

BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

STORIES FROM YOUR COMMUNITIES

LOCALLY-ELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS MATTER

WHO ARE SCHOOL TRUSTEES AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

Trustees are hardworking community leaders who come together in the context of a Board of Education in support of student success. The work is demanding but important and rewarding.

Each individual trustee brings personal values, beliefs, strengths and limitations. How trustees express their views, and the actions they take at the board table and in their daily interactions, demonstrate consistency with their values and beliefs. In the words of Freeman and Stewart, they “tell a compelling and morally rich story but also embody and live the story.” As publicly visible members of their communities, leadership by example is an excellent concept for board of education trustees. This evident consistency, this matching of hand and heart, inspires trust in their colleagues. Individual credibility is built. Through a “living conversation about ethics, values and the creation of value for stakeholders,” each member of the board of education demonstrates who they are and “where they are coming from.” It then becomes possible to build a collective board where there are shared values and strong mutual understanding.

BC is a large and diverse province with different priorities, needs, and special requirements in a variety of areas. School trustees work through their boards to address these local needs.

Local school trustee elections allow the community an important opportunity to lead and oversee our valuable investment in public education.

WHY DO BOARDS OF EDUCATION MATTER?

Excerpt from *The Report of the Pan Canadian Study on School District Governance - School Boards Matter, 2013*, Saatcioglu et al. have observed that there is a clear link between boards of education and financial and academic outcomes. They conclude that boards of education are successful because they manage the ambiguities that

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD?

Effective boards of education matter a great deal in the delivery of successful public schooling across Canada.

- They claim their rights and responsibilities as valid and legitimate elected governing bodies in their own right, and seek to find a reasonable balance between their role as advocates for children and communities.
- They are akin to ombudspersons. They are stewards of local interests, mediators between government and the local community, advocates for their respective regions, and they lobby to acquire educational services and resources that constituents feel are needed.

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arise as a result of outside pressures such as government mandates, monitor district progress, and hold individual schools accountable for student learning. Further, they propose that effective boards engender trust and a collective vision that serves to focus district energies and resources. Similarly, Sheppard et al. have concluded that boards of education matter a great deal to effective public school systems. While there are examples of individual schools that have been successful in bringing about meaningful improvements in student learning, their research shows that such cases are the exception. And even in those exceptional cases, success has been difficult to sustain when key leaders depart the school. They argue that if there is to be meaningful and sustained systems-level change among many schools, the pressure and support of an effective school district/board is essential. Further, they contend that ignoring the potential leadership role of boards of education and the districts they govern in bringing about meaningful continuous improvement of teaching and learning, or eliminating them altogether as has been the case in a number of jurisdictions, is poor public policy.

Clearly, setting priorities that are focused on improving conditions that will facilitate meaningful, authentic student learning, and making them the focus of board of education meetings are essential to board of education effectiveness. Boards of education must be constantly aware of their leadership role within a huge complex distribution of leadership that contains both positive and negative forces. Discovering their place as educational leaders in optimizing the potential of this distribution of leadership to facilitate learner success and acting upon it is a challenge that each trustee, board of education association, and CSBA must face if they are to remain (and perceived to be) truly relevant in the existing 21st century context."

A strong public education system ensures success for all learners.

“Research is perfectly clear that to help someone succeed, you first have had to be successful yourself.

- DAVID E. LEE, 2015 NSBA CONFERENCE

- They have first-hand experience with community priorities and values and ensure that their governance of public education reflects those local values and priorities.
- They focus on developing their credibility and trust among constituents and are cautious not to extend their role into district management.
- They adapt successfully to a constantly evolving political landscape.
- They strive constantly to ensure high-quality communication networks.
- They value and engage in professional development that is focused on their trustee role and informed, data-driven decision-making.
- They are focused on improving student achievement across the district, the provision of responsible financial management, establishing programs and engaging in initiatives related to improving teaching and learning.
- They are concerned about the provision of safe and caring schools, improving the quality of teaching, and closing the achievement gap among various subgroups.