

# 2024 Brandon School Division Pre-Budget Submission

Brandon Chamber of Commerce  
March 4, 2024



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**Introduction**

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is an independent, membership funded, not-for-profit organization that represents Brandon, and Brandon area businesses at all levels. The Chamber is dedicated to encouraging growth in the Brandon community by fostering a progressive business environment and attracting new business. We know that a thriving business community and strong economic growth, is vital to ensure the prosperity of the citizens of Brandon and surrounding communities.

We as a Chamber have been pleased with the relationship held with the Brandon School Division (BSD) over the past number of years, and its commitment to developing hard skills, critical to ensuring student success as they prepare to enter the workforce. We appreciate the work that the Brandon School Division does to educate and prepare our students, providing all students with equal opportunity to harness their knowledge and growth their education.

However, as a voice of business, it is also our responsibility to express concerns regarding the labour market and the impact that an individual's education has on our economy.

**From a Business Perspective**

In the 2023 Business Outlook Survey held by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, businesses were asked if they felt that access to skilled labour in Manitoba has improved, worsened, or stayed the same compared to 2 years ago. Despite being in the midst of COVID-19 2 years ago, 47% of business felt that access to skilled labour has actually worsened in our province. When they were asked what they felt the most significant barrier was hiring qualified employees, 2 of the top 3 reasons were that they are unable to attract qualified candidates (22%), and that there is a lack of alignment between employee skills and business needs (20%). This tells us that our incoming workforce is not only lacking qualifications required to find work in Manitoba, but that their education is not meeting the needs of our economy.

The Brandon Chamber understands that an individual's education can also be affected by their post-secondary institution, and their own drive and commitment to grow their skills and knowledge base. However, we cannot forget that the fundamentals to learn basic skills required to enter the workforce is most impacted by their K-12 education. Middle school and high school years are critical for strengthening a students' foundation in basic skills such as math, communication, reading, writing, all of which are crucial in attaining a higher education and entering the work force.

We know some of the budget woes stem from Provincial funding levels, and we also understand that over 80% of the Brandon School Division budget is spent on salary and wages.

We also know, based on previous conversation, that the Province of Manitoba has provided the Brandon School Division with an 8.5% increase in funding this year compared to previous years. It is with this in mind that we would like to make the following recommendations;

### **Tell Your Story**

- We believe the Brandon school system could be a leader in Manitoba, and we encourage you to find ways to illustrate the quality of our education and value for money by more actively sharing results from your Continuous Improvement Plan. This may help develop increased support from citizens for BSD spending and investments if they see evidence of it with positive outcomes.

### **Transparency with Reserves**

- Sometimes the way reserve funds are managed by public entities erodes confidence in financial management and planning processes. BSD should ensure reserve funds are reasonably aligned to actual planned activities and the modifications are easily explained to citizens.

### **Let's Work Together**

- Engage with us at the Brandon Chamber as an advocacy partner in relation to your needs. It is important the Province understand both the current pace of growth and Brandon's planned and desired growth. Making sure we have adequate school facilities to house this growing population is important to the BSD, the Chamber, the Grow Brandon Partnership, City of Brandon and the community at large.

### **Rebalance for Student Success**

- The Chamber recognizes how critical the early years are to student success. We support having lower class sizes for early years and balancing that with larger class sizes as students get older and more independent. This should be cost neutral but get better value for money and enhanced educational outcomes.

### **Let's Partner**

- Ideology should not get in the way of efficiency or innovation. Let's explore the use of public – private partnerships to potentially reduce overall costs and accelerate development of needed projects to meet community needs.
- The Brandon Chamber of Commerce continues to encourage the reinstatement of funding for the Comprehensive Health Care Aide (CHCA) program. As stated above, with concern being that students are receiving an education that aligns with economic needs, this program allows students to enter the work force in the health care industry, which is one of our economy's largest needs.

## **Quality is Paramount**

- Continue to sharpen your focus on the quality of education that all students are receiving. Naturally, the needs of our most vulnerable students must be met, but that shouldn't be at the expense of stronger students not having the support to excel towards their goals. Being able to demonstrate success here so that all citizens can see and understand is important. Try not to get lost in administrative or education jargon in your attempts to be accountable. Being able to illustrate the outputs and outcomes of a high-quality education for our students must remain a top priority.

## **Conclusion**

Brandon's opportunity in the next decade centers on the very real prospect of building a growing economy with a much more focused approach to economic development, workforce development, and an increase in private investment to help ease and spread the tax burden. It is a shared responsibility between key stakeholders.

The Chamber believes we need to focus on growing our economy, creating jobs and leveraging our strengths through a strategic, focused and results driven approach, with a lens of making Manitoba more competitive with the help of our education system.

Again, we value and appreciate the relationship that we have with the Brandon School Division, and we recognize the effort and time spent on creating a budget that balances the needs of both our infrastructure and our students.

Let's continue to make Brandon an affordable place to live, work, grow our businesses, and most importantly, grow our families.

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