

The Making of...

**Blueprints for Change:
Building Partnership-Based Education**



November 2003

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Why a Report? And... Why a Report on Education?.....	3
The Survey.....	5
Getting the Surveys Back	5
Analyzing Survey Results	6
The PR Event	6
The Recommendations	7
The Layout.....	7
The Artwork and Poetry	8
Conclusion	9
Appendix A: The Recommendations	10
Appendix B: The Survey Questions.....	12



pROvincial is an initiative of
YOUTH
delegation



Provincial Youth Delegation

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Foreword

The Provincial Youth Delegation (PYD), an initiative of the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate Office (CAO), is a youth advisory body that was founded in 1998. We are made up of youth between the ages of 15 and 21 who come from all over Saskatchewan. In addition, a Youth Coordinator, Amanda Doucette, works out of the CAO assisting the PYD in their activities and events. We do our best to represent our peers from across the province as we make recommendations to government on youth-related issues. We believe that youth have a valuable voice and should have opportunities to express their opinions. The PYD has been involved in numerous projects over the years including the highly successful *Mind the Gap – Youth/Adult Partnerships* conference of 2000 and various other conferences, boards, and councils both in and out of province.

The PYD met for a retreat weekend in August of 2002 for some team-building activities and to plan for the upcoming year. The group decided that their project for the 2002-2003 year would be to prepare a report outlining the opinions of Saskatchewan youth regarding the secondary education system (*Blueprints for Change: Building Partnership-based Education*). We spent a year gathering and analyzing data and publishing the report. Along with *Blueprints for Change*, we decided to produce this handbook to highlight the successes of our project and to give other interested youth groups some insight into what we learned about writing and producing a report.

If after reading this handbook you still have more questions, please give us a call! Also, additional copies of both *Blueprints for Change* and this handbook can be obtained by contacting our office [see the previous page for the contact information] or on the CAO website at www.saskcao.ca.

Why a Report? And... Why a Report on Education?

The *Mind the Gap* conference was a huge milestone in the journey of youth/adult partnerships in Saskatchewan – from this conference, a report was published outlining the major barriers to youth involvement. Both the PYD and the CAO were very committed to making sure that the recommendations from *Mind the Gap* were recognized by the Saskatchewan government. Finally, after two years of lobbying, we received a written response to the recommendations from the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation.

Even though we had received a formal response to the recommendations from *Mind the Gap*, the PYD still felt that they should continue to spread the word about the conference.

The idea of putting together a youth report came to fruition at the PYD Annual Meeting 2002. One of the main recommendations coming out of *Mind the Gap* was to give youth a valuable voice within government and their community. We felt a youth report could speak to the voices of countless youth. We chose to focus on the topic of education because every youth in Saskatchewan has had some contact with the education system and can speak about their experiences. Although there was no specific section in *Mind the Gap* dealing with the education system, many of the issues raised in that report have relevance within the school system (i.e., Inaccurate assumptions of youth, Youth sexual health/ill health, Involving youth at risk, and Youth Leadership/Skills Development.)

Once the topic for the PYD Youth Report was chosen, the PYD then elected an executive to carry out the bulk of the work for the report. Here were the duties of the executive in a nutshell:

1. **Layout Coordinators (Danny Anderson and Jon Kohli):** Danny and Jon assisted the CAO in the design and layout of the Youth Report, compiled and chose the contents of the report, and communicated with the other members of the PYD on the progress of the report.
2. **Artistic Director (Kali Gordon):** Kali devised a strategy to gather artwork and poetry from Saskatchewan youth, (and added some art of her own) assisted the Executive in choosing appropriate artwork for the report and consulted with the layout assistants regarding the “artistic direction” of the report.
3. **Public Relations Officer (Devin O’Neal):** Devin worked with the PYD to choose a release date for the report, contacted the media/other interested parties to inform them of the release of the report, and arranged opportunities for the PYD to present their findings to interested bodies.
4. **Director of Research (Jessica McFarlane):** Jessica helped to draft the initial survey, worked with the Executive to decide the contents of the Youth Report, assigned research projects to the rest of the PYD, collected information from the rest of the PYD, and assisted with the final editing of the Youth Report.

The Survey

But how were we going to get information from youth across the province? We brainstormed for a while and finally decided to use a survey approach. The Director of Research (Jessica) led a brainstorming session at the Annual Meeting to guide her drafting of the survey.

Following the meeting, Jessica was given about two weeks to draft a survey and email it to the Youth Coordinator. The draft was then emailed to all CAO staff and all PYD members for their comments. When the comments were compiled, Jessica and the Youth Coordinator worked together to draft a new version of the survey. This version was faxed to contacts over at the Department of Learning: Craig Dotson (Deputy Minister), Rosanne Glass (Director of the Community Education Unit), and Jane Thurgood Sagal (Director of the Humanities Unit). Once the PYD received comments from the Department of Learning, Jessica put the finishing touches on the survey and it was sent to the printers!

Getting Surveys Back...

The Department of Learning graciously volunteered to mail off the surveys to all the high schools in the province through their inter-school mail system. In addition to this, each PYD member was given 20 surveys to hand out, and surveys were sent to: ICFS Agencies, Tribal Councils, Youth in Care Networks, Youth Organizations, and both youth and adult contacts throughout the province.

271 surveys were returned! We received surveys from youth all over the province – right from the far north to the very far south! It was great to read through the filled-out surveys and find out what Saskatchewan youth were thinking about education. All in all, we were very pleased with the responses we received and there are some things we would keep in mind if we were to write another report:

#1: As mentioned earlier, we kept the Department of Learning informed throughout the entire process of making the Youth Report. Because we were unsure of how to go about disseminating surveys into the school system, we were very pleased when the Department of Learning agreed to send out the school surveys for us. However, because we didn't know that we had to notify certain people within the school system before the surveys were sent out we ran into a few problems. For example, if we were to produce another report we would send a copy of the survey along with a brief project outline to ALL the Directors of Education, School Boards, and principals in the province, inviting them to respond to us by a certain date. This way, we could have been assured that everyone was aware of the goals of our project.

- #2: One of the PYD members did an outstanding job of handing out surveys. In fact, he convinced his principal to let him hand out a survey to every student in his high school! This was awesome! However, when we looked at the final count of surveys, over 2/3 of the surveys were from one school. To avoid skewing our data, we randomly chose 10% of the surveys from this one school to include with the numerical stats. However, we kept the other surveys to use for quotes or interesting anecdotes.
- #3. We valued the voice of youth! We thought that it was imperative that we provide students with ALL the background information on our project. Before they even filled out a survey they all knew WHY we were putting together the report and WHAT we planned on doing with their comments. We also put the name of everyone who filled out a survey into a draw for a free CD player. We then published the winner's name (with their permission) in the Youth Report.
- #4. We provided anonymity. We recognized that youth are usually more willing to say what they think when there is no fear of being publicly singled out. We did not want students to think that we were going to use the survey information against them by bringing it to the attention of their teachers and administrators. You will see that only the artists (with their permission) and the PYD have had their names reproduced in the report.

Analyzing Survey Results

Once all the surveys had been collected, the PYD Youth Report Executive met to discuss how to analyze the data and begin drafting the report. Note that even though only the executive was present at this meeting, ALL PYD members received copies of the meeting minutes. At this meeting it was decided that the Youth Coordinator and the Director of Research would analyze the data in time for the next PYD meeting. In addition, even though some preliminary brainstorming was done at the Executive meeting regarding a title for the report and layout options, no final decisions were made until the next PYD meeting.

The PR Event

The PYD had initially planned to release the Youth Report during a socialite luncheon. The PR Director (Devin) put in a lot of time and effort in his initial brainstorm of the event. However, we soon realized that such an event would take a lot of time and money.

We were reluctant to charge for tickets for a couple of reasons: (1) What if nobody came because they didn't want to buy a ticket?; and (2) We didn't want to exclude organizations or youth that may not be able to afford a ticket. In addition, we knew that no one had the time (between school, work and extracurricular activities) to plan such a huge event.

So even though a socialite luncheon was a great idea, we had to put it on the "back burner" and release the report with a press conference at the Legislature in Regina.

The Recommendations

(Note that a complete copy of the recommendations can be found in Appendix A of this document)

All PYD members met several months after the executive meeting to begin brainstorming recommendations for the report. Jessica and the Youth Coordinator had finished analyzing and compiling the data by this time and provided each delegate with a copy of the final stats. The delegates broke themselves off into groups – each group being responsible for a certain number of questions from the questionnaire. After an hour-long brainstorm, each small group reported their conclusions to the larger group. Then, as a large group, we began compiling the main list of recommendations (for "wordsmithing" at a later date). In addition, delegates also pulled out their favorite quotes from each section to aid in the layout of the report.

Delegates also looked over the title options brainstormed by the executive and voted on their favorite. The winner was, *Blueprints for Change: Building Partnership-Based Education*. Now we didn't have to keep calling it "The Youth Report" anymore! At the conclusion of this meeting, the Layout Coordinators were given a copy of both the statistics and the recommendations and promised to begin work on the layout. In addition, both the Layout Coordinators sent a letter to all PYD members listing what was expected of each delegate for the report.

The Layout

Upon receiving the statistics and the recommendations, the Layout Coordinators began brainstorming layout ideas for the Youth Report. They decided to use the title "Blueprints for Change" as a central theme for the report and came up with all kinds of ways to make the report look "blueprinty". After drafting some of the initial layout ideas, the Layout Coordinators worked in consultation with the CAO and the Youth Coordinator to come up with a draft document.

All the PYD received a copy of this document at the next meeting and time to go through the report to give us their honest opinion. A lot of changes were requested! This was good, because it gave us a better idea of what the “group” wanted to see in this report. We also spent some time at this meeting fine-tuning the recommendations. Following the meeting, we redid the layout according to the comments we had received and included the artwork and poetry to decorate the pages. We then printed out the report in colour for each delegate to look over at the Annual Meeting. This was the last time that the PYD as a whole got the chance to see the report before it went to print. However, a final copy was sent to each of the Layout Coordinators before we sent the report in to be printed.

We learned a lot of things from producing this report...

- #1. **Designing a report is a creative project that allows you to think outside the box!** But it is also a very time-consuming activity that is too much to expect anyone to do on a volunteer basis when they are going to school, working, etc.
- #2. **When you assign tasks to youth, you need to provide a support network.** It was a difficult task for us to figure out the right balance between support and smothering when helping out our Layout Coordinators. All of us learned to not be afraid to ask for help and to communicate openly about our support needs.

The Artwork and Poetry

From the very first meeting, the PYD had insisted that the report be covered with youth art and poetry. However, we were having a bit of trouble with finding Saskatchewan youth art. Even though we had prominently placed our request for art and poetry in the initial survey, we only received one piece of art. So we went to Plan B! The Artistic Director helped to design a poster to send out to youth organizations, and key contacts throughout the province requesting art and poetry. In addition, each PYD member was given a copy of the poster and asked to put it up in their school or community centre.

It took awhile, but eventually the art began to trickle in. We sent a follow-up call to the Youth Art Co-op in Saskatoon and received over a dozen pieces of art by email. We also received a call from a worker at the Kilbourne Hall Youth Detention Centre in Saskatoon – he invited us up to the centre for a tour of the facilities and provided us with a load of wonderful artwork to include in the report. In addition, some of the PYD members brought artwork to the next meeting.

Now, we had so many pieces of art that we had to choose which ones would appear in the report! The Artistic Director came to Saskatoon for an afternoon and helped the Youth Coordinator choose which pieces of art would appear in the report and where they would be placed. We wanted to choose at least one piece of art from each artist – it was very hard to choose because we had so many wonderful pieces to choose from.

Conclusion

Blueprints for Change was sent to the printers only a little more than a year after its conception. It was a document all the PYD were very proud of – we knew how hard we had worked to collect the data and create the final document. The PYD learned a few things in the process, such as, when a small group of committed people get together they can accomplish anything! Of course, the CAO learned a few things too. Hopefully, you found this document useful – please learn from our successes and mistakes!

Appendix A

The Recommendations

1. SUPPORT! SUPPORT! SUPPORT! Don't forget about those students not excelling academically – don't let them all through the cracks! These students need more support systems in place to make sure that they can graduate successfully.
2. Develop more recreational sports leagues in schools that do not require youth to “make the cut” – put the focus on having fun and building team morale as opposed to winning!
3. Businesses need to create unique vocational and educational opportunities for students, to provide them with applicable skills for the workplace (i.e., mentorship, job shadowing, entrepreneurship)
4. Equal opportunities for schools! (Even if that means sharing resources between schools)
 - a. Increase availability of guidance counsellors and addictions services with attention given to equal gender representation
5. Schools need to utilize community resources, including businesses, to increase the variety of available course options and extra-curricular activities for students.
6. Increase post-secondary education preparation
 - a. Give support to students not excelling academically
 - b. Provide students with ALL their post-secondary options because not everyone wants to go to university!
7. Provide problem resolution training to student to alleviate the added stress on teachers.
8. Consult youth in matters that affect them! (i.e., a student advisory council could be set up when a new school is being built).
9. Create a body independent of the school system where students can voice their concerns
 - a) Students need a clear, accessible, and anonymous process to raise issues free from retaliation
10. Increase awareness within schools of the role of the school board
 - a. More interaction between trustees and schools
 - b. Mutual communication between SRC's and school boards

11. Amend the Education Act to:
 - a. Include a youth representative on the board and/or
 - b. Create a youth advisory body to which the board is accountable
12. Schools need to put more emphasis on multiculturalism (i.e., host Anti-\ Racism events, or have a cultural fair)
13. Ensure that students enter high school with greater cultural sensitivity and experience
 - a. Put emphasis on multicultural programming at the elementary level
 - b. Introduce Native Studies classes into the elementary curriculum
14. Implement school/teacher evaluations by students. The issues raised by the students should be carefully considered by the school (i.e., create a youth/adult advisory council for your school to help deal with the issues raised)
15. That the Children's Advocate Office bring forward the recommendations contained in this report to the appropriate provincial government departments or agencies.

Appendix B

The Survey Questions

ARE YOU BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 AND 21?

BY FILLING OUT THIS FORM YOU COULD HAVE YOUR NAME ENTERED IN A DRAW TO WIN A FREE CD PLAYER!!!!

[You must complete the questionnaire to qualify]

CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE OFFICE:

Our vision is that the interests and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government practice, policy and legislation. The Children's Advocate Office (CAO) promotes the interests of, and acts as a voice for, children who have concerns about provincial government services. The CAO engages in public education, works to resolve disputes and conducts independent investigations. The CAO also recommends improvements of programs for children to the government and/or Legislative Assembly.

PROVINCIAL YOUTH DELEGATION:

The Provincial Youth Delegation (PYD) which was founded in 1998, is an initiative of the CAO. The PYD consists of 15 youth between the ages of 15 and 21 from all over Saskatchewan who represent their peers (You!) in government and community life. They make recommendations to government on the needs of youth in Saskatchewan and travel around the province educating Saskatchewan youth on their rights and promoting youth participation. The PYD holds a recruitment campaign every year from February to May – if you would like more information on how to get involved with the PYD please contact the Children's Advocate Office at 1-800-322-7221 or if you live in Saskatoon, call 933-6700.

Your answers to this survey will be confidential – only your age, gender and geographical location will be published! You can fill out the following form to have your name entered into a draw for a CD player. This page will be immediately detached from the remainder of the survey.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Town: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Yes I would like to receive a copy of the finished youth report!

Yes, I would like to be sent an application form for the PYD!

Please note that the information you provide in this survey may be published.

Age: _____ Location (city or town): _____ Male/Female (Circle)

#1. a. Are you currently attending school? (Y/N) _____?
[If no, please answer all the questions as to your last contact with a school]
If no, why did you drop out of school?

b. Have you ever dropped out of school and then returned? (Y/N) _____ If yes, why did you return?

#2. How would you describe how you fit socially in your school and community?

#3. a. Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities in your school? (Y/N) _____
If yes, what types of activities are you involved in?

b. Why did you become involved in these activities?

c. Are there barriers to getting involved in activities at your school? (Y/N) _____
If yes, what are these barriers?

d. What strategies have you used to try to overcome these barriers?

#4. a. What type of support services (ie. Extracurricular activities, counseling services) does your school provide?

b. What other support services would you like to see your school provide?

#5. What are some advantages and disadvantages to the size of your school's student body and to the location of your school?

#6. What do you feel is an appropriate class size?

- a. less than 20 b. 20-25 c. 25-30 d. more than 30

What is the average size of your classes? _____

#7. In your school, what are the ways in which you can actively participate in making decisions about your education (ie. SRC, school board rep)? _____

#8. Is your opinion respected by your teachers and administrators? (Y/N) _____

Explain _____

#9. a. Do you feel you understand the role of the school board in your school?
(Y/N) _____ Explain _____

b. Do you feel adequately represented by your school board? (Y/N) _____
Explain _____

c. Do you think that a student position on your school board would be a good idea? (Y/N) _____ Why or why not?

#10. Have you ever had to raise a complaint with your teacher, your school, your school board or the department of education? (Y/N) _____ If yes, what was the outcome? (*Please refrain from using names*)

#11. Do you feel safe in your school? (Y/N) Explain _____

The Making of... *Blueprints for Change: Building Partnership-Based Education*

#12. Do you feel your privacy is respected by the administration and by the other students? (Y/N) _____ Explain

#13. Do you feel that there is discrimination in your school? (Y/N) _____
If yes, who do you feel discriminates and how? *(Please refrain from using names)*

#14. Please name two things you really like about your school.

#15. If you could change one thing about the current education system what would it be?

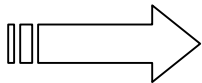
#16. The PYD is also interested to find out about other interests of Saskatchewan youth. Feel free to comment on any other issue you feel affects Saskatchewan youth of today. *(Please feel free to attach a separate sheet).*

#17. What topic would you like to see the PYD research for their next youth report?

#18. As a part of this report, the PYD hopes to represent the views of our peers in any creative way they feel like expressing themselves. We are looking for youth who would like to submit poetry, artwork, pictures or other items to be included in the report.

If you would like to submit something for this report:

- **Send a copy of your submission as we will not be able to return the original.**
- **Ensure that your name, age and town is listed on your submission if you would like your name acknowledged in the report.** *(If you don't want your name in the report we can include your submission anonymously)*
- Send your submission to:
Attn: Youth Coordinator
Children's Advocate Office
315 25th St. E
Saskatoon SK S7K 2H6
- **Deadline is November 30, 2002**



Note: *By submitting your material, you are granting permission to the PYD/CAO to publish the material. You will not be provided with financial compensation if the material is chosen for publication.*