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Andrew Thomson has a keen insight into modern education systems. He holds a B.A. in political studies from the University of Saskatchewan, where he served as Member of the Board of Governors, and served six years on the University Senate. However, it is his experience in public life that has allowed him the greatest opportunities to help renew Canada's education system at a provincial level.

### **Public Service**

Andrew was first elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature in 1995 at the age of 27 having previously worked in community development and in the professional public-service. He served 12 years in elected office during which he was served in a variety of Cabinet posts that included the Ministries of: Finance; Learning; Information Technology; Public Safety; and Energy.

### **Educational Leadership**

While well respected and recognized for his work in each portfolio, it is as Minister of Learning that he undertook the most significant reforms of the province's education system in 60 years in an effort to streamline the system and improve the quality of education for Saskatchewan students. This included significant changes to finance and governance structures of the province's K-12 school system. The focus of these reforms was on rebuilding the education system to reflect the new 3-R of education: *relevance* to students; *responsiveness* to communities; and *results oriented* outcomes.

As learning is a lifelong process, he also established the Literacy Commission to improve access to basic skills for ordinary citizens, expanded early childhood education programming and oversaw the post-secondary education, research, and training system of the province. His work at the post-secondary level included increased funding to post-secondary research, the introduction of a fully-funded multi-year tuition freeze to improve access, greater inter-institutional co-operation and transferability of university credits, and re-alignment of the province's training system with the economy's labour-force development needs.

Central to the changes he led in government was Andrew's focus to integrate technology into public sector systems and in so doing to help move government from a traditional information technology focus to one that was information enabled. In education this meant ensuring every school was wired, that online course offerings tripled, that teachers had new professional development tools, and that on-line courses would help to support students in rural and remote areas achieve world-class education.

One of the goals of these reforms was to ensure that student outcomes were more uniform across the province. PISA scores show that Saskatchewan today has the most uniform performance outcomes in Canada across socio-economic strata, despite significant demographic challenges. This work on mitigation of gender and SES differentiated education led to Andrew's appointment as head of the Canadian Delegation to UNESCO's International Conference on Education in 2005 and saw him elected as Vice-Chair of conference that worked to renew UNESCO's "education for all" objectives.

### **Technological Advancement**

As a strong proponent of information technology to improve government services, and under Andrew's leadership as Minister of Information Technology, Saskatchewan became the "most wired" jurisdiction in Canada by 2003. By 2006, using traditional and wireless technologies, Saskatchewan had built the largest contiguous broadband network in the world, and had enabled access for up to 90% of the population to commercially viable internet services at less than \$2 a day. In 2007 he led the introduction of free wi-fi services in the province's major urban centres and on academic campuses, thereby creating one of the largest wi-fi networks in North America today.

Today, Andrew is advising Cisco's Global Education Group to help improve access and outcomes for students across the US and Canada. He is a specialist in state and system wide reforms and is keenly interested in ways to better ready today's students for life in a connected world.

Andrew lives and works out of Toronto, and can be reached by email at [Andrew@Thomson.org](mailto:Andrew@Thomson.org) or by phone at +1-416-838-3416.