports directly to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

The foundation of this council is the belief that students must assume an active role in making the policies and decisions that impact their educational journey while working together for the betterment of Manitoba's education system. The council strives to ensure that student perspectives, concerns, suggestions, and aspirations do not go unheard. Students deserve a say in their education, and this council is the first step in ensuring that they have a role in the decision-making that directly affects them and their education.

The council's mission has once again been achieved with grace and excellence, something that can only be attributed to the partnership between our dedicated, passionate members and department staff. Members made time for monthly meetings, where they displayed their commitment via active engagement with consultants and thoughtful participation, be it sharing pertinent feedback and experiences, giving suggestions, or simply elaborating on their hopes and aspirations regarding what an ideal system should look like in the future: a system where youth's interpersonal, intrapersonal, and educational needs are met.

When asked to talk about their experience on the Student Advisory Council, there was a deep sense of gratitude within the group. For many, this was the first time they had been given a place at the table, the chance to be changemakers, to work on matters close to their heart. This year's council featured a nuanced, diverse group of youth; passionate, dedicated, and excited to come together to build a brighter future. Each meeting included rich, consistent dialogue; complex perspectives; and nuanced, respectful discussion on a myriad of student-centered subjects.

This council has paved the way for a new, revolutionary way of thinking when it comes to a system where youth voices are highlighted on a provincial level. This term has been an eventful one, full of new perspectives and immense personal growth, and so it is with great pride and satisfaction that members share this Report of the 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council.

# Highlights and Contributions

During our time as a council, we had the opportunity to attend seven meetings and consultations, where we had the honour to meet with newly elected Minister Nello Altomare, Deputy Minister Brian O’Leary, Rebecca Chartrand, Dr. Brent Roussin, as well as staff from various areas within the department. These well-informed and future-focused presenters honoured our voices and created a culture that promoted respect, unity, and innovation, thus allowing the council to share our ideas and inspiring us to become invested in our learning experiences.

Through the council, some of our members had an opportunity to engage in other Education and Early Childhood Learning advisory groups, such as the Provincial Anti-Racism Advisory Group (Glydel Capua and Namirembe Afatsawo) and the Curriculum Advisory Panel (Namirembe Afatsawo). These members were able to use their voices to make changes in Manitoba’s education system. As a group, the Children’s Therapy Network program sought our insights and perspectives and we were able to share our valuable thoughts, suggestions, and feedback on the topics of communication and reading.

We have gained valuable insights from our meetings and shared our viewpoints on matters impacting students. Topics discussed throughout the term are outlined below, highlighting specific insights and takeaways from each meeting.

## **1. Manitoba’s Kindergarten to Grade 12 Anti-Racism Policy Framework (October 27, 2023)**

Council members were honoured to consult with Rhonda Shaw, Executive Director of the Learning and Outcomes Branch within the department and Rebecca Chartrand, President and CEO of Indigenous Strategy, as well as her colleague Joan Pinera. Rebecca and her team are leading engagements across the province to help develop a comprehensive Kindergarten to Grade 12 anti-racism policy framework, aiming to address systemic racism in education and improve the academic success and well-being of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students across Manitoba’s school divisions. The Student Advisory Council was the first group to be consulted as part of these engagements and was able to contribute their thoughts to help work towards a more inclusive and equitable educational environment in Manitoba.

# Highlights and Contributions

## **We Discussed:**

Rebecca Chartrand discussed how lived experiences offer a deeper understanding of anti-racism. Members learned about existing initiatives and directives, both at the provincial and local levels, such as the Mamàhtawisiwin policy framework, Equity Matters, the Safe and Caring Schools policy, and existing anti-racism initiatives from school divisions which all work to combat racism. Council members learned about four types of racism:

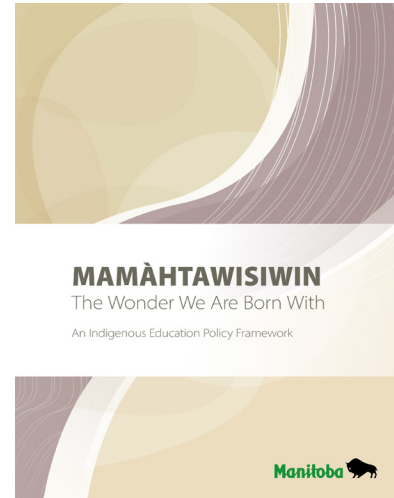
- Internalized: lies within individuals; absorption of cultural racism ideas and stereotypes
- Interpersonal: beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours based on bias and stereotypes
- Institutionalized: prejudice within policies and programs of institutions
- Structural: established hierarchy of groups based on perceived “race”

These insights are crucial to learn and unpack as they provide fundamental understandings to developing a provincial anti-racism policy framework, aiming to effect real change in schools across the province.

## **We Considered:**

The council was presented with many lived experiences of racism and the members were asked to think deeply about their school environments and determine where racism may occur. Three main questions were brought forward for discussion during the presentation:

1. What does brave leadership look like in the face of anti-racism?
2. How can we engage a diverse group of students in Manitoba to gather information and inform the policy directive?
3. What questions should we ask students in order to understand their experience with race, racism, and anti-racism?



*Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework* was developed in collaboration with over one hundred individuals from across the province.

# Highlights and Contributions

## ***Our Thoughts:***

- One member noted, *"A lot of racism occurs online through social media."*
- Technology facilitates more extreme forms of racism and hate speech that might not occur in face-to-face interactions.
- Members emphasized that there is a prevalence of racism within our school system and an urgent need for intervention.
- The council is in support of a step-by-step plan to address racism, ensuring that even minor issues, which may go unnoticed, are dealt with effectively.
- Members want to ensure that school divisions are held accountable for the policies they develop.
- Members believe measures must be enacted to enhance inclusion of diversity in curriculum and among employees, and that as many school divisions as possible must be engaged when collecting data to develop provincial policy.

## **2. Class Sizes and Poverty in Education and In-School Nutrition (November 27, 2023)**

The Speech from the Throne marks the opening of a new legislative session and outlines the government's priorities for the coming year. During the November 27 session, council members had the opportunity to read the commitments made by the new government in the Speech from the Throne and focused their discussion on lower class sizes. Council members agreed the Speech from the Throne reflected concerns raised by the Student Advisory Council, underlining the importance of our contributions to developing educational policy. During the session, a representative from the Inclusion Support Branch in the department provided an update to the council regarding the Poverty and Education Task Force. They also sought members' insights on nutrition programs in schools and how these programs can be introduced effectively and equitably to all Manitobans.

## ***We Discussed:***

- The impact of class sizes on both teachers' and students' learning experiences, advocating for necessary adjustments.
- The influence of poverty on educational outcomes, including attendance and participation in schools.
- Strategies to enhance school nutrition programs, exploring equitable distribution based on needs.



# Highlights and Contributions

## ***Our Contributions Included:***

- Insights into the challenges of managing high student numbers in rural classrooms, advocating for smaller class sizes to enhance mental health benefits and better support for individual student needs.
  - One council member shared an example of a student whose struggles in reading went unnoticed by the teacher in a large class.
- Addressing poverty in education by integrating initiatives like the Community Schools Project for enhanced food security, nutrition, and mental health support.
- Discussions around promoting cultural safety and equity through anti-racism policies, focusing on improving school readiness and engagement.
- Emphasizing the importance of normalizing food programs to reduce stigma and ensure all students can focus on learning without hunger as a distraction.



The 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 Student Advisory Council members during the August 27, 2024, in-person meeting at the Manitoba Legislature.

# Highlights and Contributions

## ***Our Thoughts:***

- Smaller class sizes, comprehensive in-school nutrition programs, and targeted support for students living in poverty are essential for creating an inclusive and equitable education system.
- The initiatives outlined in the Speech from the Throne and discussed in our meetings have the potential to significantly improve educational experiences and outcomes for all students, particularly those from marginalized and underserved communities.
- The commitments made in the Speech from the Throne reflect the feedback and concerns raised by the Student Advisory Council, emphasizing the importance of our contributions to shaping educational policy.

## **3. Smartphone Use in Schools, Pronoun Use, and Promoting the Student Advisory Council (February 13, 2024)**

Minister Nello Altomare greeted the council and introduced Deputy Minister Brian O’Leary. The Minister emphasized the value of student voices and asked for members’ perspectives and experience on the use of smartphones and pronouns in schools. The Minister also took time to answer questions from the council. During the session, students shared their unique journeys to becoming a council member. The session ended with a brainstorming session on how to encourage and recruit new members to the next council to ensure it reflects the diversity of students in Manitoba.

## ***We Discussed:***

- The impact of smartphones on students’ education and the responsibilities of both students and teachers in managing their use.
- The harms and benefits of smartphones in classrooms.
- The importance of using correct pronouns to create a safe and respectful school environment, including concerns about parental influence on children’s pronouns.
- The benefits of broader geographical representation and diverse levels of student achievement within the Student Advisory Council for deeper insight into future topics.
- Ways that teachers and guidance counselors can be involved in promoting the Student Advisory Council to students.

## ***Our Contributions Included:***

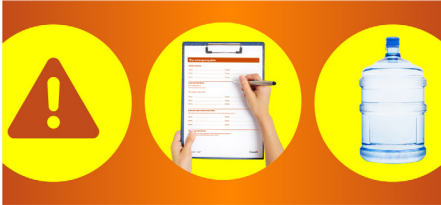
- Insight into students' responses regarding smartphone bans:
  - Students often circumvent smartphone bans in class and view them as controlling, leading to rebellious behaviour.
  - Phones can serve as a learning tool when used properly.
  - Students are responsible for their learning, and those who lack motivation will still struggle, even if phones are not a distraction.
- Ideas on how educators can foster an environment where 2SLGBTQIA+ identities feel welcomed and appreciated:
  - Offer education and training for both students and educators surrounding the use of pronouns, and how to foster an inclusive environment.
  - Provide students with the opportunity to share their pronouns during introductions at the start of the year.
  - Have the primary focus be supporting inclusion and ensuring that every child has access to education, and if this requires using pronouns different from those assigned at birth, we should respect that.
- Suggestions for promoting the Student Advisory Council:
  - Utilize social media as a means of promotion.
  - Have current members lead a question-and-answer session for potential incoming members.
  - Have members act as ambassadors in their schools and divisions to help inform and support students and staff with regard to the council.

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*“As a trans man myself, I have a deep understanding of the importance of proper pronoun use in schools. Proper pronoun use isn’t just a matter of respect—it’s about acknowledging and validating students and their identities. It can make a gender diverse student feel seen, safe, and comfortable, and can significantly reduce the negative mental health effects caused by misgendering.” – Student*

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### 4. COVID-19, Emergency Preparedness, and Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools (April 24, 2024)



An image from the Government of Canada, Get Prepared webpage that was recommended to students to learn about preparing for an emergency.

Government of Canada. Get Prepared. <https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-en.aspx>. All rights reserved.

Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, started the session with a presentation on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, including data that can be used to prepare for any potential future events. Afterward, Allyson Demski, Communications and Emergency Preparedness Manager of Sector Relations within the department consulted with the students on emergency management and preparedness in schools. Allyson started the presentation with a quiz about emergency preparedness that helped set the stage for an engaging discussion about emergency preparedness in schools. The key themes of the meeting were clarity, transparency, and consistency.

#### ***We Discussed:***

- The presence and efficiency surrounding emergency preparedness in schools.
- How to differentiate between an emergency and a disaster.
- Who can help when preparing for disaster prevention, and how to initiate discussions and raise awareness surrounding Emergency Preparedness, particularly during Emergency Preparedness Week.

#### ***We Contributed:***

- Opinions on the areas of concern and hazards in Manitoba schools.
- Thoughts on our schools' Emergency Management plans.
- Suggestions for potential solutions to mitigate dangers in our schools.
- Our experiences with emergency measures in schools.

## Highlights and Contributions

The council shared how schools were prepared regarding safety concerns and hazards in three areas.

### Mental Health and Well-Being

- Many of us agreed that some schools offer a lot of mental health resources. A member pointed out “Schools are nailing it when it comes to mental health and well-being issues.”
- Other schools, however, are lacking resources and need more support when it comes to mental health.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have noticed that mental health is being prioritized more than it had been previously.
- Drug use is becoming more common and needs to be addressed.

### Cyber-attacks and Internet Safety

- We concluded that nothing on the Internet is fully impenetrable, and we should focus on proactive prevention rather than reactive responses.

### Environmental Conditions

- We concluded that schools have adequate measures in place regarding severe environmental conditions, such as a snowstorm impacting school transportation.

### ***Our Thoughts:***

- An increased focus on transparency, clarity, and consistency in terms of divisional emergency procedures can ensure that each student feels safe at school.
- Additional support for students regarding their mental health and other non-traditional concerns and hazards can help provide a safer school environment for all.



## 5. Presentation of the Report of the Student Advisory Council to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (August 27, 2024)



Members of the 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council with their certificates of recognition along with Minister Nello Altomare.

We had the pleasure of presenting our Report of the Student Advisory Council to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, Nello Altomare, and the Deputy Minister, Brian O'Leary, along with department staff. The Minister's opening remarks reminded us that our voices are invaluable and reflect an opportunity and expectation to share concerns from our fellow students. Our report summarized our work and insights shared over the past year, while also reflecting on our achievements and future goals. We also had the opportunity to pose questions to the Minister and gain an understanding of how our insights and experiences are helping to shape the future of education in the province.

While the presentation of our report marked the conclusion of our term, it was also an opportunity to meet the incoming 2024/2025 Student Advisory Council members and relay our experiences, our insights, and our hopes with them as they embark on their term. We shared the day with our peers, building relationships and learning about the history of the Legislative Building. We had the opportunity to participate in place-based and land-based learning activities led by staff from the Indigenous Excellence Division and Elder Charlotte Nolin.

# Conclusion

This report would not have been possible without the unwavering support and guidance of department staff and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning. It is the culmination of countless hours of writing and numerous meetings. We deeply appreciate the teamwork and communication of everyone involved in facilitating the 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council. Their dedication ensured that our discussions were productive and that our insights and recommendations were accurately captured and conveyed. Our gratitude extends to all who contributed, reinforcing the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving our shared goal of enhancing education in Manitoba.

As this current term ends and a new one approaches, we are filled with an immense sense of pride and satisfaction. We are grateful to the Minister for providing us with the platform to voice the concerns of our diverse school populations and divisions, ensuring a direct line for our opinions to be heard. This opportunity has allowed us to make meaningful contributions and has reinforced the value of our collective efforts in shaping the future of education in Manitoba.

This council has not only been a forum for discussion but also a catalyst for real change, with opportunities for members to actively contribute to initiatives such as the Anti-Racism Policy Framework and emergency preparedness work. The impact we've begun to make is a statement of the council's potential and effectiveness. As this term concludes, it's clear that this council is just the beginning. The next term of members will build on the progress made this year and in previous years, bringing with them a unique creativity, enthusiasm, and collaboration that truly characterizes Manitoban learners. We are confident that the continued dedication and innovation of both future and past council members will drive even greater advancements and reinforce our commitment to creating a more inclusive and effective educational system.

Sincerely,  
2023/2024 Student Advisory Council



Members of the 2023/2024 and the 2024/2025 Student Advisory Council with department staff at the Forks.



# Photo Gallery: August 27, 2024

## Student Advisory Council

### In-Person Meeting



Students engaged in conversation legislature during an ice-breaker activity.



2023/2024 co-chairs along with council members presenting the annual report to the Minister.



2023/2024 council members presenting the annual report to the Minister.



Minister Nello Altomare addressing the students in the Golden Boy room of the Manitoba Legislature.



Elder Charlotte Nolin engaging with students at the Forks.



Students reflecting upon an exhibit at the Agowiidiwinan Centre.



# Appendix A – 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council Members

2023/2024 Student Advisory Council Members	
Aaditya Raj Singh	Grade 11 student at Fort Richmond Collegiate in Pembina Trails School Division
Aadvika Mukherjee	Grade 11 student at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute
Allison Beaumont	Grade 11 student at Neepawa Area Collegiate in Beautiful Plains School Division
Brianne Judson	Grade 12 student at Roseau Valley School in Border Land School Division
Edlynne Paez	Grade 11 student at Niverville High School in Hanover School Division
Glydel Capua	Grade 12 student at Crocus Plains Regional Secondary in Brandon School Division
Griffin Carnelley	Grade 12 student at Carman Collegiate in Prairie Rose School Division
Hafssa Jamal	Grade 11 student at St. Mary's Academy
Harisharn Bahra	Grade 11 student at Fort Richmond Collegiate in Pembina Trails School Division
Hassan Saijad	Grade 10 student at Dakota Collegiate in Louis Riel School Division
Ievgeniia-Diana Furda	Grade 12 student at École secondaire Kelvin High School in Winnipeg School Division
Ivy Zheng	Grade 10 student at Vincent Massey High School in Brandon School Division
Jeremy Lloyd	Grade 12 student at Northlands Parkway Collegiate in Garden Valley School Division
Julian McArthur	Grade 12 student at École secondaire Kelvin High School in Winnipeg School Division

### 2023/2024 Student Advisory Council Members

Kristine-Claire Bolisay	Grade 11 student at Steinbach Regional Secondary School in Hanover School Division
Lauren Field	Grade 10 student at Balmoral Hall School
London Fraser	Grade 12 student at École Pointe-des-Chênes in Division scolaire franco-manitobaine
Mackaila Bruce-Tapley	Grade 11 student at Centre scolaire Léo Rémillard in Division scolaire franco-manitobaine
Namirembe Afatsawo	Grade 12 student at Margaret Barbour Collegiate Institute in Kelsey School Division
Nilesh Dhakal	Grade 10 student at Linden Christian School
Owen Tully	Grade 12 student at St. Paul's Collegiate
Pleasant Oyela	Grade 12 student at Windsor Park Collegiate in Louis Riel School Division
Precious Ola-Joseph	Grade 12 student at Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate in River East Transcona School Division
Rafia Oyewole	Grade 12 student at Glenlawn Collegiate in Louis Riel School Division
Sally Leask	Grade 11 student at Churchill High School in Winnipeg School Division
Samantha Martinussen	Grade 11 student at Stonewall Collegiate in Interlake School Division
Siya Patel	Grade 12 student at Crocus Plains Regional Secondary High School
Stanley Gwanoya	Grade 9 student at St. John's Ravenscourt School
Teniyomi Olumide-Ale	Grade 12 student at St. John's Ravenscourt School
Tony (Seung Woo) Han	Grade 10 student at Collège Jeanne-Sauvé in Louis Riel School Division

# Appendix B – Terms of Reference

## STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL TERMS OF REFERENCE

### PURPOSE

Manitoba students are the cornerstone of our education system, and their perspectives are crucial in guiding the decisions that impact them. The Student Advisory Council empowers young people to actively participate and share their insights with the department, playing a significant role in shaping the future of our education system.

### ELIGIBILITY

Council members

- are Manitoba residents
- are between 14 to 18 years of age as of September 1 in the school year in which they serve
- represent the diversity of Manitoba students
- have an interest in issues related to education
- have the ability to work with other people and on a team
- engage in respectful, open discussions, and are accepting of differing viewpoints
- may not be employed by the Manitoba government
- are willing to serve for a one-year term

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The Student Advisory Council members are responsible for

- attending meetings
- participating in discussions/consultations to provide input to the Minister on aspects of the education system and how they affect the children and young people who use them
- bringing youth insights to the department and the education sector to help inform our work
- providing other students with ways to share their perspectives and advice

- providing feedback to requests on department products (for example, surveys/discussion papers)
- working collaboratively

## **TIME COMMITMENT**

The Student Advisory Council is expected to meet at least four times within its year-long mandate; however, there may be additional sub-meetings to attend.

## **REMUNERATION**

There is no remuneration. Council members from outside Winnipeg will be reimbursed reasonable travel expenses as per the Province of Manitoba's travel and accommodation policies.

