

The BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) offers this submission to the Minister of Education on behalf of British Columbia's 60 public Boards of Education.

BCSTA has represented BC's publicly-elected Boards of Education for more than a century. We serve all 60 Boards, providing professional development, communications, legal services, and policy support. We represent the interests of Boards of Education, working with the Ministry of Education on their behalf.

As co-governors of BC's public education system, Boards of Education support the Core Review's "overarching goal of ensuring the best possible use of government resources and respect for the interests of taxpayers." Boards of Education are continually looking for opportunities to maximize resources to support student achievement and to ensure that their operations are as efficient as possible. BCSTA views the Core Review as an important opportunity to work with government to not only identify possible efficiencies, but also to be forward-looking to strengthen the success of the current system.

LOCAL Matters in EDUCATION

LOCAL BUDGETS

Boards of Education take their fiduciary responsibilities very seriously. Under Section 111 of the School Act, Boards of Education are required to annually submit balanced budgets and maintain control over expenditures. Each year, local Boards of Education engage in extensive consultations to identify goals and needs for their communities and stakeholders. Local Boards tailor their consultation processes and resulting budgets to best meet the needs and expectations of their communities.

It is well-documented that increasing education expectations and costs have placed enormous strain on local budgets. Operations are continually impacted by inflationary pressures from rising energy, transportation, infrastructure, and labour costs. Boards have worked hard to minimize the impact of these pressures on students. Operational and administrative costs have been reduced where possible and many Boards are participating in shared service arrangements.

However, Boards express concern that ongoing reductions in support services, school and district-based leadership, and infrastructure will have long-term negative impacts on student achievement and the health of the public education system overall.



The need for increased education funding was most recently acknowledged by the 2014 Budget Consultation Report by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. After hearing submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, the Committee recommended that the government:

- Provide sufficient funding for the K-12 system to address cost increases for school districts (e.g. rising Hydro rates)
- Develop a comprehensive capital plan for educational facilities – aging facilities, increased maintenance, seismic upgrades

- Increase funding for trades and technology in K-12
- Review increasing demands on school district budgets for students with special needs

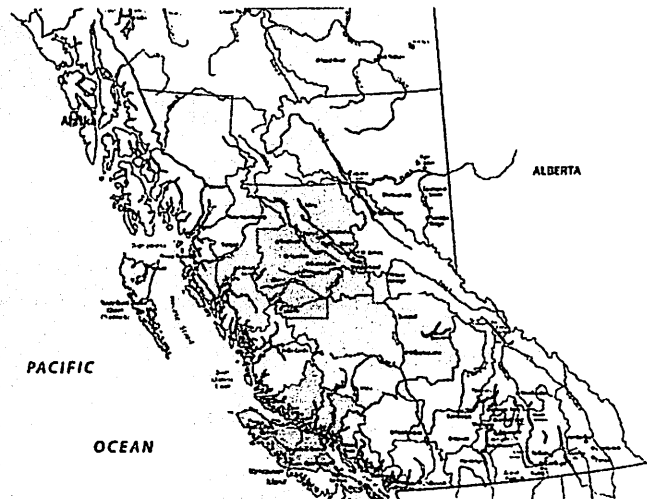
In addition to managing the impact of current funding shortages, it is critical that we pay attention to the type of education system required to prepare students for success throughout the 21st century. Presently, there are many factors at play that will challenge our education system. All levels of the system must contend with emerging trends in how education is delivered, the integration of technology, increasing community diversity, and changing expectations of students and parents. While it is true that the solutions to these challenges are not only dependent on funding, implementing new models of education will undoubtedly cost more.

A misconception held by some is that Boards of Education are holding surplus funds that should be used to support daily operations. Some will end their fiscal year in a positive position. However, it is incorrect to suggest that Boards are sitting on large reserves of cash. Surpluses are intentionally reserved to support special programs and non-capital improvements. They also serve as contingency funds to ensure stability in program delivery, because budgets are affected by many variables throughout the year.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The regionalization/amalgamation of Boards of Education is an idea that is occasionally considered by some as a panacea for the challenges and costs that come with local representation. Those holding this view suggest that Boards of Education are an expensive and ineffective level of governance that should be eliminated entirely, or regionalized similar to Provincial Health Authorities. However, this belief is both an economic and political fallacy.

In 2013, BCSTA commissioned an external report to examine the financial implications of restructuring Boards of Education on a regional basis. The report was extensive in nature and focused on the governance and senior administration savings that might result from amalgamating the current 60 Boards of Education into six regions. It considered the costs of trustee stipends, Board-related expenses, and the replacement of the



existing senior district staffing model with administrative structures similar to Provincial Health Authorities.

BCSTA would be pleased to provide the Ministry of Education with the details of the report, but, briefly put, the conclusion was that overall the savings and operational efficiencies that would be gained are insignificant. The province-wide savings of amalgamating from sixty elected Boards to six regional structures would be only \$6 million overall. Put in context, this is approximately 0.1% of the entire education block; or 1% of the operating budget for the province's largest school district; or just 0.2% of the funds the Ministry expects to spend when it completes its school seismic upgrade program. The potential savings are small because the vast majority of public education costs – the number of teachers, schools, and related operational costs— would not be reduced by amalgamation. Further, there would be significant up-front costs required to merge district operations and administration, the savings of which would not be realized for close to a decade. The conclusion is that there is no economic value in regionalization, particularly given the social and political upheaval that such a move would cause throughout the province.

The true value of local governance is not a number on the bottom of a ledger sheet, but the democratic engagement of citizens in their local communities. Local citizens have a significant interest in how public education is governed in their communities. Schools play a critical role in the overall economy and quality of life of communities, including housing values, property taxes, and which workers and businesses choose to locate in or leave the community. The connection between citizens

and their sense of representation in the governance of their schools would be significantly weakened by amalgamation. As individuals become distanced from those who represent them, they become increasingly alienated from government in general and democracy itself.

For more than a century, publicly-elected Boards of Education have existed to ensure that decisions affecting students and schools are shaped and approved by people in local communities. Through its community engagement endeavours, each Board of Education is accountable to its citizens for setting the direction and monitoring results for the achievement of students. Student achievement is a central responsibility for Boards of Education.

Trustees engage with the public both formally through Board meetings and informally almost every day through personal interactions in their communities. They talk with parents and teachers. They address local groups. They interact with local media. As the closest level of government they are in the best position to identify and respond to community needs. Without locally-elected trustees, public education would be less connected to the local communities it is intended to serve.

One of British Columbia's great riches is its cultural and community diversity. No two communities are the same - the community of Masset is not the same as Langley, which is not the same as the city of Vancouver. A large regional Board could not begin to reflect or represent the unique nature of multiple communities. Locally-elected Boards of Education matter. They are the "local" in local governance. They are the way by which public schools belong to the public.

In 2014, communities throughout British Columbia will return to the polls to elect school trustees and other local government representatives. All 60 Boards of Education will start a new term and approximately 35% of the 418 trustees elected will be new to the position. To ensure that all Boards of Education are prepared for their responsibilities, BCSTA will build on its current professional development program to incorporate recommendations made by the Auditor General's 2013 report of Board of Education governance and other national and international governance best practices. This will be a significant opportunity for the Ministry of Education to work closely with BCSTA to support the building of co-governance relationships, responsibilities and skills. It is our mutual opportunity and responsibility

to collaboratively focus on the "one thing" – the success of every student.

CORE REVIEW OPTIONS: LOOKING FORWARD

Boards of Education are committed to maximizing the resources available to support students and support the Core Review objective of efficient governance. Accordingly, we request that the Ministry meet with BCSTA to discuss and consider the following:

1. Strengthening the co-governance relationship with Boards of Education.
2. Implementing the recommendations of BCSTA's Bargaining Structure Task Force Report to integrate the existing services of BCPSEA within BCSTA.
3. Exploring the opportunities being considered in the Service Delivery Project, including:
 - a. A Labour Litigation Risk Pool.
 - b. Consolidating purchasing cards and other group buying opportunities.
 - c. Provincial fuel procurement options for school districts.
 - d. Coordinating of vehicle fleet purchasing for districts on a provincial level.
 - e. Expanding the PeopleSoft HR/Payroll pilot program.
 - f. Investing district funds in the Provincial Treasury to earn increased investment revenue.
 - g. Developing best practice attendance support and wellness programs.
 - h. Provincial agreements for the provision of telecommunications/network services, such as the Telus Voice Services contract.



SUMMARY

There is no greater investment a society can make than in the education of its future citizens. The success of British Columbia rests in the half million students currently in our public schools. Boards of Education are elected by local citizens to hold their interests in the public education system in trust. We are committed to working with the Ministry of Education to ensure effective and efficient governance of this trust.

This submission has identified a number of potential cost savings to meet the objectives of the Core Review. On behalf of BC's 60 Boards of Education, BCSTA looks forward to continued collaboration with the Ministry of Education to further explore these options.

SUBMITTED BY



TERESA REZANSOFF
President
BC School Trustees Association

Cc: *Rob Wood, Deputy Minister of Education*
Boards of Education, Superintendents, Secretary Treasurers