

Education no longer atop the issues ^[1]

Author: Martin, Nick

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EXCERPTS:

There was a time when public education was an important issue in this province, often mentioned in the same breath as health care.

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The Tories designated Morris incumbent Mavis Taillieu to speak on behalf of the party. She said the Conservatives would like to cap class sizes at 20 students for the younger grades and would like to move toward the province's covering 80 per cent of the public school operating grants.

But the Tories can't make financial promises on education, Taillieu lamented, because the NDP has botched the economy so badly.

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Green Leader James Beddome certainly has opinions on those issues, but the Greens haven't campaigned on them.

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The NDP is standing by its track record of investing in public education beyond the level of provincial growth every year, said Allan.

Premier Greg Selinger has promised to cap class size at 20 kids in kindergarten to Grade 3, at a cost of \$20 million for additional teachers and \$85 million for additional classroom space. Whether that's enough money is still to be seen.

"We're the only party that's taken a position on class size and composition," said Allan.

Selinger will also eliminate education property taxes for seniors and for farmland, at a cost of \$49 million, details still to come.

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Taillieu said the school resource officer program will be available to all schools, to improve safety and to reduce bullying. In fact, McFadyen has promised only eight additional police officers for Winnipeg and Brandon.

Liberal Leader Jon Gerrard hasn't had much to say about day-to-day school issues, but he's passionate about the big picture, programs from prenatal care through high school to improve graduation rates and reduce dropouts.

Gerrard would expand on existing fetal alcohol spectrum disorder programs, and he'd institute universal hearing screening for newborns among a slew of improvements for catching problems before kids start school.

"We're missing a substantial number of kids who've got problems," Gerrard said. "We need a full effort at the front end. A hearing problem becomes a speech problem, a speech problem becomes a learning problem, a learning problem becomes a behaviour problem."

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"One of the reasons we've got a crime problem is because a lot of kids are dropping out of school," said Gerrard.

Beddome said the Greens favour local decision-making and broad reform of taxation. What's vital is every child have the most equitable as possible opportunity for a good education, including children in private schools and children living on reserves.

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Region: Manitoba ^[2]

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