

Executive summary

Challenging education governance

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Academic writings define governance as a framework and a process for the allocation of decision making powers. It involves the setting of a strategic direction, setting policy, monitoring the implementation of policy and stewarding the allocation of resources. In school boards, the superintendent is responsible for implementation of policy and strategic direction.

Good governance requires clarity and a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and reporting. Good governance is reflected in the quality of the relationship and synergy that exists between the board of trustees and the superintendent.

Indicators of good governance of school trustees includes:

- Trustee's clearly setting a mission that includes high expectations for student achievement and well-being
- Trustee's allocating resources to support the goals it has set
- Trustee's holding the system accountable for student achievement through the superintendent, by regular monitoring of evidence
- Trustee's engaging the community and communicating progress
- Trustee's monitoring their own performance and taking action to continually improve their governance.

Two very recent reports speak to different approaches taken on governance of school boards. The Governance Review Committee in Ontario reported to the Minister of Education, K. Wynne, in April 2009. Their recommendations address 4 themes:

- the duties, powers and accountabilities of school boards, chairs, individual trustees and the Directors of Education (Superintendents)
- effective practices in governance applicable to the education sector, including codes of conduct and audit committees
- capacity building for trustees
- content and format of provincial interest regulations designed to ensure a board achieves student outcomes specified in regulation.

The committee stated that the mandate of school boards, which should be reflected in legislations is “ *to promote student achievement and well-being; deliver effective and appropriate education programs for students; and to provide effective stewardship of board resources.*”

The second report was completed in September 2008, for the Public Advocate for the City of New York. The Commission on School Governance recommended that mayoral control of schools should be maintained so that the mayor can remain the principal public official who charts the direction of the school system and through the chancellor (superintendent), is ultimately responsible for the operation of schools on a day to day basis. The mayor should continue to appoint the chancellor (superintendent) and a majority of members to the Panel on Education Policy (Board of Trustees).

Support for mayoralty leadership and appointed boards also comes from Arne Duncan, Education Secretary in the Obama administration, particularly in big city school districts where academic performance is suffering. President Obama has indicated he wants to reform the education system and speaks to charter schools, merit pay for teachers and national achievement testing standards.

Governance is the topic of the ASBA's spring general meeting, which acknowledges there are also issues in Alberta. Interviews were conducted with individuals experienced and knowledgeable regarding Alberta's education system, including former Minister's of Education, Deputy Ministers, department staff, superintendents, trustees, current and past presidents of ASBA and ASBA staff. Issues were raised and opinions expressed, some of which you will probably find very controversial. They include:

- Who are school boards accountable to?
- Should taxation powers be returned to school boards?
- What are the responsibilities of school boards?
- Are school boards representative of the communities they serve?
- Who represents students participating in "distributed learning"?
- Should school boards be appointed?
- Should school boards be elected regionally?
- Are school boards efficient and effective?
- Should there be amalgamation of smaller boards?
- Would a cross jurisdictional governance approach (municipal/educational) result in coherent community facility planning and operational savings.

The purpose of this presentation is to stimulate discussion based on the views of individuals who have been or are involved in education today, many at the highest decision making levels. Their opinions are reflected in a power presentation at your spring general meeting.

Consider these questions. Are school trustees prisoners of the prevailing system? Are trustees thinking broadly enough? Are trustees prepared to initiate changes which may negatively impact their power, but which may benefit student achievement and well-being?