




British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

BOARDS OF EDUCATION ARE ESSENTIAL

A young girl with glasses, wearing a white shirt, a red plaid skirt, and a backpack, is jumping joyfully on a grassy hill. She is holding a red book in her right hand. The background shows a sunset sky with orange and yellow hues, and a tree with autumn leaves in the upper right corner.

**DRIVEN BY THEIR CENTRAL PURPOSE, AND CONFIRMED BY STUDIES
ACROSS CANADA AND NORTH AMERICA, BOARDS OF EDUCATION ARE
MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OUR STUDENTS**



BOARDS OF EDUCATION ARE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

In the provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, boards of education have been eliminated; Newfoundland has moved to two boards for the entire province; in Ontario and Quebec, there is talk about moving to a different model of governance for school districts; and, in Manitoba, a review to consider amalgamating elected boards, or possibly moving to appointed boards, has recently been announced.

In British Columbia, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), acknowledging the important role of boards of education in a co-governance model, has been signed. While this puts boards of education in BC in an enviable position, there can be no complacency.

We must continue to assert forcefully that boards of education make a difference when it comes to student achievement and that they are an essential part of our democratic system. The BC School Trustees Association is the key voice of this message in BC.

**THERE IS A GOOD
REASON FOR EVERY
CITIZEN OF CANADA
TO BE CONCERNED.**

WHY BOARDS OF EDUCATION ARE ESSENTIAL

The most important reason to maintain our current system of governance (through local boards of education) is that boards can make a difference a difference in student achievement outcomes. That, in fact, is their key purpose. Studies in Canada and across North America have confirmed that: when they are practicing good governance, focusing on a clear vision for student achievement and well-being, directing resources to achieve that vision, recruiting a strong superintendent and management teams, and collaborating with that team, boards of education have a significant positive effect on student achievement.

An influential study in 2000 was one of the first to conclude that boards of education influenced student achievement. While a direct cause and effect relationship does not exist, it noted the conditions that a board of education can establish positively affect results for students. Called “The Lighthouse Study” because it was meant to be a lighthouse to districts seeking to improve education in their communities, this was the first of several that have been undertaken since that draw the same conclusions. A Pan-Canadian Study conducted by professors from Memorial University and the University of Manitoba likewise found a positive relationship between good governance at the board of education level and student achievement. They further went on to also confirm other important reasons that boards of education matter a great deal for the delivery of effective public education.

**PUBLIC SCHOOLING
IS AT THE CORE
OF A DEMOCRATIC
SOCIETY.**

Schools, to a large extent, embody the values we hold for our children and future citizens. Boards of education are embedded in their communities and can reflect these values. Members of a board know their constituents and understand their needs. They can be responsive to the concerns and desires of the people they represent.

and diligence, taxpayers can be assured that the public purse is in good hands. At the community level, the public can influence decisions with local knowledge and can question trustees about their work and direction. This helps ensure community focused decision making and accountability.

The community can take part in creating a vision for student achievement in their local school district, and helping to ensure that resources are directed to the realization of that vision. And, if they are unhappy, voters can remove the members of the board come election time. Finally, boards of education can advocate for their local communities toward supporting student achievement.

There are those who say that with provincial governments in control of budgets and taxation, the role of boards of education is no longer important. Coupled with the argument about central fiscal control, they may also point to the fact that since the curriculum is mandated provincially, there is no need for boards of education. That type of suggestion should be strongly rejected.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT LOCAL BOARDS OF EDUCATION PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES.

This cannot be said about other governance structures such as regional boards, appointed boards, or provincial bodies. Boards of education, operating in the communities where they are elected, have an important role in representing their constituents so as to affect a positive influence on student achievement. Boards of education are also directly accountable to the community. Trustees are entrusted with oversight of finances in a school district. When they undertake this responsibility with knowledge



IMPACTS ON THE COMMUNITY

Local context and the need tailor the K-12 education system to meet the needs of students and communities cannot be achieved with a 'one size fits all' top-down approach. Students in small rural communities face entirely different circumstances than those in large urban centres. The culture, economics and realities of no two communities are the same. Boards of education who serve at the school district level can hear the voices of their community and shape their schools to best meet the needs and aspirations of those students. That cannot be accomplished at the provincial level by a single bureaucratic body.

Democratic societies also value and uphold decision making through directly elected representation. Citizens deserve both the right and the responsibility to elect those persons they feel can best govern and oversee a critical component of every community - its schools.

We must protect the right to elect the persons who oversee school districts. While the elimination of locally elected boards of education might simplify decision-making processes, a significant price would be paid for this expediency. Without question, research and experience show that there would be a negative impact on students. Innovation, engagement and, ultimately, student academic success would all suffer.

Locally elected trustees, and the boards of education on which they serve, are a key component of what makes BC's public education system one of the best in the world.

**MOVES TO ELIMINATE
BOARDS OF
EDUCATION
WOULD ELIMINATE
COMMUNITY-BASED
DECISION MAKING
THAT SUPPORTS
STUDENT SUCCESS.**



Equity of opportunity as well as the creation of unique programs to meet the needs and ambitions of local students and their communities exist in part because of the existence and focused work of boards of education.

It is in everyone's best interest to ensure that strong and resourceful boards of education continue to exist and are able to do the fine work that helps support student achievement.

BCSTA plays an essential role in supporting local boards of education through advisement and professional learning opportunities focused on good governance and proper oversight. We are also the provincial voice for boards of education, helping to ensure the goals and priorities of school districts are well represented with governments at all levels. Supporting the success of local boards ultimately supports the success of K-12 public education and our students across BC.



**BOARDS OF
EDUCATION HELP
IMPROVE STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT.
THEY ARE, IN FACT,
ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD
STUDENT OUTCOMES.**

Please contact BCSTA if you would like further information on how boards of education are essential to improving student achievement and ensuring communities have a voice in the priorities and goals of their local schools.