

Alberta School Boards Association
Organizational Review Advisory Committee
Final Recommendations Report

December 10, 2004

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every 5 years, the Alberta School Boards Association conducts an organizational review. The 2004 Organizational Review focused on the governance practices of the Board of Directors. It includes an assessment of current policies, practice and structures with a goal of making recommendations for change that will build on the ASBA's strengths and address the ASBA's weaknesses.

ASBA retained Western Management Consultants to assist with this assessment, and the areas reviewed include:

- Governance: assess the effectiveness of the ASBA's governance structures and practices, in supporting the achievement of the ASBA's mandate.

Key themes explored:

- Being an influential voice for public education and school boards: in order to be an influential voice on behalf of public education and school boards, what policies, structures and practices should the ASBA adopt?
- Dealing with diversity: are there changes the ASBA could/should make to better respond to the varying needs and wishes of the diverse school boards it serves? How/does/ should the ASBA make significant decisions in an expeditious manner?

The review of association governance includes:

- **Policy development process:** is the current process appropriate and effective?
- **Board of Directors:** review the Board of Director's authority, mandate, bylaws, representation, election of the President and Vice-President and how school boards provide input to the Board of Directors.
- **Zones:** review the Zones in terms of function, size, number of boards, diversity of boards, relationship of Zone bylaws to ASBA bylaws and how Zone leadership is selected (i.e., role of metro boards in selection of leadership).

2. THE ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board of Directors, and is comprised of the following members:

- Maureen Kubinec (Committee Chair, Trustee, Pembina Hills Regional Division No. 7);
- Frances Bissell (Vice-chair, Northland School Division No. 61);

- Linda Blasetti/Maureen Emond (Trustee, Calgary RCSSD No. 1);
- Anita Gillard (Wolf Creek School Division)/Roy Brassard (Chair, Chinook's Edge);
- Svend Hansen (Chair, Edmonton Public Schools);
- Gitta Hashizume (Chair, Medicine Hat School District No. 76);
- Judy Muir (Trustee, Northern Gateway Regional Division No.10);
- David Rideout (Superintendent, Livingstone Range School Division No. 68); and
- Suzanne Lundrigan (Project Manager, ASBA).

3. THE ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee and Western Management Consultants developed a survey tool in late July and early August of 2004 based on the above stated objectives of the review, and input from key stakeholders as identified by the Committee. This survey was distributed electronically to all board chairs on August 13, 2004 and then mailed out in hard copy format shortly thereafter (additional hard copies of this document can be obtained from the ASBA website or by contacting Aimee Nichols at 1.780.482.7311 or anichols@asba.ab.ca). Individual boards and trustees were invited to submit a single board response, individual trustee responses, or both, with an overall hope to receive as many board responses as possible.

Throughout September, Western Management Consultants facilitated focus groups at each of the five Zone meetings to solicit additional feedback to supplement the survey responses and to present preliminary findings (where possible).

In general, the survey was well received, and we experienced an excellent response rate of 50 out of 66 individual school boards (76% return rate), and an additional 17 individual responses from trustees. The responses were segregated by submission type (board vs. individual) and by Zone. The responses were further categorized into board type (metro, urban, or rural) for analysis.

The culmination of this research and analysis was the "What We Heard" report, which was distributed to boards on November 25, 2004. This report presented the most frequently cited comments and issues with regards to the Organization in terms of structure, practices and function (additional hard copies of this document can be obtained from the ASBA website or by contacting Aimee Nichols at 1.780.482.7311 or anichols@asba.ab.ca).

4. ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE WORKSHOP

On November 27, 2004, the Organizational Review Advisory Committee participated in a workshop facilitated by Lawrence Beaudry and John Steffensen of Western Management Consultants. The agenda appears in Appendix A and the Issues Amplification document appears in Appendix B. The purpose of this workshop was to develop recommendations to

present to the Board of Directors on the most pressing issues identified by survey respondents and communicated in the “What We Heard” report. These issues are documented in section 6 of this report under the following headings:

- 6.1 Zone 23 Representation on the Board of Directors;
- 6.2 Minority Interest Group Representation;
- 6.3 Role Clarity – President and Executive Director;
- 6.4 Budget Development Process;
- 6.5 Board Chair Meetings;
- 6.6 Emergent Policy Decisions;
- 6.7 The Nomination Process (ASBA Leadership Positions);
- 6.8 Observers at the Board of Directors Table; and
- 6.9 Other Recommendations.

A detailed discussion on each issue took place, and recommendations for resolution were developed.

5. GENERAL STUDY IMPRESSIONS

After reviewing the study findings, the Organizational Review Advisory Committee concluded that overall the ASBA is functioning very effectively, and that the following recommendations represent fine-tuning to strengthen an already strong organization.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

6.1 Zone 23 Representation on the Board of Directors

Survey respondents indicated that they felt that Zone 23 was underrepresented at the Board of Directors table, since it currently has one Zone Director representing over 29 boards, whereas the other Zones average about ten boards per Zone Director. A number of options were considered:

1. Zone 23 could remain “as-is” with no change in structure or representation.
2. Split Zone 23 into two and appoint a Director for each zone.
3. Appoint a second Director for Zone 23.
4. Create a hybrid of options 2 and 3. This would not preclude reallocation of some boards to different zones.

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee agreed that there are significant advantages to maintaining Zone 23 as one large Zone, including operational efficiencies and an increased ability to share information among boards. There was consensus, however, that additional representation is required.

Recommendation

1. Maintain Zone 23 as one large, overarching Zone.
2. Create two “sub-Zones” within Zone 23, likely geographically based (e.g., Zone 23 East and Zone 23 West).
3. Each sub-Zone to elect a Director.

The two individual sub-Zones will then independently elect their own representative, who will be responsible for representing only those boards within the sub-Zone. The larger Zone 23 can continue to meet together, and will have the option of acting as a single Zone (i.e., selecting two winners of the Edwin Parr award), or to act independently (as they will when voting for their own Zone Director).

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee suggested that this recommendation be presented to the members of Zone 23 prior to action by the Board of Directors, in order to ensure that their needs will continue to be met.

6.2 *Minority Interest Group Representation*

Some survey respondents indicated that minority interest groups should have a designated representative on the Board of Directors, e.g., Francophone Boards. The Organizational Review Advisory Committee did not support moving away from a geographic model because of the precedent this would set. There was general agreement that the geographic model of representation, while not perfect, is the best possible model for ASBA, as it ensures that all boards have a voice at the Board of Directors table. To address the specific concerns related to Francophone representation, the following was recommended.

Recommendation

1. Amend the bylaws to allow a Francophone representative to function as an “observer” to the Board of Directors.
2. Emphasize the responsibility of Zone Directors to represent all boards within the Zone, including the Francophone boards as well as all other minority interest groups.

6.3 Role Clarity – President and Executive Director

Discussion on this issue centered on the roles of the President and Executive Director as representatives of ASBA to both internal and external stakeholders. There was agreement that the role of the Executive Director is to support the President and the Board of Directors and communicate with his administrative counterparts internally and externally. It was also agreed that the President, as the elected leader, should always be the public spokesperson when communicating with other elected officials.

Recommendation

1. Ensure the role and responsibility statement for the Executive Director accurately defines expectations with respect to communications internally and externally; and that these expectations are communicated clearly to member boards.
2. Ensure that all communications to member boards are under the President's signature and/or direction.
3. Position the Executive Director as a supportive resource at ASBA General Meetings.

6.4 Budget Development Process

There was agreement among committee members and survey respondents that the budget process is fundamentally sound. However, there appear to be some communications difficulties between the Zone and the board levels. This may result in a lack of information getting to the trustees prior to the Spring General Meeting.

Recommendation

1. Create a graphic representation of the budget process which shows the relationship between the strategic planning process that takes place in January, and the creation and ratification of the budget. This graphic should then be included in all communications pertaining to strategic planning and budgeting. This will help trustees to understand the relationship between the two processes and facilitate timely input into the budget development process.
2. Emphasize the important role that Zone Directors and Zone Representatives play in supporting communications to school boards relating to strategic and budget priorities.
3. Ensure that Board Chairs have timely access to information relating to strategic and budget priorities and that this information is shared with all trustees.

4. Ensure that the orientation for Zone Directors includes detailed information on the strategic planning and budgeting process, along with a briefing on their related communications roles and responsibilities.

6.5 Board Chair Meetings

Historically, the Board of Directors has called ad hoc meetings of the Board Chairs when they have wanted input and advice on emerging issues. Survey respondents expressed concerns regarding the purpose, scope of issues that were to be discussed and the decision-making authority of the Board Chairs at these meetings.

Recommendation

1. Develop clear terms of reference for Board Chair meetings that include the purpose, authority, nature of issues to be discussed and the membership. It is further recommended that:
 - a. The purpose of the Board Chair meetings be to provide advice to the Board of Directors on emergent issues;
 - b. Meetings of the Board Chairs be called at the discretion of the Board of Directors when they feel they need additional input on an emergent issue; e.g., emerging, time sensitive issues that require action in the absence of clearly articulated policy; and
 - c. The membership includes all Board Chairs and all Superintendents, as ex officio members.
2. Provide clear background information on issues under consideration to the Board Chairs early enough to allow them time to consult with their respective boards.
3. Encourage Board Chairs to come to the meetings prepared to speak on behalf of their boards.

6.6 Emergent Policy Decisions

Some survey respondents expressed the need to clarify the processes for making policy decisions between general meetings. Current practice is that policy decisions may be made without the prior ratification of the boards in the event of an emergency or when a quick response is required.

The Committee felt that the flexibility for the Board of Directors to make decisions immediately, and then bring these decisions before the membership after the fact is important. For this

reason, there was strong support for maintaining the current practice. The Committee felt that the concerns could be addressed if Zone Directors took a more active role in communicating emergent issues and policy decisions taken by the Board of Directors between general meetings.

Recommendation

1. Ensure that the Zone Directors are responsible for communicating policy decisions to the Zone level in a timely fashion. School boards would have adequate time to evaluate the issues and establish their position in advance of the next general meeting.
2. Continue the current practice of ratifying emergent policy decisions made at the next general meeting.
3. Continue to use email and conference calls to share information on these matters with the school boards prior to general meetings.

6.7 The Nomination Process (ASBA Leadership Positions)

Some survey respondents indicated that a more formal nomination process held in advance of the fall general meeting would be of benefit. However all respondents felt that the right to do nominations from the floor must be maintained.

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee members were generally supportive of the current nomination process and feel that candidates are accountable for organizing their own campaigns. They did see some advantage to providing some general pre-election information on ASBA nomination and election processes.

Recommendation

Circulate a brief notice (“fly sheet”) along with regular communication reminding boards when it is an election year, and that potential candidates are encouraged to review specific policies relevant to the nomination and election process.

6.8 Observers at the Board of Directors Table

A small percentage of survey respondents expressed concerns about the role and value of observers (non-voting). The Organizational Review Advisory Committee viewed the presence of a small number of observers as contributors to more effective communication. Current bylaws allow observers from ACSTA and PSBAA.

Recommendation

The Organizational Review Advisory Committee recommends that observers continue to be a part of the ASBA Board of Directors, and that the bylaws be amended to allow for the appointment of a Francophone board representative as an observer at the Board of Directors table (as per Recommendation 6.2).

6.9 Other Recommendations

In addition to the preceding issues, the following recommendations were made to enhance operational effectiveness.

Recommendation

1. Continue to invite Alberta Learning to all Zone meetings but establish a designated timeframe for their report.
2. Make the Board of Directors meeting agendas and minutes available on the ASBA website.

7. NEXT STEPS

The recommendations put forward by the Organizational Review Advisory Committee in this report will be presented to the Board of Directors at either their December Board meeting, or their February Board meeting. The Board of Directors will discuss the recommendations, and any policy decisions that result from the recommendations will be brought forward to the membership at the Spring General Meeting. Upon ratification of the policy decisions, any agreed upon recommendations or other actions resulting from the organizational review will be implemented.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA

ASBA ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
Western Management Consultants Board Room
10609 – 124 Street
November 27, 2004
9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the workshop is to utilize the findings from the Board consultation process to:

- Review and affirm the major issues that need to be addressed;
- Discuss each major issue and reach agreement on recommended solutions; and
- Review and confirm the next steps in the process.

AGENDA

- **Welcome and introductory comments** – Maureen
- **Review of session objectives, agenda and process** – Lawrence
- **Review and affirm major issues** – John
- **Recommended strategies to address issues** – Group Discussion
 - Zone Structure and Representation
 - Representation - Zone 23
 - Francophone Board Representation
 - Role Clarity – expectations, accountabilities, etc.
 - President
 - Executive Director
 - Budget Development Process
 - Early input from Zones into budget priorities
 - Resolve issues prior to Spring General Meeting
 - Emerging Issues Resolution - the nature of emerging issues that should be addressed at the Zone or board chair level

- Communications and Logistics - enhancements
 - Zone meeting locations
 - Board – Zone communications
 - Role of Alberta Learning
 - Timely circulation of documents
- Election of President and Vice President
 - Nomination process
 - Advanced information on candidates
- **Other Items**
 - Discussion of voting structures at the board level (i.e., split ballots)
 - Others
- **Session Wrap Up and Review of Next Steps** – John/Maureen

APPENDIX B

ISSUES AMPLIFICATION

ISSUES AMPLIFICATION

ZONE STRUCTURE AND REPRESENTATION

Representation – Zone 23

- Strong consensus that Zone 23 is one representative short
- Have tried 2 votes for Zone Director – not viable
- Used to be 2 Zones (mid 1990s)
- Should Zone 23 be 2 Zones again?
- Should some Zone 23 Boards move to Zone 1 or Zone 4?
- What do we recommend?

Francophone Board Representation

- Move away from geographic base to special interest base of representation

ROLE CLARITY – EXPECTATIONS, ACCOUNTABILITIES, ETC.

President

Executive Director

- Confusion over role and mandate of Executive Director to speak and act for ASBA
- Are ED and President roles and mandates interchangeable?
- To whom is the ED accountable?
- Could be a communication issue
- Roles are currently defined but maybe not well understood

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Early input from zones into budget priorities

Resolve issues prior to Spring General Meeting

- Perhaps review budget creation, dissemination, discussion, revision, timelines so that major issues are resolved prior to SGM
- Clear majority agree that members should ratify the budget
- Discipline of Zones to actually review budget proposals prior to SGM

EMERGING ISSUES RESOLUTION – THE NATURE OF EMERGING ISSUES THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED AT THE ZONES OR BOARD CHAIR LEVEL

- Is there clarity in determining which emergent issues should be dealt with by a meeting of Board chairs as opposed to a Zone meeting?
- Perceptions are that sometimes there are issues dealt with by Board chairs and other times with Zone representatives:
 - Board chairs have mandate of their Board
 - At the Zone meetings, the representative at the meeting usually does not have the mandate of their Board
- Can we separate the types of issues that should be dealt with by these two process mechanisms?

COMMUNICATIONS AND LOGISTICS – ENHANCEMENTS

- ***Zone Meeting Locations***
- ***Board – Zone Communications***
- ***Role of Alberta Learning***
- ***Timely Circulation of Documents***
- A number of suggestions for further enhancing communications and information sharing were suggested
- Should Alberta Learning be an invited guest with a timeslot to present what they want to, rather than a participant in the Zone meetings?
- Every Zone meeting's agenda should have a presentation component to update the Zone on ASBA initiatives, reports and changes (similar to circulation of ASBA agendas and minutes to the Zones)
- Without necessarily creating an ASBA Research Department, it was felt that available, pertinent research information on key topics should be circulated in advance of policy decision making
- The recurring theme is that Boards and Zones would like information prior to decision making:
 - What is the balance between “information overload” and not enough information?

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

Nomination Process

Advance Information on Candidates

- The question here is whether or not the members would be better served and better prepared to elect their leaders if nominations were more formalized to allow for prior distribution of candidate information prior to the AGM, so that members are better informed?

- No one indicated a wish to discontinue allowing nominations from the floor