Responses to Budget Cuts Misconceptions
April 7, 2017

The Saskatchewan Government has made many statements justifying budget cuts of 58% to regional libraries and 100% cuts to Regina and Saskatoon public libraries. Comments and statistics are provided in this document to counter 6 quotations by the Minister of Education. A seventh quotation is countered by the Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA). This paper was drafted primarily by Mr. James Richards, Regional Branch Manager, Southeast Regional Library and it was edited by SLA.

1. **"There are five libraries between Martensville and Langham, SK - all within 15 minutes of Saskatoon - and four between Indian Head and Regina."**

- There is a public library branch in the Town of Balgonie (one of the 4 in-between Indian Head and Regina that the minister correctly identifies). The nearest Regina Public Library branch is more than a 30 minute drive one-way from Balgonie and is likely longer due to the Regina bypass construction currently underway. It is challenging for some people (e.g. seniors and families with children) to make that commute for library services.

2. **"The number of items checked out of all libraries has dropped by 1.6 million items since 2007 and the number of library cards has dropped by 175,000."**

- Physical item checkouts (e.g. books, DVDs, music CDs) have dropped significantly over the past 10 years. However, there are many research databases and recreational e-resources such as Hoopla, Zinio, PressReader, and Naxos that provide access to a wide collection of movies, TV shows, music, comics, e-books, audiobooks, newspapers and journals).
- Patrons using a public access computer or the free WiFi do not generate a checkout statistic but they make good use of their library.
- Programming has increased as has attendance at programming. Traditional checkout statistics of physical items cannot be the sole benchmark by which to measure the success of evaluating libraries.
- The number of active library cards has dropped but much of that can be attributed to the library's new computer system that was installed in 2015. It routinely deletes inactive and duplicate cards. Libraries have not so much lost library card holders as much as they have a more accurate picture of how many active cards are in the province-side system.
- One common scenario to illustrate is that a parent with 3 children enter their local library. The parent checks out all her kids' materials on her/his personal card. **Four** people used the library, but only **one** card was active. Card counting is not an accurate method of assessing active library users.
- A second common scenario is that many libraries issue "institutional cards" to group homes, senior's homes, daycares, etc. One card can potentially serve dozens of multiple users in these cases. Again, card counting is not an accurate method to assess active library users.

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3. **"Saskatchewan has one library for every 4000 citizens"**

- Yes, 1 library for every 4000 people in Saskatchewan does sound high when compared to Alberta's ratio of 1:15,000 and Manitoba's 1:10,000.
- In 2010 there were more libraries per capita in Saskatchewan than in Alberta, about 1 service point per 10,600 people in Saskatchewan and approximately 1 service point per 3,300 people in Alberta (Source: *National Statistical Profile of Canadian Libraries*)
- In 2010 Saskatchewan had 307 service points, Manitoba had 118, and Alberta had 312 (Source: *National Statistical Profile of Canadian Libraries*)
- Economies of scale or population distribution patterns statistics are also needed to bring context
- Saskatchewan has a small and widely geographically dispersed population. Much of the population lives in rural and remote communities. The population density per square kilometer in Saskatchewan is 1.9, Manitoba is 2.3, and Alberta is 6.4 (Source: *2016 Census*)
- The population of Saskatchewan is approximately 1.1 million (Source: 2016 Census) and is widely scattered across a huge geographic area including many rural and remote communities. There have to be many public library branches to serve such a widely dispersed population.
- Manitoba has a provincial population of almost 1.3 million people. 705,000 of those people live in one location: the City of Winnipeg (54% of the provincial population). (Source: *2016 Census*) Winnipeg Public Library has 20 branches. That means **_54%_** of the provincial population receives library service from **_20 branches_**. Saskatchewan's population and library system are not comparables.
- Alberta has a population of approximately 4.1 million according to Statistics Canada (Source: 2016 Census). The City of Calgary has a population of 1.2 million making the entire city population larger than the population of Saskatchewan. (Source: 2016 Census) Calgary Public Library serves **_1.2 million people_** with **_18 branches_**. Alberta has a higher ratio of citizens to physical libraries.
- Comparing Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta population distributions and the number of libraries in each province is unfair and misleading. It's like comparing a watermelon to an apple to a banana: yes they're all fruit but that's where the comparison ends.
- There needs to be branches to offer library and community services to a widely scattered rural population.
- Municipalities have the option of scheduling hours of operation of their local library. That all these communities have chosen to maintain and fund a library, sometimes staff by volunteers, and despite another library being nearby, indicates this is a service their residents want. It does not represent an over saturation of public libraries.

4. **"More than 90 Saskatchewan rural communities with a library also have one in their school"**
- There are approximately 300 rural public library branches in Saskatchewan. This would indicate that there are about 200 communities that do not have both a public and a school library.

5. **"We have small towns that have a municipal library in a municipal building. A few blocks away, we have a school library. We need to look at what kind of efficiencies, what kind of co-location can exist."**
- As previously mentioned, for the over 200 communities that do not have a public library and a school library, co-location is not an option. Even for the 90 that do, what assurances are there that the school library has the physical capacity to absorb the public library collection, were it to move in?
- To maintain a safe learning environment, many schools have restrictions on allowing the general public access during the day.

- If the intent of co-location is to save money, and we have to assume financial savings are a major attraction to suggesting co-locating public and school libraries, then it needs to be made aware that co-locating libraries would likely cost more money than it saves. Additional administration, supervision, staff cross-training, integration of the school and public collections and integrated policy work are just some of the ongoing time and finance consuming hurdles to overcome during an integration project.
- Public libraries strive to have materials for everyone. The magazine *Cosmopolitan* is a typical and popular title on many magazine racks across public libraries. However, this publication routinely contains sexually suggestive content, both textual and visual. While *Cosmopolitan* fits within the collection development policies of nearly all public libraries, it is not an appropriate publication for an elementary school library. *Cosmopolitan* is only one example among the innumerable books, DVDs and other materials that are expected in a well-rounded public library collection it would not be appropriate for school libraries. How would this collection development conflict be resolved if public libraries were co-located within a school library?
- Public libraries do not install internet filters on their public access computers. School libraries, with good cause, do. How would a member of the public conduct valid internet research on a topic such as breast cancer if a filter were installed on the computers in a co-located library? If the library were to install one set of "non-filtered" computers for public use only and another set of "filtered" computers for school use only, that is an immediate strike against the "co-located-libraries-are-more-efficient" argument.
- In a co-located library scenario, what funding, policies and procedures will be in place to ensure year round access to the library for the public, given that schools routinely close for the summer, weekends, evenings, Reading Week, teacher in-services, etc.? If the school must maintain year round open hours as well as year round utilities, security and janitorial services, this again speaks against the "co-located-libraries-are-more-efficient" argument.
- In the event of a student suspension, the student would be forbidden from entering school grounds. How would this student continue his/her studies in the public library if it were co-located within the very school he/she was suspended from?
- As a parent, I would feel deeply uneasy about members of the public entering my child's school on their way to the co-located library. I would assume principals would also share this apprehension that "just anyone" could be coming and going from school grounds, strolling the hallways, and accessing the washrooms without their knowledge. How would the minister ensure equitable and open access to the public library for members of the public while simultaneously guaranteeing faculty and student safety in a co-located library scenario?

6. **"We want to work with our libraries to adjust how they can deliver services within the available funding levels."**
- Did the government consult with public library directors before the budget announcement of cutting 58% of their funding?
- Before announcing options such as having co-located libraries, there needs to be consultation including thorough research and understanding of the inherent complications of such a proposal including legislation, policy, financial responsibilities, union conflicts, accountability, etc.

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7. **"The future of libraries is leaning more towards electronic media. I'm not saying you shouldn't have bricks and mortar, but there certainly is a shift."**
   - Public libraries offer a diverse number of public programs and services where many people need to be in a library
   - Total library program occurrences in 2016: 27,381 (4 systems reported)
   - Total library program attendance in 2016: 299,201 (5 systems reported)
     - 1 system provided comparative statistics for 2010 in both categories that resulted in a 34% average between 2010 and 2016
   - 90% of Saskatchewan public libraries participate in the annual TD Summer Reading Program for children
   - This eight week summer learning period is an important part of the public library programming calendar
   - Evidence shows that librarian-supported public library programs that involve families, support independent reading activities, and offer enrichment activities over successive years can have a significant impact on student success
   - Saskatchewan has consistently been for years near or at the top of having the greatest percentage of children register for the Summer Reading Club in Canada. It had the highest rate of 9.1% in 2015 while the national average was 5.2%. More impressive was that the registration rate among 6 to 8 year old children in 2015 was 22.6% - the highest in Canada (Source: *National Report of 2015 Program Statistics*)
   - In 2016, over 45,000 children were involved in the 2,510 activities offered by public libraries over the 8 week summer programming period.
   - Public library staff made:
     - 422 trips to school classrooms, reaching 31,566 children
     - 28 trips to day camps, reaching 452 children
     - 65 visits to childcare centres, reaching 998 children
     - 172 visits to outside venues, reaching 2,442 children (Back to Batoche, Word on the Street, community events etc.)
       (Source: *LAC TD Summer Reading Club (Draft National Report) prepared for Library and Archives Canada by Nielsen Consumer Insights, Dec 12, 2016*)
   - Libraries offer incredible efficiencies and value for communities that arguably no other public space can offer."

SLA advocates that all residents of Saskatchewan must continue to have equal access to a variety of public library programs and resources.