

# Reimagining school board governance: A call to action

ASBA Transformation of School Board Governance Task Force Report





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 14 steps to reimagining school board governance

With the 2015 proclamation of a new Education Act – the first rewrite of the provincial legislation governing K to 12 education in 30 years – and the government’s commitment to transforming education, change is coming to our province’s classrooms and schools.

While the transformation agenda is being advanced on many fronts – the curriculum is being redesigned, we are rethinking assessment – scant attention has been paid to reimagining school boards’ new roles in this transformed education system.

Recognizing this void – and the huge opportunity it presents – ASBA President Jacquie Hansen in 2012 launched the ASBA’s *Transformation of School Board Governance Task Force*. The task force’s assignment:

- To ensure student success remains central to the transformation of school board governance.
- To provide leadership to school boards about governance structures and practices which support the informed transformation of Alberta’s education system.
- To reinforce the role of school boards as local governments; elected by, and accountable to, their local communities.
- To inform the Education Act regulations respecting school board governance

En route to writing these 14 recommendations, the task force sought the advice of school boards, the public and key education partners. Informed by what it heard – and its own reflections – the task force issued a stern warning as it released its counsel to school boards:

***If school boards want to make sure Alberta’s students get the best possible education, school boards must elevate their leadership role.***

### Strong words

While the task force identified myriad barriers that impede school boards from functioning as truly robust local governments, the task force is also very optimistic that school boards can overcome those challenges – and that many of the solutions are already in school boards’ hands. It will only take school boards to step up to the plate and take their leadership skills to the next level.

## Today's reality

Effectively, school boards can't tax. That authority was removed in 1994. As well, the provincial government now bargains directly with the provincial Alberta Teachers' Association, usurping a role school boards fulfilled locally. Both the ability to tax and negotiating with employees are functions that are closely linked to autonomy. Imagine the hue and cry if the provincial government had stepped in to cut a deal with Calgary's bus drivers or Edmonton's water treatment plant workers. The reality is that since 1994, the provincial government has been steadily eroding school boards' local decision-making powers.

On the plus side, while school boards no longer have an effective ability to tax, they do have an almost unfettered authority to determine where the money allocated by the provincial government for education is spent. As well, the new Education Act will give school boards *natural person powers*. School boards will be far less constrained in how they go about the daily business of delivering high quality education that will improve student success. The key question: will school boards actually exercise this new power and freedom? The task force is heartened that the school board CEOs will now report exclusively to the school board and that school boards are no longer required to seek ministerial approval of the individual they choose to appoint as CEO.

## Call to action

- 1 Use it or lose it—natural person powers, that is. School boards must exercise the new freedom afforded them through the natural person powers in the new Education Act, much like the freedoms and responsibilities granted to municipalities and post secondary institutions. School boards must unleash their creativity in implementing the *Inspiring Education* report – always with the aim of improving student success. Demonstrate to your communities the unique and valuable contributions you make to students, schools, public education and your communities. Exercise the autonomy and authority you do enjoy to build your schools and communities – and tell people about it.
- 2 Give your communities the tools to hold you accountable as a school board. As you start this four-year term, make a public promise to your community about the legacy this school board will leave – and invite citizens to assess and evaluate if you reach your goal. Transparency will be important in this work.
- 3 Collectively, school boards must work together to reframe the provincial government's understanding of their role as the local government which oversees public education in Alberta communities.

## Today's reality

The call for community engagement by school boards is interwoven through the fabric of the new Education Act. On this front, many school boards are light years ahead of other governments. This foundation will serve school boards well, but we must do more. The task force encourages school boards to embrace the principles of generative engagement: trustees should connect with their communities not as *knowers* but as *listeners* and *learners*. On the negative side of the ledger, the task force is concerned that in the 2013 election several trustee seats had to be held open after nomination day because no candidates had presented themselves for school board. This does not speak to a healthy, vital local democracy.

## Call to action

- 4 Along with ensuring every student in your system enjoys success, make community consultation job one for your school board. Each school board should establish an annual consultation plan setting out how and with whom it will consult as it makes decisions for students, schools and communities.
- 5 Open your board table to free and open debate and discussion among trustees. Welcome dissent and discourse. Write a school board policy that is supportive of individual school trustees voicing their views around the board table. Let your communities see that before you make a decision as a school board you have canvassed a breadth and depth of views and ideas. Create structures that will allow more people to participate in the work of your school board. Is the timing of your school board meeting creating barriers to public participation in your meetings? Should the school board consider moving the location of your school board meeting to make it more convenient for people in different parts of the jurisdiction to attend and participate?

## Today's reality

Given the complex challenges our students face, the dearth of resources within the public education system, and the wealth of knowledge and information beyond the classroom walls, school boards' efforts to improve student success are doomed to fail if school boards do not reach out to others for help and counsel. School boards must champion a collaborative approach by inviting others to the table and by building relationships.

## Call to action

- 6 With the goal of improving student success, identify and reach out to those in your community who share your interest in creating safe, healthy and educated communities.
- 7 Through the coming term, assess all initiatives through the lens of whether or not it will contribute to continuous student improvement. Use data and research to inform your decisions.
- 8 Lead by example as a school board. Be learners. Commit to professional development to improve as trustees and as a school board. Regularly assess your progress on this front.

## Today's reality

The task force recommends significant changes to the board chair's role. Historically, board policy often sets out a primarily operational function for the board chair: developing meeting agendas; liaising with the superintendent, chairing school board meetings and, sometimes, serving as spokesperson for the jurisdiction. In today's shifting environment – and given what the task force heard through the consultation – this traditional role is too constrained. During the tripartite discussions, the most effective school board chairs were those empowered by their trustee colleagues to respond on behalf of the school board – even when a formal discussion on a specific topic might not have occurred at a board meeting. Affording school board chairs the freedom to exercise this leadership, on behalf of the school board, will be essential to advancing the new approach to governance the task force is recommending. Let us recognize school board chairs as leaders of leaders.

## Call to action

- 9 Rework your school board's "role of the board chair" policy to enable your board chair to fulfill the leadership role your school board will require as you move forward on a new approach to school board governance. Given the complex skills required, assign your board chair at least a two-year term. And provide the chair with access to the training and resources to carry out this role.
- 10 Designate and prepare the school board chair to be the sole spokesperson for the school jurisdiction. Too often, school boards defer this role to senior staff. To reinforce the role of the elected school board, the face of the jurisdiction must be an elected official – the school board chair.

## Today's reality

The role of the CEO is to advise the board and take direction from it to implement the board's vision and legislative mandate. To improve student success, the school board and superintendent will have to work together as a "first team". An effective board-superintendent relationship is fundamental to a school jurisdiction's success. School boards should work with their superintendent to answer these questions:

- Is this the superintendent's work? If it is the superintendent's work, how will we hold the superintendent accountable?
- Is this the school board's work? If it is the school board's work, how will we hold ourselves accountable?
- Should this work be shared between the superintendent and the school board? How is such work framed and messaged for your community?

## Call to action

- 11 With a focus on improving student success, the school board and superintendent should work together to align and assign work and responsibility with a view to clarifying what is in the superintendent's bailiwick, what falls to the school board and, most importantly, what initiatives will be shared work.

## Today's reality

The task force has recommended significant changes to how school boards in Alberta govern. The task force opened with a stern warning that if school boards truly want to give students the best possible education – they will have to change their governance practices. As school boards move forward on these recommendations locally, the task force sees the Alberta School Boards Association playing a key role in advancing and supporting this work. It recommends the following to the ASBA:

- 12 Develop and offer a curriculum for all trustees that reflects this new direction in school board governance. Make this part of a voluntary trustee certification program. The more educated a trustee, the more empowered he/she becomes in that role.
- 13 Offer specific professional development to school board chairs, specifically designed to reinforce their enhanced leadership role.
- 14 Work with the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta to ensure senior leaders have a greater understanding of – and are ready to support – the evolving role of school boards and school board chairs.

### Published November 2013

*14 steps to reimagining school board governance* summarizes the *Reimagining school board governance: A call to action* research paper, written by the ASBA Transformation of School Board Governance task force.

Both documents are posted on the ASBA website as follows:

*14 steps to reimagining school board governance*

[www.asba.ab.ca/perspectives/research-papers.asp](http://www.asba.ab.ca/perspectives/research-papers.asp)

*Reimagining school board governance: A call to action*

[www.asba.ab.ca/perspectives/research-papers.asp](http://www.asba.ab.ca/perspectives/research-papers.asp)

## Preamble

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Bob Dylan, in his song, suggests, “*The times they are a changing*”. It is time for school boards to transform their governance practices. The complexity of board governance increases as our society demographics and student needs change. There are calls for greater public scrutiny and transparency and boards must respond to a multitude of differing legislative acts. Our present School Act is over 30 years old and is about to change. A new of vision and framework of education and student learning is emerging.

Boards are well positioned to lead this change and lead we must. We are the body entrusted with our province’s most valuable assets – our children, our youth, our passion.

What has worked in the past will not sustain us into the future. The task force strongly believes it is time for school boards to exert their leadership.

We need to ensure our governance practices prepare our children and youth for their future, not our past.

This is a call to action.

## Context

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At the 2012 Alberta School Boards Association Fall General Meeting, President Jacquie Hansen announced the ASBA would assume a leadership role in supporting school boards as they move towards the informed transformation of local governance as described in *Inspiring Education: A dialogue with Albertans*. She further suggested that, with the introduction of a new Education Act, it was time for boards, in their role as local government of the education system, to take the lead in their communities.

In the spring of 2013, the ASBA Transformation of School Board Governance Task Force was given the mandate to:

1. Ensure that student success remains central to the transformation of school board governance;
2. Provide leadership to school boards about governance structures and practices which support the informed transformation of Alberta’s education system;
3. Reinforce the role of school boards as local government, elected by, and accountable to, their local communities;
4. Inform the Education Act regulations respecting school board governance.

At the 2013 ASBA Spring General Meeting, President Hansen convened a special general session of all boards to consider the transformation of school board governance with the overarching question:

*What are the barriers and frustrations that you see for school boards in achieving the transformation of school board governance?*

From the dialogue at the SGM, five themes emerged:

Theme 1: School boards are local governments

Theme 2: School boards are a form of representative democracy

Theme 3: School boards are change agents

Theme 4: School board chairs are leaders

Theme 5: The CEO is the school board's one employee

Over following months, the task force engaged the various stakeholders and reviewed governance research. The aim of the task force was to provide a report to the ASBA membership at the ASBA Fall General Meeting in November 2013.

During the course of the task force meetings, a sixth theme emerged that recognized the role of the ASBA:

Theme 6: Task force recommendations to ASBA.

## **What did the task force hear?**

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The task force is pleased with the level of engagement from boards and stakeholders through the ASBA 2013 Spring General Meeting, online surveys and stakeholder submissions.

It is apparent that there is a critical mass of trustees, boards and stakeholders that see the importance of transforming school board governance to ensure student success.

## **Background to the call to action**

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### **How did we reach out to trustees and stakeholders?**

Led by President Jacquie Hansen, the task force developed a work plan to gather responses to questions that would give clarity to the transformation of governance (Appendix I: Task force members). To fulfill their mandate, the task force asked stakeholders to comment on the five governance themes:

Theme 1: School boards are local governments

Theme 2: School boards are a form of representative democracy

Theme 3: School boards are change agents

Theme 4: School board chairs are leaders

Theme 5: The CEO is the school board's one employee

As well, through an online survey, the stakeholders were asked to comment on the role of ASBA, as in support of and as the collective voice for boards. The information collected resulted in the inclusion of:

Theme 6: Task force recommendations to ASBA.

The task force developed an online survey with eight open-ended questions to gather as much information as possible. The task force did not define school board governance or transformation to allow respondents to express their current perceptions and understanding of the transformation of school board governance.

The survey was made available from July to September 2013 to the public, trustees and school jurisdiction administration. (See Appendix II: Stakeholder participants). A total of 111 surveys were completed.

In addition to the survey data, submissions were invited and received from:

- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Education
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)

The task force also reviewed input gathered from the 2013 ASBA Spring General Meeting and research on board governance. The information was analyzed using the framework of the six themes and an overview of current literature and documents (See Appendix III: Overview of literature and documents).

## Detailed recommendations and findings

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The following sections of the task force report restates each theme and recommendations and provides some background discussion to enable understanding of the 14 recommendations. Each theme is followed by the analysis of the findings and quotations that give voice to those who responded to the survey and the call for submissions. Since most of the respondents were trustees, their responses form the bulk of voices heard, followed by the public and the administration.

The data gathered from the stakeholder submissions were analyzed within each of the perspectives as appropriate. The ASCA and Alberta Education submissions are included with the perspective of the public. The ASBOA and the CASS submissions are included with the perspective of the administration.

I strongly agree that there is a lot to do at the local level to strengthen governance in order to be perceived as a strong local decision making body for the greater good of families and communities. There are countless ways in which we could prioritize this notion...most of it centers on community engagement and creating champions in your community and education.  
- Trustee

## **THEME 1: SCHOOL BOARDS ARE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

### **Recommendations**

It is apparent that school boards have lost much of their autonomy that would see them viewed as local government.

1. Use it or lose it—natural person powers, that is. School boards must exercise the new freedom afforded them through the natural person powers in the new Education Act, much like the freedoms and responsibilities granted to municipalities and post secondary institutions. School boards must unleash their creativity in implementing the *Inspiring Education* report – always with the aim of improving student success. Demonstrate to your communities the unique and valuable contributions you make to students, schools, public education and your communities. Exercise the autonomy and authority you do enjoy to build your schools and communities – and tell people about it.
2. Give your communities the tools to hold you accountable as a school board. As you start this four-year term, make a public promise to your community about the legacy this school board will leave – and invite citizens to assess and evaluate if you reach your goal. Transparency will be important in this work.
3. Collectively, school boards must work together to reframe the provincial government’s understanding of their role as the local government which oversees public education in Alberta communities.

One of the governance shifts described in *Inspiring Education* is toward greater local direction. This shift is supported by the Education Act (section 51), which gives boards natural person powers, in effect expanding the opportunities for board governance to do anything reasonable that is neither prohibited by legislation nor defined by the Act as a requirement of the board.

This provides an opportunity for boards to step up to the plate and assert their political role and authority as local governors of the education system. Embedded in this opportunity is the requirement for boards to be more visible in the work that they do and the leadership they exert in ensuring that their students have the very best of educational opportunities and that schools are a vital part of communities.

Boards need to engage community and municipal leaders in dialogue regarding the role of the board as a community partner and large-scale employer. They need to model democracy, debating in an open forum with strongly held, diverse opinions and futuristic thinking. Boards need to exert their presence at community events and ensure that the board chair, not the superintendent/CEO, is the chief spokesperson for the jurisdiction and the liaison with MLAs and the Minister.

## Findings

### Guiding question

Boards have had a challenging time regarding the negotiation with the provincial government and the ATA. Some boards/trustees are not invited to local election forums or introduced at local events. How can we raise the profile of the school boards as local government?

### Perspective of trustees

- Community engagement and visibility
- Recognition of board as local government
- Relevance of board authority
- Education on board governance and trustee roles

Theme 1: School boards are local governments is very connected to Theme 2: School boards are a form of representative democracy. Many of the trustee respondents addressed the importance of community engagement and visibility. Suggestions regarding purposeful planning for engagement included opportunities at public events, school events, election forums and organization or agency meetings and events, and through social media and networking. Trustees took ownership of the need to engage with community and suggested the need for communication protocols, including how to engage with social and traditional forms of media.

The recognition of school boards by other stakeholders as local government was key. Embedded in this discussion is the notion of respect for trustees as earned or accorded because they are elected local officials. Trustees cited the example of the perceived sidelining of the boards by Alberta Education and the ATA in reaching an agreement and the dissolution of boards by the Minister as examples of a lack of respect for the board as local government and the role of the trustee. At the same time, trustees recognized the delicate relationship that exists between boards and government, describing it as “school boards exist at the whim of the province”. For some, the notion of trustees not being introduced at local events when municipal elected officials were introduced was symbolic of the lack of respect and recognition. Others felt it was more a result of their own lack of engagement.

Recognition as local government was directly related to relevance. Although the natural person powers were seen as positive, the inability to collect local taxes was seen as a stumbling block to relevance. Constituents don’t see the connection between education tax dollars and board fiduciary accountability. They don’t understand that school boards are among the largest employers in the community or that school boards are the “representative, advocate and governor of the school system”. Local authority and relevance seems to be diminished with decisions from the provincial level which disrupt school board plans and priorities.

As politicians we have a responsibility to be visible in our communities and should work with all levels of government locally and provincially. Through regular communication and attendance at local events we can raise our own profiles. - *Trustee*

If we’re not being introduced at events, it’s because we haven’t asked for it. It’s time to talk to the presidents of the local chambers and rotaries, local newspapers, church groups. We need to show interest in what they are doing if we are going to ask them to do the same for us. We ask that these groups be community builders so therefore we need to be community builders. - *Trustee*

From the viewpoint of the general public, boards have little effect on their lives or even the lives of their children. Want a new school for community? Don’t write the Board. Better to write to the Premier, the Minister or bug the heck out of your MLAs. Boards are irrelevant to what is really important to most parents. - *Trustee*

This has to be about more than just profile and whether we are introduced at events. Perhaps the reason school boards are seen as “less than” municipal government is because we are less involved in the affairs of our divisions than the average city or town councilor is in his or her community. - *Trustee*

Boards have too often de-powered themselves by making tough decisions behind closed doors and without adequate public involvement. Until boards are more than a firewall between parents and the provincial government, until they have the powers of local government and behave like governors, their profile will be low. - *Public*

Since the provincial government largely ignores school boards, the public sees them as generally ineffective and at worst – useless. - *Public*

If electors, the media, or others interested in the well being of education in Alberta cannot determine facts about their school districts or how critical decisions were made, the relevancy of our democratic processes and the boards themselves are called into question. - *Association for Responsive Trusteeship in Edmonton Schools*

Trustees expressed concern that the public – and even some boards or trustees – perceive their role as rubber-stamping administrative decisions. All stakeholders would benefit by better understanding the importance of the governance role of boards and the role of the trustee. However, raising the profile of trustees for constituents who just want action on issues and are not interested in clarifying roles is difficult. Despite this, trustees indicated the onus to prove relevance was on the trustees and the board through continued efforts on purposeful education for boards, trustees and stakeholders through a variety of modes, including engagement and modeling.

### **Perspective of the public**

- Community engagement
- Credibility

As with the trustees, the public response centred on community engagement, when asked how to raise the profile of school boards as local government. Public respondents mostly addressed the importance of raising the profile of trustees during election year to include trustees at public forums. Beyond electioneering, trustees and boards need to be visible in their communities at events and through social and traditional media.

Public respondents expressed concern about the credibility of boards because of the lack of visibility as they engage in governance and the inability to collect taxes and to make decisions without the interference or support of the provincial government. As well, attracting and retaining quality candidates was viewed as an issue.

Respondents also questioned the availability of information and the transparency of board decisions. This can lead to the perception that many decisions are made in-camera, behind closed doors.

In the submission of Alberta Education to the task force, the issue of local governance was addressed in that the boards are viewed as in a position to work with local constituents. As well, the Alberta School Councils’ Association endorsed school boards as a critical form of local government.

### **Perspective of administration**

- Branding and messaging
- Respect from the province

The administrative respondents focused on the notion of branding and messaging to get the board perspective to the public. The administration expressed the concern that the government does not respect the role of the boards. This lack of respect was recently reflected in the lack of board input into how 80% of their funding was allocated to teachers’ salaries in the recent negotiations. Administrative respondents felt boards had lost authority in the recent negotiations between the ATA and province.

## **THEME 2: SCHOOL BOARDS ARE A FORM OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY**

### **Recommendations**

Board decision making processes must be informed by a broad range of constituents.

4. Along with ensuring every student in your system enjoys success, make community consultation job one for your school board. Each school board should establish an annual consultation plan setting out how and with whom it will consult as it makes decisions for students, schools and communities.
5. Open your board table to free and open debate and discussion among trustees. Welcome dissent and discourse. Write a school board policy that is supportive of individual school trustees voicing their views around the board table. Let your communities see that before you make a decision as a school board you have canvassed a breadth and depth of views and ideas. Create structures that will allow more people to participate in the work of your school board. Is the timing of your school board meeting creating barriers to public participation in your meetings? Should the school board consider moving the location of your school board meeting to make it more convenient for people in different parts of the jurisdiction to attend and participate?

The Seel and Gibbons (2012) study found that boards were spending the majority of their time in the fiduciary role of governance. The Education Act describes board responsibilities including:

- 33(c) provide, where appropriate, for engagement of parents, students, staff and the community, including municipalities and the local business community, in board matters, including the board's plans and the achievement of goals and targets within those plans
- And 34(d) engage parents, students and the community in matters related to education

Generative and strategic modes of governance are premised on the belief that boards are engaging a variety of community constituents in future thinking and using this process to inform direction through strategic planning. Boards need to be purposeful in identifying who their constituents are and engaging them in a variety of ways; through face-to-face community consultations, focus groups, surveys, one-on-one, and through social media. Generative engagement requires addressing high level questions such as, "How would you define student success?" or "What does it mean to be an engaged citizen?" and using these themes to inform board direction. The study suggested that many boards were focused on engaging parents, particularly through school councils, and were not as invitational to views of business and industry or municipal governments.

Boards should work toward providing assurance to the taxpayer that fiduciary components of the system are in order and shift to generative thinking at the corporate governance level. In short, local trustees and school boards are best positioned to build community capacity and create generative concepts that foster collective input strategies in the best interest of our students, our community and our future.

- Alberta Education

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) believes a school board, comprised of people chosen to represent local citizens in the governing of education in their communities, is a critical form of local government and feels the board should be perceived as an authentic, well-placed form of local government, and as a leader that engages their communities in education decisions and answers to their local constituents for their actions. - ASCA

Any successful organization takes its own initiative to promote its own cause. School boards need to strongly promote, on their own behalf, how they retain the "public" element of education within their system, how they reflect community perspectives within the system, and how they exercise a meaningful oversight role in ensuring that the system meets the desired ends.

- Administration

Another issue identified in the study was the difficulty presented with a representation model that may pit the interests of a trustee's ward or community against the interests of the entire board. This is particularly so in cases such as school closures. Legislation clarifies that the fiduciary responsibility of an individual trustee is one of loyalty to the corporate board and its decisions, and the Education Act requires boards to develop a code of conduct that includes reference to fiduciary duties, and also to establish appropriate dispute resolution processes in order to respond to parent/community concerns. Section 34 of the Education Act defines the responsibility of an individual "trustee to engage parents, students and the community in matters related to education". Boards will need to ensure that practices/protocols are in place to address this expectation of an individual trustee while ensuring that the trustee is able to also represent the interests of the entire division.

## **Findings**

### ***Guiding question***

The preamble to the Education Act and Sections 33 and 34 state increasing expectations for boards and trustees to engage and collaborate with parents, students, and communities, etc. How should a trustee bring forward the representative views of his/her constituents?

### **Perspective of trustees**

- Engage stakeholders
- Hear all voices
- Open and transparent communication

Trustee respondents highlighted the importance of engaging constituents to gather a variety of perspectives on key governance issues. Engagement can occur in a variety of ways and should be done in a purposeful and planned way to ensure it occurs. It is a board priority. Constituents can be engaged at school board meetings by inviting groups or ensuring board meetings are open to all unless there is a need to go in-camera (i.e., land, legal or labour). Holding district forums on their "turf" to invite feedback or networking with local municipal representatives or other institutions or agencies provides an opportunity for trustees to share the board direction or seek input. Being where the constituents "are" provides opportunities for formal and informal engagement. As well, trustees felt that just by being present in the community at local events, they will become aware of issues and concerns of constituents.

Trustees viewed that hearing the voices of all constituents was important. This included the voices of students, parents and community members. Whether constituents have children in school or not, their input should be considered. Trustees have an individual responsibility to listen to their constituents just as the board has a corporate responsibility to represent the views of the entire jurisdiction. Some individuals prefer to communicate face-to-face while others are using social media to have their voices heard or to get information. The trustee must explore a variety of social media to engage others. Trustees felt establishing protocols for communication is critical to help them ensure their constituents are in touch with the appropriate person, whether that is the board, administration or staff if they require information or assistance.

Whenever a decision is made, trustees should always ask themselves, "Should we be consulting with any stakeholders on this issue?" - *Trustee*

An elected official needs to take time to hear more than just that one or two who have an agenda of personal change and search for the quiet voices when bringing forward changes that will affect the entire district. - *Trustee*

The best way to have them involved is in a constant, anticipatory way. When they are part of seeing the issues develop and are given authentic opportunities to participate in the generation of potential solutions/initiatives, you have initiatives and solutions [that] are owned by everyone. This produces stakeholders who are involved, who have an understanding of issues, and who contribute in meaningful ways to their communities. - *Trustee*

Authentic public consultation requires dedication and work, is sometimes controversial and often messy, but it is the most effective means to demonstrate leadership, accept responsibility and accountability and raise the profile of school board governance. - *ASCA*

By adopting a strategic emphasis and using a shared leadership approach, governance teams can engage the community in an ongoing dialogue to deepen the public's understanding of issues and trends and to generate new ideas. This requires the boards to be nimble, responding to the needs of the local community and to be builders of community capacity. Further, individual trustees in the future need to build parent and community capacity in relation to the redirection of *Inspiring Education* and embrace generative and collaborative processes in the local community. - *Alberta Education*

Be visible – talk, think – act responsibly! - *Public*

Trustees expressed the importance for genuine consultation and the importance of being proactive in opening the doors to communication. It is critical to engage stakeholders early in the process – not after the decisions have already been made – and develop a relationship with your constituents before issues arise and establish your message. Trustees can listen respectfully to opinions and keep a record of constituent concerns so that constituents can be apprised of decisions through feedback loops – even those decisions that don't go their way. In addition, it is important for stakeholders to witness disagreement and discussion among board members so they understand that board decisions are soundly debated. Frustration was expressed that constituents go the MLA because they know the power of taxation and funding is with the provincial government. This can also be an opportunity to educate stakeholders about board direction or the role of the board.

### **Perspective of the public**

- Meaningful engagement with stakeholders
- Focus on the greater good
- Social media

Public respondents expressed the need for trustees and the board to engage with stakeholders by being present in the community at local events or by holding their own events in the community to invite feedback and share information. This is important every year, not just election years. It is critical that trustees look beyond the traditional venues of school council meetings to engage parents, students, seniors and others who may be interested.

Trustees need to engage in true consultation, instead of going through the motions of due diligence. They need to really listen and not be passive on issues, such as cuts to education. Open dialogue at school board meetings and engagement in debate are engaging, so limiting in-camera sessions is critical. A shared leadership approach with constituents is required to transform education. However, it must be included that frustration was expressed that boards and trustees are already engaging with constituents and the focus on board governance is a way to deflect the Ministry's lack of respect for boards back to boards.

The public believed trustees should focus on the greater good by bringing forward the views of all their constituents, without editing or judging them. The trustees should be the voice of their constituents' ideas, concerns and questions. They must balance the different views with the greater good and review all the information and engage in discussions. The greater good should focus on student success, and student achievement. Trustees need to be advocates for students and student success.

Social media was viewed as an important means to enhance communication through the use of Facebook, Twitter, and websites. To get people out to vote, it is important to engage them in conversation. It is critical for trustees to network in the community both face-to-face and digitally.

While a select few may be the most vocal and be the most engaged, boards need to more creative when trying to engage different, diverse school communities to reach the greatest amount of community members. - *Public*

In order to demonstrate relevance boards need to use the various forms of social media and other forms of communication to ensure that the public is aware of their role. There is a need for ensuring that trustees understand the various forms of social media and proper use of them. - *ASBOA*

## Perspective of administration

- Public engagement

Administrative respondents addressed the topic of community and public engagement through a variety of means as previously described, including online engagement and, in addition, town hall meetings, council of school councils meetings and meetings with town/city councils, local MLAs, ATA and Minister of Education. However, this generative engagement must be tempered with the demands on the trustees, as administration felt the increased demands for engagement could deter individuals from seeking election.

In general, administration felt trustees are doing a good job of bringing forward the views of their constituents by bringing them to the board table. Boards could develop more purposeful protocols for communication to engage communities and the electorate. The administrators did caution trustees not to get caught up in the singular concerns and drawn into the role of administration.

## THEME 3: SCHOOL BOARDS ARE CHANGE AGENTS

### Recommendations

Boards must be leaders in engaging with many organizations that touch the lives of children and youth.

6. With the goal of improving student success, identify and reach out to those in your community who share your interest in creating safe, healthy and educated communities.
7. Through the coming term, assess all initiatives through the lens of whether or not it will contribute to continuous student improvement. Use data and research to inform your decisions.
8. Lead by example as a school board. Be learners. Commit to professional development to improve as trustees and as a school board. Regularly assess your progress on this front.

An old saying is that it takes a whole village to raise a child. *Inspiring Education* suggests that student learning will benefit from the enlisting the expertise within the community to support student engagement and learning. It also suggests that both the school and community will benefit from these relationships and that a “seamless transition” to post-secondary is an important goal. We have recently witnessed the establishment of a Regional Collaborative Services delivery model as a collaborative partnership between the ministries of health, human services and education, focused on a relationship that will coordinate local supports and services for children with complex needs using a wrap-around service delivery approach and multi-disciplinary teams. Establishing relationships based upon purpose and common interests will help boards in deciding if a collaborative partnership will be beneficial.

Boards need to be the leaders of change at the local level, encouraging innovative practices that benefit students, removing barriers to innovation and working to grow individually and improve their governance practices.

*Inspiring Education* suggests that governance, “in the larger context, is the action undertaken by government in partnership with other organizations and citizens to establish and implement policy.” It is important that this relationship be one of mutual respect, with government respecting the role and authority that it has placed on the board through legislation and boards respecting the role of government in assuring its citizens (70% of taxpayers do not have children in school) that the education system is one of the very best in the world.

## **Findings**

### ***Guiding question***

How would you describe appropriate collaboration with the following agencies: Government? Municipalities? Post-secondary institutions? Business and industry? Other boards? First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities? Community agencies? Others?

### **Perspective of trustees**

- Purpose of collaboration
- Clarity of roles
- Specific relationships

Trustee respondents recognised the importance of determining the purpose for collaboration. Keeping students at the centre when contemplating collaboration with other agencies or institutions needs to be a basis for board decisions regarding collaboration. As well, mutually beneficial collaborations are best.

Developing relationships with different agencies over time is helpful when the opportunity to collaborate arises. Keeping in touch with different agencies on a regular basis helps to foster understanding of shared interests. Then defining roles is easier as participants are familiar with each other’s organizations. Boards can’t really force or legislate true collaboration, but they can work on developing the capacity to collaborate so they are ready when the opportunity arises.

Every agency or group has particular interests or needs. It is critical that boards foster relationships with agencies in a way that makes sense to the group. Municipalities are peers and school board counterparts in the community, and there are many opportunities to work together on issues of safety and community development. Strong relationships with business, industry and post-secondary institutions provide a multitude of opportunities for students. Developing trust, whether the collaboration is with government, post-secondary institutions, other boards or First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, must be based on understanding and knowledge of the group with whom the board chooses to collaborate.

### **Perspective of the public**

- Building relationship
- Increase dialogue and communication
- Expanding the circle

Before an organization approaches another organization, regardless of who they may be or represent, you must first understand why you are collaborating with them.  
- Trustee

We need to be better at inviting conversations with on and off reserve First Nations people. The key here is trust...the relationships need to be grassroots, school-by-school, area-by-area. - Trustee

Trustees need to develop understanding, empathy and respect for all players in the community. School boards need to make an effort to involve others in solving their difficult problems instead of trying to do it all themselves. Trustees need to see themselves as representatives of the community instead of defenders of the status quo. - *Public*

Begin with clear goals as to why you need to engage. Build mutual terms of reference to guide your work. Keep children at the centre of it all. Remember relationship building takes time. - *Public*

The concept of shared governance extends also to school boards appointing trustees to the board, a practice which could be very beneficial to both board and community alike, and encourage greater variety among trustee perspectives. - *ASCA*

With the support of Superintendents, School Boards have more actively engaged their communities resulting in a better understanding of the challenges faced at the local governance level and affording community stakeholders a greater sense of ownership in 'their publicly funded school system.' - *CASS*

The public respondents emphasized that focusing on building connections and relationships would, in fact, grow partnerships and opportunities to collaborate. Establishing advisory committees that reflect the diversity of the stakeholders ensures all populations are engaged.

Clearly communicating with each other about shared interests is an important on-going step. Developing protocols and plans and seizing opportunities to talk formally and informally is key to building collaboration.

In their submission, ASCA suggested expanding the circle by appointing trustees who represent additional perspectives. This could be an opportunity develop stronger relationships with agencies or under-represented populations.

### **Perspective of administration**

- Cross-agency communication

The administration focused on the importance of cross-agency communication, particularly with agencies that share similar interests. They noted that, with generative governance, collaboration happens on many levels, including joint programming, shared facilities, dual credit programming, joint ventures and co-location of agencies.

## **THEME 4: SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRS ARE LEADERS**

### **Recommendations**

As the role of governance becomes increasingly complex, board chairs must assume an enhanced role of leadership.

9. Rework your school board's "role of the board chair" policy to enable your board chair to fulfill the leadership role your school board will require as you move forward on a new approach to school board governance. Given the complex skills required, assign your board chair at least a two-year term. And provide the chair with access to the training and resources to carry out this role.
10. Designate and prepare the school board chair to be the sole spokesperson for the school jurisdiction. Too often, school boards defer this role to senior staff. To reinforce the role of the elected school board, the face of the jurisdiction must be an elected official – the school board chair.

The majority of school boards define the role of the board chair as an operational one, developing agendas with the CEO, presiding over meetings, being in regular contact with the CEO and acting as chief spokesperson for the jurisdiction. Research suggests that the role of the board chair continues to evolve in its complexity. The board chair is now being asked to be the point person able to receive and distribute messages from and represent the views of his/her board to the government, the community, ASBA and other organizations.

Today's realities of expectations for immediate response often place the board chair in the position of needing to respond without waiting for the next board meeting. Such was the case during the tripartite negotiations. The current role requires the board chair to be thoroughly familiar with provincial issues and trends, to be able to represent the views of the entire board in emerging matters and to be a facilitator of change for the board while remaining one of equals and ensuring that student success and well-being are always front and centre.

In the Seel and Gibbons (2012) study, board chairs suggested that it took time and experience in the role to gain the skills and competencies in team leadership, conflict resolution, and public speaking. Boards need to consider a longer-term appointment for their chair.

## **Findings**

### ***Guiding question***

Given the vision for transformation of education described in *Inspiring Education* and the roles and responsibilities as described in the Education Act, what do you think the role of the board chair should be in helping to lead this transformation?

### **Perspective of trustees**

- Clear role definition
- Enhance leadership skills
- Governance leadership and transformation
- Spokesperson and community connections
- Relationship with the superintendent/CEO

The perspectives of trustees regarding the role of the board chair were extensive, but key ideas did emerge in the data. The importance of clarity in the role and responsibilities of the board chair was apparent. It was also recognized that the role of the chair is shifting to require an enhanced level of skill and leadership which is required to lead transformational change. However, the trustees emphasized, even with this shift, the board chair remains one among equals. The degree of the designation of decision-making authority to the board chair was an issue that was not agreed upon, but was recognized, as it is important to respond to issues in a timely manner.

Trustees expressed that the board chair is expected to model strong leadership skills in the transformation of governance and education. The relationship with fellow trustees was cited as critical as the board chair should inspire, grow, lead and listen to trustees. One key skill that was identified by many respondents was the role of the board chair as a facilitator of dialogue to bring out the gifts and talents of all trustees and ensure all voices are heard at the board table. Trustees, administration and stakeholders must be valued contributors to the decision-making process.

The board chair should be given the authority to make decisions on behalf of the school division in order to relay board information in a timely way. The board chair should operate from a set of policies and guidelines that reflect the mandate and culture of his/her board. We lose a tremendous amount of time and momentum because boards have to go back to their table to pass motions before anything public can be said. Believe in your board chair and guide your board chair to speak on behalf of yourselves.

- Trustee

The board chair's understanding of generative governance, along with the traditional strategic and fiduciary responsibilities, is important in the transformation of governance. As well, the board chair should be able to articulate the board's core principles to guide the decision-making process and the development of policy, rather than being policy driven. The board chair should model openness and encourage generative thought. Through building trust and consensus, the board chair should encourage imaginative and innovative solutions to transform education and improve learning for students, rather than focus on gatekeeping or controlling information.

Trustees felt the board chair has an important role to play as spokesperson, communication link or point of contact for the board, but within the confines of the representing the will of the board. Key messages should be discussed at the board table in readiness for when the board chair may be required to respond to issues. Trustees recognized the importance of having a member of the board who can provide the perspective of the board to government, community, business and industry, agencies and institutions and act as a liaison between outside groups and the board, bringing back information to the board as well as providing information to stakeholders. Building networks is key to transformation.

The relationship of the board chair with the CEO was seen as important as the CEO and board chair, along with the board, share responsibility for leadership. The board chair should model for trustees the role of the board and how to work with administration.

### **Perspective of the public**

- Governance leadership and transformation
- Connection to community leaders
- Board member
- Spokesperson

Some public respondents felt the board chair's role may not need to change, as it is already a position of leadership, while others thought it could be enhanced. The board chair should lead by example and be respectful of all stakeholders and fellow trustees. The board chair may also have a role as a visionary, innovator and mentor in the transformation of education.

It was clear that the public felt the role of the board chair and the board was not to "micro-manage", but rather to focus on the bigger picture of board governance and transformation. Respondents recognized the importance of the board chair to ensure all voices are heard and to ensure that questions are being asked of administration by the board and build consensus, not just rubber-stamp administrative decisions.

The public respondents raised the importance of the board chair's connection to the community and community leaders. As a member of the board, the board chair should not be viewed as more important than any other trustee. Trustees also must be visible to the community, but the board chair may take a leadership role in engaging the community.

The Chair serves as conduit between the community, stakeholders and the Board including organizations of which the Board is a member. The Chair is responsible for knowing and understanding the Board's policies and the Board's position on issues. The Chair does not make decisions on behalf of the Board. The Chair is held accountable by trustees to fairly represent the expressed views of the Board. - *Trustee*

It is important that board chairs are seen advocates for the education system both locally and provincially while supporting administration with clear direction. - *Trustee*

Don't be afraid to question the superintendent's recommendations or discuss alternative approaches to issues and challenges. - *ASCA Submission*

Their leadership skills should include the ability to encourage frank discussion with respect for all parties involved. - *Public*

As the official spokesperson of the Board, the Chair is in a unique position to speak at events in the community, provide key messages to the media, and provide inspiration to the internal audience of staff. The Chair has the ability to champion the transformation in his or her local community.

- *Administrator*

In the generative mode, the CEO role requires someone who is open-minded, accepting of group process and consensus, adaptable to multiple sources of leadership, and comfortable with ambiguity, conflict and group dynamics. The generative role of the CEO requires more flexibility and open-mindedness from the CEO to share organizational leadership with the Board (Donahue, J. D. & Zechauser, 2012, p.48).

The role of the board chair as spokesperson for the jurisdiction, rather than the CEO, was emphasized. It is important the board chair understands the board's position on issues because of the difficult balance between communicating in a timely manner and ensuring the will of the board is being communicated – not the will of the board chair or the CEO.

### **Perspective of administration**

- Effective board practices
- Governance leadership

The administration focused on the role of the board chair as a leader who deals not just with the smooth running of the board meetings, but also as champion of the transformation of education. The board chair is viewed as pivotal in focusing the board agenda on policy and ensuring administrative procedures are in place to assist in the movement towards the transformation of education. Working collaboratively, the board chair and trustees gather input from stakeholders and set the mission, vision and values for the jurisdiction. As well, the board chair is viewed as working with senior leaders, particularly the CEO, to ensure they have the leadership skills and knowledge to lead the transformation of education with the board.

## **THEME 5: THE CEO IS THE SCHOOL BOARD'S ONE EMPLOYEE**

### **Recommendations**

The role of the CEO is to advise the board and take direction from it to implement the board's vision and legislative mandate.

11. With a focus on improving student success, the school board and superintendent should work together to align and assign work and responsibility with a view to clarifying what is in the superintendent's bailiwick, what falls to the school board and most importantly, what initiatives will be shared work.

The new Education Act makes clear that the superintendent/CEO reports to the board and the board has the responsibility to:

*Recruit the superintendent and entrust the day-to-day management of the school division to the staff through the superintendent*

Education Act, Section 33(1)(j).

Leading change of Alberta's education system, as described in *Inspiring Education*, will require boards and their CEOs to work as a first team, each with specific responsibilities as described in legislation and policy, and supportive, integrated responsibilities in the areas of strategic planning, generative engagement and advocacy. Boards must hold their CEO accountable for all aspects of performance of the system, especially student achievement.

If school board governance is to be successful in affecting the informed transformation of our education system as described in *Inspiring Education*, the shared leadership of board and CEO in affecting change is vital. The Education Act not only clarifies that the CEO is the board's one employee, entrusted with managing the day-to-day operations of the division, but suggests that "education is a shared responsibility that requires collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential" (Education Act preamble).

Broadly defined, the board's role is that of co-creating the mission/vision and providing direction for a jurisdiction focused on student success by establishing foundational values, beliefs and principles; identifying key outcomes for the system and indicators of success; monitoring results and reporting to the community and government regarding assurance and accountability. Broadly defined, the role of the CEO is focused on implementation of this direction by providing data analysis and research; defining strategies, interventions and measures; and reporting on results to the community and government through the board. Board self-evaluation and CEO performance assessment processes should be used to clarify these roles.

It is in the areas of generative engagement and strategic planning as described in *Inspiring Education* as "governance shifts" that the board and CEO need to work together as a first team. Not everything about a relationship can be defined in policy and boards, together with their CEOs, will need to establish practices and protocols that define the first team relationship, asking the questions: "Is this the work of governance? Is this the work of administration? Is this the shared leadership of a first team?"

## **Findings**

### ***Guiding question***

The Education Act clarifies the role of the superintendent/CEO with respect to the recruitment, reporting to the board and being entrusted with the day-to-day management of the jurisdiction. What do you think the relationship of the board and its superintendent/CEO should be?

### **Perspective of trustees**

- Clarity of the roles
- Board as employer and expectations
- Electorate and long-term direction
- Trust and the first team

The primary concern of the trustee respondents was ensuring clarity in the role of superintendent/CEO and the role of the board. Each board has its own model of governance, so the roles and responsibilities may vary to a degree. How boards define roles cannot be governed through provincial regulations, but must be developed at the local level. Generally, the role of the board is governance and the role of the CEO is administrative. However, generative governance requires a generative approach to system leadership, so this relationship will transform as well.

Superintendents and school boards form the 'first team' at the local level and the unity and collaboration that exists between them is often a key determiner of the success of a school jurisdiction. - CASS

It should be clear what the roles of the Board and Superintendent are. This may require spending time reviewing these roles and how the two meld together to make a successful jurisdiction. This may be something that needs to be reviewed annually to make sure the roles are always clear and respected. - Trustee

If one is to be transformative, one needs to be comfortable moving beyond 'turf protection' or guarding 'sandboxes'. While respecting that the responsibilities of boards and chiefs differ, there needs to be a transition towards a more imaginative way of working together to achieve results. This may 'blur' boundaries, but will lead to a more effective relationship, and better long-term results. - *Trustee*

I believe it is incumbent upon every elected official to ask questions, set parameters, and expect to be kept informed about issues and projects happening throughout the district or division. Thorough discussions and questioning at the board table assures the public that issues, financial appropriations, and new projects have been looked at from all angles before being approved. - *Trustee*

The board must work to have mutual trust and respect of and for the superintendent. If a board does not trust that the day-to-day operations are reflecting their will, then things will go bad fast. - *Trustee*

School boards are elected to represent the views, values and expectations of the communities they serve. As it stands now, school boards, all too often, rubber stamp the recommendations of the administration and superintendent, rather than articulate the expectations of the community, ensure the district initiatives are in the best interest of the student and ensure that the desired educational outcomes are articulated and achieved. - *Trustee*

The board is the employer of the CEO and, as such, must set out clear expectations of what it expects of its employee. The board must be very engaged in securing the services of a CEO who can lead educational transformation, participate in the strategic and generative modes of governance and have relational skills to be the lead educator of the jurisdiction. The CEO must have a clear view of the principles, values, mission and vision of the board. Likewise, the board must respect the professionalism of the CEO and entrust the day-to-day operations to the CEO. Issues such as personnel are not the responsibility of the board and it can be problematic if the board steps outside their area of responsibility, even with the best of intentions. Rather than micro-manage, the board needs to establish policies that provide for accountability and/or assurance practices to monitor the operations of the jurisdiction, and hold the CEO accountable through evaluation processes. At the same time, the CEO must keep the board appropriately informed on issues and provide options for the board to address issues through governance processes.

The board represents the electorate and has a responsibility to set the long-term direction and priorities for the jurisdiction that takes into consideration the views of their stakeholders. The board ensures the CEO is working with his/her administrative team to carry out the will of the board. Generative dialogue that includes the CEO about the direction and implementation of board direction is critical.

Most respondents emphasized that trust is at the heart of the relationship between the board and the CEO. This is achieved through open and honest communication. As well, mutual respect for each other's roles and expertise is foundational. Related to trust was the notion of the board and CEO as being each other's first team. They need to work as a team – as a unit. Together they hold each other accountable for their individual roles and responsibilities and keep all levels of the organization focused on the long-term objectives. If the goal is truly generative governance, then exploration, influence and direction setting needs to be widely distributed to all levels of the organization, including students, staff, parents and community.

### **Perspective of the public**

- Role clarity and accountability
- Communication and trust

As with the trustees, it was important for the public to have a clear understanding of the role of the board and the role of the trustee. Most understood that in general, the board dealt with governance and long-term direction and the CEO dealt with administration. Frustration was expressed with the boards' seeming lack of ability to hold CEOs accountable or boards rubber-stamping CEOs' decisions or recommendations.

The public identified communication between the board and the CEO and mutual trust as a key element in school board and CEO relations. It was important that the board and CEO were seen to be acting as a team. Visibility of both the CEO and the board were raised as important for communication with stakeholders in the community. How the board communicates with their public is also related to role clarity.

The “face”, “voice” and key decision-maker of the school district and the “gatekeeper” of the school board appears, to many, to be the superintendent. While it is recognized that the superintendent is an employee of the elected school board, examples of confusion regarding who is the key decision-maker include the superintendent always quoted in the media about school board decisions/priorities; parents of community members unable to speak with board members or make presentations to the board without superintendent approval; boards’ rubber stamping decisions of the superintendent; board members referring questions/concerns from constituents to the superintendent; superintendent policy preventing trustees from attending school council meetings. - ASCA

Board needs to recognize that the Superintendent is the CEO and chief education leader. There needs to be mutual understanding of everyone’s roles. Depending on the governance model, each should stay out of each other’s sandbox. There also needs to be accountability and oversight on a regular basis. Superintendent evaluation should be done every year. Roles should be clearly defined in Board policy. - Administration

## Perspective of administration

- Clarity of roles

Administration was also interested in role clarity. Although the role of the board was noted, the focus of most respondents was on the role of the CEO/superintendent. The relationship between the school board and CEO is seen as crucial to getting things done. CEOs seem to be caught in the middle between the school board and Alberta Education. Sometimes direction from Alberta Education can be in conflict with the priorities of the school board.

## THEME 6: TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ASBA

Although not described specifically in the task force’s terms of reference, the task force was aware of the role of the ASBA in providing leadership and support for boards and the implications of the preceding recommendations. The task force requests that ASBA consider these recommendations as it receives and responds to the entire report.

### Recommendations

12. Develop and offer a curriculum for all trustees that reflects this new direction in school board governance. Make this part of a voluntary trustee certification program. The more educated a trustee, the more empowered he/she becomes in that role.
13. Offer specific professional development to school board chairs, specifically designed to reinforce their enhanced leadership role.
14. Work with CASS and ASBOA to ensure senior leaders have a greater understanding of – and are ready to support – the evolving role of school boards and school board chairs.

### Findings

#### Guiding questions

##### Support

Given your views provided in the previous questions, what do think the role of ASBA should be in supporting school boards as they lead this transformation?

##### Voice

Do you feel it would be useful for the task force to consider, and recommend back to the ASBA members, potential adjustments that may improve ASBA’s effectiveness as a provincial voice on behalf of school boards?

### Perspective of trustees

#### Support

The trustee respondents indicated that the ASBA could be a unifying organization that supports the diversity of boards in the province. As well, the ASBA could provide a forum for dialogue and healthy debate and lead the discussion of the transformation of education and engage in dialogue about best practices. It is important to understand boards do not act in isolation and what they do affects other boards.

ASBA provides a perceived neutral ground for all school boards to come together to discuss educational issues, and test the educational climate of the province. ASBA provides the leadership and voice for those decisions once they are formed by the collective group at the provincial level. ASBA provides the resources and research to help boards as they struggle with their transformation and address the needs of their local community. In essence, ASBA's role is the same as each district's but on a provincial level. It is democracy...it is messy...and it is needed. - *Trustee*

ASBA will have to transform into an organization like the ATA that provides high level expertise and guidance to Boards on a variety of topics whereby Boards can use their new natural person powers to avoid government bureaucracy to get things done, like schools refurbished and modulars bought or leased from private contractors without having to go through the government begging process. - *Trustee*

The ASBA does need authority to respond to issues in a timely fashion. There will always be government issues that need to be dealt with quickly and so there needs to be a conversation about how ASBA can take a stronger role without diminishing the importance of local decision making. We will continue to be cut out of situations unless we can become more nimble. - *Trustee*

The ASBA provides experts who support boards in a variety of ways. The ASBA is skilled in gathering data, generating ideas and disseminating information efficiently. The ASBA can provide templates for board policy that will need to be developed for the Education Act. They could act as a clearinghouse for sharing board initiatives. The ASBA is at present a networking organization and membership driven.

The ASBA can provide professional development for trustees, board chairs and boards to assist them with the transformation of education and governance and the implementation of the Education Act. The ASBA could provide professional development on a variety of topics, including trends in education, running meetings, communication, social media, the role of the trustee and board governance, *Inspiring Education* and the Education Act.

### Voice

The majority of trustee respondents believed that on critical matters, the ASBA needs the ability to act quickly. There must be a mechanism to get feedback from boards in a timely manner. Progress has been made in the media as the ASBA is the “go-to organization” on education issues.

The ASBA could provide a forum for discussion and the development of provincial positions and common school board messages. This would provide an opportunity for boards to speak with a common/united voice through ASBA like teachers are able to do through the ATA. This may not be possible because of the diversity of boards. School board strength comes from “championing our local autonomy.” Boards should listen to their constituents and parents and that might not be in agreement with their CEOs.

If board chairs were able to speak on behalf of the boards, the ASBA could work with them to develop common messaging. This is a role that needs to be examined. Boards and the ASBA speak on behalf of students and parents in addition to constituents.

The ASBA needs to be knowledgeable about transformation so the views they bring are credible. There is an opportunity for the ASBA to collaborate with the government to ensure the effective transformation of education and governance. The ASBA can advocate for boards at the provincial level by engaging with the Minister on critical issues.

Boards must decide if they want the ASBA to be their voice. Not all trustees agree this is possible. Some boards are “playing both sides of the fence”. Some trustees think the ASBA must work to mend the split between the public and separate, rural and urban viewpoints. Concern was raised that the ASBA often reflects the views of the CEO, not the board.

### Perspective of the public

#### Support

ASBA could lead boards through transformation. There will be a lot of work to do with the proclaiming of the Education Act and the ASBA could support boards as they review local policy to ensure alignment. It could provide expertise, best practices, professional development, training, support and advocacy.

I think absolutely we need to consider potential adjustments to our provincial voice. There are many boards who see us as not strong enough because we are concerned with overstepping ASBA mandate or interfering with the local decision making. I think that most boards (not all) would like to see some out of the box thinking on [how] we might manage our provincial voice. The new advocacy model has been an important positive first step towards a stronger voice.  
- Trustee

At the end of the day it is the local board that is held accountable by ratepayers and stakeholders to deliver the desired outcomes of the community. The ASBA's role should be one of support.  
- Trustee

In my experience the ASBA has generally done a good job representing the perspective of Boards and advocating for education. ASBA can provide some discipline and professionalism for Boards to help them make informed decisions. Transformation will bring changes and Boards will need information and resources to help provide thoughtful input. ASBA can facilitate that and be the main force to be sure the Minister and Ministry hear. The ATA cannot be the most powerful voice at the table.  
- Public

## Voice

ASBA could ensure all voices are heard, including teachers, parents and students and communities. The ASBA could be the voice of public education and counter the strength of the ATA. The government could take the ASBA more seriously. The ASBA could better utilize the Zones to represent the boards. Although most respondents considered there is a role for the ASBA in representing school boards, not all respondents endorsed the ASBA as the voice of school boards.

## Perspective of administration

### Support

ASBA can provide support to boards regarding transformation initiatives. ASBA can assist boards in raising awareness of brand and message and can share best practices.

### Voice

There was no strong agreement on whether or not ASBA could provide one voice for school boards. Respondents identified the strengths of having a strong provincial voice and the difficulty of achieving this when boards must also be autonomous.

## Moving forward

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As advocates for the success and well-being of children and youth across the province, school boards are well positioned to champion the education system in Alberta. School boards are local government. Trustees are locally elected representatives. In leading and responding to change, boards must continually examine their own governance practices to ensure effective stewardship of resources, connection to the communities they serve, and above all, that the needs of students in their care are always placed front and centre. The Education Act and its regulations will require boards to revise policy and will also provide an opportunity to re-examine practices and the board's leadership role.

Working together within their own boards, with other boards, with strong leadership in governance and administration, and supported by the ASBA, school boards can deliver on the call to action. As the lyrics of Queen remind us, "*We are the champions.*"

Without structural change in authority, government will not truly value ASBA's voice. The same can be said for CASS. The ATA has power and subsequent voice with the government because of their ability to sway public opinion. - *Administration*

The trustees collectively and individually owe a public duty to carry out their responsibilities and the work of the Board in good faith and with reasonable diligence. They are elected for that purpose. They need not be of like mind. They may hold strong and conflicting views. They may debate with vigour, and occasionally with rancour. There is no rule requiring trustees to like each other. But they do have one overarching responsibility – a shared public duty to advance the work of the Board to which they had the privilege of being elected. - *Justice McMahon, Calgary RCSSD No. 1 v. O'Malley, 2006*

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## Appendices

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### Appendix I: Task force members

Jacquie Hansen	ASBA, President
Cheryl Smith	ASBA, Vice-President
Nan Bartlett	ASBA Northern: Chair, Peace River S. Div. #10 Zone 1 Chair
Mary Martin	ASBA Metro: Chair, Calgary Catholic
Dave Price	ASBA Southern: Chair, Golden Hills S. Div. #75
Emery Dossdall	Former Deputy Minister, Education BC
Bob Hawkesworth	Former AUMA President
Mike Percy	University of Alberta: Business
David Anderson	ASBA, Executive Director
Jim Gibbons	ASBA, Senior Education Advisor
Susan Lundrigan	ASBA, Communications
Scott McCormack	ASBA, Special Initiatives

### Appendix II: Stakeholder participants

ASBA member school board trustees  
Members of the public  
Jurisdiction administration  
Alberta Education  
Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)  
Alberta School Business Officials Association (ASBOA)  
College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)

### Appendix III: Overview of literature and documents

Through the journey from the early days of Alberta's Commission on Learning (ACOL, 2003) to the on-going *Inspiring Education* process and the anticipated proclamation of the new Education Act in 2015, the Government of Alberta has engaged in extensive consultations with Albertans. Albertans have expressed the need for a new vision for education in Alberta and government has responded with a vision and policy to support transformation, including board governance.

The recommendations of *Fundamentals of Effective Governance* (ASBA Governance Task Force, 2010) and *Governance in Transformation: Alberta School Board Chairs' Perspectives* (Seel and Gibbons, 2012) also indicate a need for transformation of governance models to reestablish school boards as local government. This Alberta based research is supported by contemporary educational research.

## *Inspiring Education – vision and policy*

*Inspiring Education: A dialogue with Albertans* (2010) describes a vision for public education in Alberta in 2030. Included in this vision is the suggestion that governance should ensure:

- A broad representation of stakeholders to participate in governance and decision making
- Flexibility and discretion at the local level; less top-down, more consensual and principle-based
- Governors strive for excellence and are supported with training to achieve it
- Accountabilities for learning excellence should be clear
- Where institutions and agencies share a common purpose regarding the welfare of children, collaboration should occur

Shifts in governance practices to better align with policy:



©Alberta Education. *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report*. 2010

As Minister Johnson introduced the Education Act to the fall Legislature, he described the shift in an October 23, 2012 press release. The legislation will allow for more local decision making by giving school boards more flexibility, while reinforcing their obligation to work closely with communities and post-secondary institutions. “As the name of the legislation suggests, we’ve shifted the focus from the school and the system to the student and his or her education,” Johnson said. “The focus needs to go beyond just the four walls of the school and involve the community in making sure that all students get the best possible education.”

The Education Act was passed in December 2012 and a process for development of its regulations is underway. It is planned that the Act and its regulations will be proclaimed in September 2015.

Section 33 of the Education Act describes the fiduciary, strategic and generative responsibilities of school boards: ensuring the safety and well-being of students and staff, stewardship of resources, and that programs and supports are in place that support each student in achieving his/her potential; establishing governance and organizational structures that promote student success, including goals and targets, and evaluating their effectiveness; and engaging and collaborating with students, parents, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, business and industry and community-based agencies to effectively address the needs of all students.

The Education Act brings to life the vision for education that thousands of Albertans shared with us through *Inspiring Education*.  
- Minister Johnson as quoted in October 23, 2012 media release

The importance of the transformation of governance is highlighted in the Education Business Plan 2013-16 Goal Four: Engaged and effective governance as:

The education system demonstrates collaboration and engagement with Aboriginal communities, business, industry, and the public. Students and communities have access to safe and healthy learning environments.

The Results-Based Budgeting Act (2012) will also place governance under greater scrutiny with respect to the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of programs in achieving desired outcomes. The education system will be examined under these three lenses over the next two years.

### **Research informed governance and practice**

Asking meaningful questions is at the heart of addressing the shift in governance from rules based, operations focused, central influence and accountability to bureaucracy to principles-based, governance teams, local direction accountable for learning and excellence as outlined in *Inspiring Education*.

What kind of governance school boards should practice has been under consideration for nearly 40 years in jurisdictions in Canada and around the world. Common areas of concern centre on what it means to be an effective governor and an effective governance body within the context of providing public education. At the root of the concerns is the fundamental question of what is meant by “governance.” School boards have characteristics of both government and nonprofit organizations—they bridge the worlds of the provincial government and local communities at the level of the individual citizen.

Complex challenges are raised as school boards consider: ‘to whom are we responsible?’ ‘what is governing?’ and ‘what is it we are governing?’ The final question moves the dialogue from fiduciary and strategic modes of governance to generative modes of governance. Boards move from a focus on budget to planning to deeper inquiry and new ideas as they balance their attention amongst these modes of governance (Chait, Ryan & Taylor, 2005).

The ASBA Governance Task Force report, *Fundamentals of Effective Governance* (2010) and the *Governance in Transformation: Alberta School Board Chairs’ Perspectives* (Seel & Gibbons, 2012) both used current research on governance to inform their studies on school board governance. The 2010 ASBA Governance Task Force developed a framework of four duties to guide school boards while Seel & Gibbons (2012) described five dimensions of governance. Each study informs the challenge Alberta school boards are facing in the transformation of school governance.

Governance must make learners and the learning experience its core concern, always asking: what is in the best interests of the child?  
- *Inspiring Education: A dialogue with Albertans* (2010)

### *Fundamentals of Effective Governance*

The 2010 ASBA Governance Task Force engaged in the dialogue on effective school board governance through a combination of research and discussion. The 2010 ASBA Governance Task Force compiled the *Fundamentals of Effective Governance* (2010) report that acknowledged the necessity for the responsibilities of school boards to expand from a primary focus on the fiduciary mode to include both strategic and generative modes of governance.

They suggested school boards are accountable to both the public of Alberta as ‘owners’ of the education system, as well as accountable to the students, parents, community members and the public as ‘customers’ of the education system. In the report they referenced *The Essential School Board Book: Better Governance in the Age of Accountability* (Walser, 2009), which describes four duties that are common elements or fundamentals of effective governance, including:

- Duty 1: Establish and promote ownership of the district’s vision and mission
- Duty 2: Articulate expected district results and monitor progress
- Duty 3: Create conditions for achievement of the district’s vision, values, and expected results through effective use of board authority
- Duty 4: Ensure a community-wide climate of commitment, respect and trust

Although these duties could be used as a framework for effective governance, the task force recognised the local nature of board governance in the application of the framework and the importance of flexibility to serve local and unique needs.

### *Governance in Transformation: Alberta School Board Chairs’ Perspective*

Seel and Gibbons (2012) conducted an extensive study of perceptions of Alberta school board chairs regarding the transformation of governance being brought about through legislative changes. The chairs of school boards were asked how they perceived the governance role of their board up to October 2012 and how they anticipated the roles and responsibilities of their school board to change with the anticipated new legislation.

The benchmark study, *Governance in Transformation: Alberta School Board Chairs’ Perspective* (2012), highlighted five dimensions of school board governance and the challenges presented by moving toward the governance shifts identified in *Inspiring Education*:

1. Role Ambiguity
  - Ambiguity about the role of the board and trustee
  - Governance and management
  - Clarity on the role of the chair
  - Ambiguity about the role(s) of the public
  - Representation: ward interests versus jurisdiction interests
  - Erosion of board powers
  - Autonomy of school boards
  - Relevance of school boards

2. Public Engagement
  - Broad community engagement
  - Special interest groups
3. Optimism toward change
  - Boards well on their way
  - The need for transformational change
  - Preservation of core values/beliefs
  - Board chairs as champions
  - Uncertainty, doubt, skepticism regarding change
4. Understanding governance
  - Administrative bias
  - Absence of a governance mindset
5. Boundary Spanning
  - Moving toward defining a “governance space”
  - Challenging the status quo

The trustee and school board will have to develop the capacity – already evidenced by the actions of school boards – to become active boundary spanners.  
- Seel (2007)

The main lines of transformative activity that school boards need to engage in seems to be the following: making symbolic boundaries and related processes more permeable; addressing the power imbalance; and changing organizational culture.  
- Seel & Gibbons (2012)

The study concludes that much is to be done in achieving the shifts in school board governance as described in *Inspiring Education: A dialogue with Albertans* (2010).

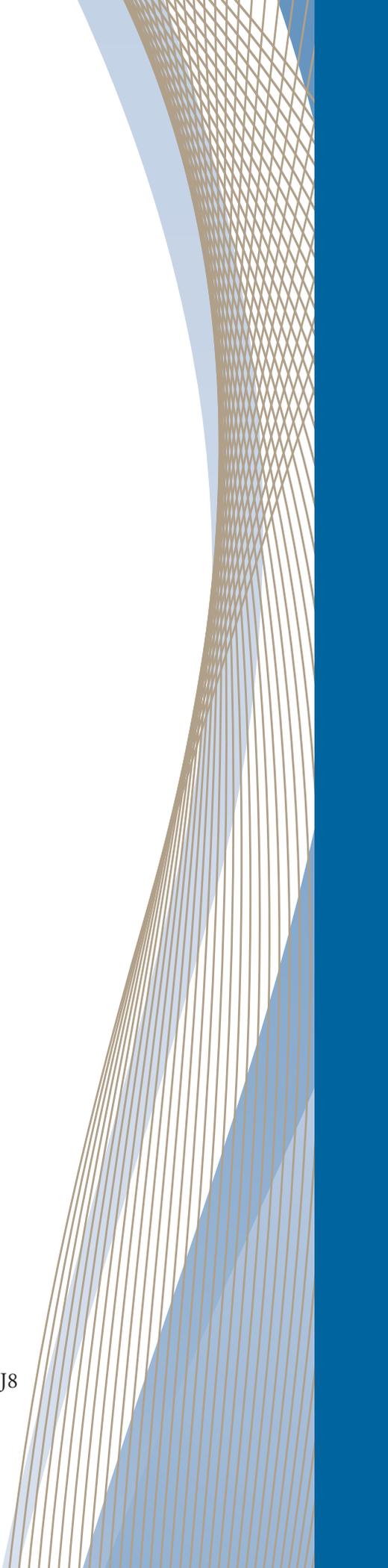
By introducing legislation that compels governance reform across all 61 school boards in the province of Alberta, the Minister of Education is taking a bold step to ensure broader stakeholder engagement in public education that is somewhat unsettling for the majority of school boards. As school boards work to meet the required changes, they will have to address the symbolic boundaries that define the current governance culture. This difficult work could result in improved relations as the trustees, government officials, and other stakeholders learn to span boundaries rather than defend them.

Both studies reference the limited research available on school board governance. Most research on board governance is directed at corporate boards or not-for-profit boards. Although Seel and Gibbons (2012) provide a thorough critique of the available scholarly literature, there is an opportunity for Alberta school boards to inform the wider education community with continued research into their transformational journey and their renewed emphasis as local government.









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