



## Why school boards matter

Recent events in British Columbia's public education system have again focused attention on the role of locally elected school boards. While we may not always agree with decisions made by school boards, they are democratically elected to serve and be responsible to their local communities. That democratic tradition should never be undermined by eliminating elections or by moving responsibility from elected representatives to provincially appointed bureaucrats.

## Top 10 reasons to maintain locally elected school boards in BC

- 1. Community influence:** For more than a century, school boards have provided communities with the ability to shape their public education systems at the local level. Democratically elected school trustees can represent the community's profile and needs to the provincial government.
- 2. Advocacy:** Local school boards have the potential to be the most informed and credible advocates for public education in their communities.
- 3. Strengthening communities:** Trustees can make decisions that protect neighbourhood schools from cuts and closures and strengthen their role as community hubs.
- 4. Accountability:** Democratically elected school boards are accountable to the communities they serve in a way that politically appointed bureaucrats never are.
- 5. Consultation:** Parents, teachers, students, and community members need locally elected school boards as accessible venues for the resolution of local issues. The ability of parents and other community members to have direct conversations with their elected trustees means that concerns and opportunities get a fair hearing.
- 6. Protection of the public system:** Trustees can help safeguard students and parents from ongoing attempts to commercialize and privatize education in BC.
- 7. Local decisions for local needs:** At the governance level, school trustees are best equipped to learn about the specific needs of children and families in their communities, and to determine how resources should be allocated.
- 8. Representing and ensuring diversity:** The diversity of our communities is often reflected in the range of trustees elected, and they can serve as models for inclusive institutions, as well as helping boards act in the interests of the increasingly diverse needs of BC's students.
- 9. Ensuring equity:** Local school boards are able to balance allocation of resources to minimize disparities between schools and maximize equity.
- 10. Building strong working relationships:** Local school boards are able to ensure the positive working relationships that are fundamental to a thriving school system.

# What challenges do school boards face?

## **Loss of control**

For decades, BC's school boards have had their powers reduced through the loss of local taxation powers, the move from local to provincial bargaining, amalgamations of districts, and the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) being made the employer's bargaining agent. In 2014, BCPSEA's trustee reps were fired and replaced by a one-person board.

## **Threat of re-organization/elimination**

For years, it has been suggested that local school boards might be replaced with regional authorities, as in BC's health sector. This would reduce public access to the decision-makers capable of addressing students' real needs.

## **Chronic underfunding/downloading of costs**

The easiest way to weaken school boards is to underfund them, while downloading more costs and responsibilities onto them. With less ability to meet their mandates, boards have been forced to represent the provincial government to the community instead of vice-versa.

The few school boards that chose to take on the government by submitting budgets of their actual needs have been fired, such as the Cowichan School Board in 2012, and the school boards need adequate, stable, and predictable funding that meets the actual needs of the students, parents, and those who work in their district.

## **Privatization, corporatization, and fundraising**

Over the past decade, funding for private schools grew by 92% while funding for public schools grew by only 19%. As well, school boards faced a push for "efficiencies" by centralizing and/or eliminating educational services, insidious corporatization of public schools by companies seeing many millions of dollars of potential profit in schools, and ever-increasing demands on parents to fundraise for what used to be considered basics.

## What can you do to help preserve school boards?

- Talk to family and friends about the need to maintain democratically elected school boards.
- Write letters of support, attend events, and otherwise participate in public dialogue on the future of school boards.
- Contact your MLA to voice your support for school boards.
- Ask candidates in the upcoming provincial election what they will do to support and enhance the role of school boards in our province.
- Encourage parents, students, and community organizations to take supportive actions in your district. You can ask trustees what would be helpful in this regard.

**The role and mandate of school boards is an issue that impacts the broader community, not just trustees and the Ministry of Education. Everyone in the community has a stake in public education, because we all benefit from a strong and stable public school system that is equitable, accessible, and supports success for all students.**



A message from the BC Teachers' Federation