

ASCA Directors had grave concern regarding the April 1, 2018 decision of the Nova Scotia provincial government to dissolve all seven of its English-language school boards.

As the Association does not have a member-approved policy with respect to locally elected school boards, the ASCA Board felt it was critical to be able to speak to this on behalf of its members should the issue surface in Alberta.

Presenting a Board-sponsored emergent resolution in support of maintaining and preserving locally elected school boards in Alberta was considered for the ASCA April 2018 AGM, but deemed at risk, should it not be wholly endorsed by the membership.

It was determined, alternatively, to present the issue in an engagement discussion format for member school councils to share thoughts and capture the input to appropriately prepare prior to further action.

The member engagement discussion activity at the 2018 AGM was intended to be a (group) opportunity for parents, together with trustees and others from their jurisdictions, to provide the ASCA Board with enough information to determine three (3) possible courses of action:

1. In the absence of actual Association Advocacy Policy, to be confident expressing the perspective of its members, primarily parents on school councils;
2. Presenting a Board-sponsored resolution at a future AGM, in favour of maintaining Alberta's current practice of ensuring local representation and advocacy through locally elected school boards, with confidence that members be decidedly supportive.
3. Identify areas where additional education and support for school councils may be needed in fostering positive relationships with trustees and/or boards.

Responses to the three (3) questions posed by the Board to its members in the activity are strongly in support of maintaining the current structure of locally elected school boards in Alberta.

Directives determined as a result of the activity report:

- I. That the ASCA Board of Directors direct the Executive Director to publish the full report (omitting any respondent personal information) on the ASCA website on or before September 15th, 2018, and furthermore to provide the same public document to the Minister of Education, the Presidents and Executive Directors of ASBA, CASS and ASBOA, the Board Chairs who have written letters of concern, and to any ASCA Member or Board of Trustees requesting same.*
- II. That the ASCA Board of Directors direct the Board Resolutions Committee to compose a Board sponsored Advocacy Resolution - for Board review and approval - appropriately reflecting the results of the 2018 AGM Member Engagement Activity report and summary, for consideration by ASCA Member School Councils at the 2019 AGM.*

The engagement discussion results are captured from member school council group responses (not individuals), sorted into themes and summarized, as outlined in this report.



ASCA Member Responses: Locally Elected School Boards Discussion

1. What value does your locally elected school board contribute to student learning?

Local Needs

- A lot of trustees have served our districts and understand local needs.
- They are able to respond to local issues and needs of our students. School councils are able to engage more easily at a local level with our school board to contribute to student learning.
- They provide local voice and governance of the district. Very valued.
- Best interest in local schools. Bridge from parents to government.
- They advocate facility needs, financial resources that address our local and unique needs, representation on community committees that advocate the health and safety of our children, mental health training to understand the student culture needs.
- Local perspective and understanding.
- Aware of local needs.
- They know what is going on and what the concerns are in their local area. Local input is a must and should be respected.
- I believe that a locally elected Board is essential to a true representation of what is best at a local level.
- We feel that locally elected school boards know the preferences and needs of their communities. Our school board has been very proactive in meeting students' needs. They have created an initiative to develop leadership within the district, as well, hiring two vice principals for each school. We feel a need for locally elected school boards, and more centralized government will not be beneficial.
- Responsive to local community and priorities for our particular community.
- School boards have knowledge of student and social demographics.
- The school board is aware of the needs of individual schools and can identify and allocate resources accordingly. They are then able to evaluate after if the needs were met.
- School boards are able to assess the big picture as well as individual needs and see how they fit.
- Our school board trustee is at every one of our school council meetings so knows us very well, which is vitally important for our school with a Christian alternative program.

Representation

- Representation of all areas in the province when trustees are involved.
- I feel they advocate for our students with all concerns our parents have.



- Charter schools operating under their own boards should not be dissolved. The voice of charters is unique.
- Our trustee is a tremendous advocate for our students and for our division. The work that she does is absolutely valued!
- Representation of all areas in the province when school board trustees are involved.
- Our board is the voice for our different groups. They are able to accurately represent each area and needs.
- Advocate for parents and students.
- That all voices are shared, from our district.
- They work with our school council who listens to our parents so we have a good representation.
- Lobby government on behalf of parents.
- My locally elected trustees and school board are very valuable in that they represent my voice and the freedom to have choice in who I want to represent myself and my family within our education system.

Elected

- They are the body of government voted in by me who speaks to my values and oversees the administration in my district. They are the elected voice of me and my people in the district.
- They are **elected** by the **people**.

Improve Education

- Our school board works passionately for the improvement of our education system. Our school board is highly involved in our student learning. They work hard to ensure that any tool that will increase learning in our classrooms is looked into and implemented if possible.
- Great value – emphasis on numeracy, literacy, equity, high school completion. Funding for same.
- They are very good. They are engaged in making positive and effective changes.
- Passion and determination for a change and improvement that is long past due.

Communication/Connection

- Connection and communication.
- They bridge the gap between the school council and other governing organizations.
- One of the most important roles they play - a link between families and boards.
- More direct lines of communication to decision-makers.

Support/Inform

- The value is having people local and “accessible” for advisement and support to school councils and schools.



- They help school councils be informed on what is happening in the government level in regards to policy education.
- Bring broader perspective to parent council.
- Policies and procedures.
- Financial resources equitably distributed to support all students in achieving success.
- Our Board of Trustees annually sets and reviews the District priorities, which guide the Chief Superintendent in establishing teaching and learning strategies. These priorities are broadly shared throughout the District: Faith Formation, Student Excellence, Student Wellness, First Nations Metis & Inuit. The Board also establishes the District's Mission Vision & Value Statements from which all board policies flow to set clear direction to achieve the desired goals and outcomes for all students.
- I think there is a huge value in having an elected school board. I know they give direction to our Chief Superintendent on priorities and strategies on what is best for our students.
- Experience, broad perspective. Sober second thought.

Accountability

- They ensure financial resources are **equally** distributed, as well as focus on transparency and accountability from our boards.
- Hold our school division administration accountable.
- Needing five (5) out of nine (9) trustees to agree on an initiative or a request means that there is accountability. Not everything that an administration asks for gets approved.

Parent/Trustee Forums

- Our elected school board not only takes in the responsibility of hiring our Superintendent, but also helps to foster engagement in the Parent/Trustee Forums and Help Plan our Future meetings.
- Parent/Trustee forums provides ground level connection.
- Ensures parents have an active role through Parent/Trustee Forums and Help Plan our Future meetings.
- Trustees play a vital role in ensuring that parents are actively engaged and communicated to through Parent/Trustee Forums and Help Plan our Future meetings where input is sought.
- The Parent/Trustee Forums they have for parents I found very valuable, as we have an opportunity to exchange ideas and in my experience, they have really listened and applied our suggestions.

General

- Our locally elected school board is valued in our schools.
- Our elected school board is invaluable. How in the world would you control the chaotic events that may occur?
- Everything in the District is transparent with parent council and vice versa.



- At the moment, they are not contributing beyond offering funds and asking for input.

Adverse Responses

- I actually do not believe that they have been very active provincially. They have ensured smooth school years, have ensured we get the required new schools and that our class sizes have remained reasonable. I believe the newly elected Board has a desire to be more involved.
- Minimal. In our community, it is largely a political popularity contest, with minimal value.
- The board in its current form is useless. Too many older people with no students currently in school.

Summary

Majority of the responses are positive and indicate elected school boards connection with local issues and needs.

The responses emphasize the value of school boards being elected by people and how they represent parents' voices and provide communication and connection.

2. What changes to the existing structure of locally elected school boards may help to improve student learning?

Limit Terms

- Limit terms and number of times a trustee can run and serve.
- Limiting terms to avoid re-election of stale trustees.
- Term limits for school trustees as this would introduce fresh faces. Discussion to length would be open for discussion.
- Putting in term limits and eligibility points *i.e. kids in system*.
- Term limits to ensure new voices, perspectives, and experience is present on boards.

Public Awareness

- Our Minister of Education needs to focus in creating more meaningful public awareness of the value the locally elected trustees bring to education. If the public were more knowledgeable of the actual roles and responsibilities of our trustees, there would be no question of their value.
- There is a good structure where democracy is upheld supporting elected Boards to serve needs of our students and communities. Trustees fulfill many roles. Create more public awareness of the value and role locally elected trustees bring to education.



- I believe there is an excellent structure in place today. We live in a democratic society and support elected Boards to serve the needs of our students, parents, and communities. Trustees fulfill multiple important roles including advocates, financial planners, communicators, visionaries, overseers, policy writers, and evaluators. The Minister of Education should create **more** public awareness of the value our locally elected trustees bring to education in Alberta.
- If the school board was better supported by the Ministry of Education, they would have more flexibility to make changes to help improve student learning.

Communication

- More direct lines of communication with parents, teachers, etc. Not all mediated by superintendents/administrators, to help inform the trustees' understanding and decision-making.
- Communication between school councils and boards to be clearer on what is happening in legislation.
- There needs to be far more transparency and discussions with parents. They need to collaborate!

Consistency

- Maintain consistency between schools and trustees (mandatory attendance and involvement).

Focus

- Redirecting focus from administration to proactive activities at school level.

Numbers

- Perhaps a few less per board.
- However, 61 school boards are expensive and probably often dealing with the same issues. See some value in some amalgamation.
- I think there should be only one provincial public school board.

Representation

- Trustees must represent parents/schools per capita *i.e. Palliser's Christian Schools in Calgary do not have locally elected trustees.*

NO Changes Needed

- NO CHANGE.
- No changes.
- No changes necessary. Our district is first and foremost the best school division in Alberta. Come and learn from us.
- I have found that our school board is composed of many past teachers so our school board works well as it is.



- Overall our school board is doing well to continually improve the quality of the learning of our students.
- The current model has been successful in our area. The flow of information from the ministry to the board allows us to have a transparent view of what is being worked on (recently transportation, high school funding, Super Net).
- I don't think there needs to be any change to school boards.
- My current school board meets all my needs as an active council member chair and parent. I believe no changes are needed at this time.
- None.
- We feel the process works very well as is. One thing that might help is more standardized, formal training for school board trustees.

General

- Can understand that there is some redundancy in the trustee role, yet eliminating them and replacing with PACs and SACs is a real loss for students and parents.
- I believe that they have the ability and will move in that direction. I also think that having the **ability** of the trustees to advocate for our students is necessary, even if they currently don't exercise the right. I think they likely don't know how. They are stuck in the operations end of the board. They need prompting.
- Keep working hard and help making our voices heard.
- Giving them the ability to work with RCMP to identify children that break the law on a regular basis.
- Tax funding should be provided to charters with the same proportions as other public education.
- Funding.
- I appreciate the added two trustees that we were able to elect in our district this last year.

Summary

Majority of the responses indicated no changes were needed.

Statements include an increase in public awareness of the importance of elected boards would increase appreciation of the value of the existing format. An increase of communication in certain areas and term limits also suggested.



3. What message(s) would you like ASCA to provide to the Minister of Education with respect to locally elected school boards?

Continue

- Continue to support ASCA and school councils.
- To continue to support and engage with our elected school boards.
- Keep them.
- Please leave our school boards as they are. They work and they are valued and effective.
- Very valued. Do not replace with larger mega boards.
- To let them do their jobs. Allow them the funds you can, and let them do the jobs they were elected to do.
- Leave them alone.
- Keep them in place. They are an important part of the education system in Alberta.
- That we need and want them to stay in place.
- We need our locally **elected** trustees and school boards along with our representation from ASCA.
- We are very concerned about how effective our voice, especially as a small rural school with an alternative program, would be heard if Alberta Education changed to anything like what is happening in Nova Scotia.

Stay Unified

- That they need to stick together - not collapse. There's strength in numbers. We have trustees come to all our meetings and it would be nice if all councils did the same.
- Work together - include all the educational partners in collaborative consultation to build on the strength of Alberta education. Allow locally elected boards the flexibility needed to govern and to meet the needs of their local communities.
- ASCA must ensure the Minister is aware of the value of **all** partners in education, including ASCA, ASBA, CASS, CCSSA. The Minister needs to include all educational partners in collaborative consultations and not be perceived as putting one group against another. It is essential that the minister ensures that the School Act provides the necessary structure to allow locally elected boards the flexibility needed to govern and meet the needs of their local communities.

Representation

- Every division needs its own board to nurture their neighborhood school district. Every board should take notes from our district where the majority of persons are represented well by our board and dedicated.
- There is a requirement for school boards so that there is a fair and diverse view and decisions on our curriculum, approved books, open discussions for the communities and establishment of policies.



- They are important to parents for providing a local, authoritative voice for education in our community.
- Our vote is our voice. You take that away and you won't know what the constituents want/need.
- Parents value the democracy of a school board – they should have the voice to elect their representatives.
- Rural schools would be lost in the mix because of numbers alone. E.g. Speech & Language Pathologists, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists are hard enough to find in rural divisions - even with local boards making it a priority. This would be almost impossible with one provincial board looking out for the entire province.
- We would strongly discourage changes; we would rather keep a locally elected board and see Alberta Education work with the divisions that are experiencing difficulties to improve their experiences.

Connection/Communication

- We appreciate and value our locally elected school boards. Our local trustees regularly attend our school council meetings. They are a liaison between the parents/school community, the board, and Alberta Education.
- Our school boards are an important part of communication.
- We have tremendous support from the school board - trustees come to parent council meetings and understand what each individual school needs and can personally represent us. If all decisions were left up to a higher power, our individual needs would not be recognized or met.

Local Needs

- The Minister of Education has his own personal agenda. The only way he can even begin to understand (whether he listens or not) what is happening at the local level, is to have local boards. I worked in health care administration when they dissolved local districts and went to a super board. It never works and costs tax payers a lot of money! SK Healthcare is back to local boards.
- If not through a trustee, how will local issues be addressed? How will school districts be held accountable to parents? What avenue will students have to challenge schools and districts and administration? Who will lobby and advocate for our families?
- Our school board knows what specific needs are required for specific schools.
- Locally elected boards are the ONLY way to truly meet the diversity of needs in our province; our alternative program would struggle to exist in a "Provincial Advisory Council of Education" format.
- Locally elected boards have invested interest in our school. Local representation is much more credible.

Accountability

- Please make sure school boards are held accountable and prepared to answer to the deficiencies.



General

- That they should be re-educated on their roles, not relieved of that advocating opportunity. There are many different needs throughout Alberta and they all should have their own voices.
- As long as they are elected fairly, engaged and truly overseeing the superintendent.
- Emphasis on the importance of children's mental, emotional, and physical health.
- We need them!
- Charter schools should be allocated the same funding as other public forms of education. Charter school trustees should be given a unique voice for representation.
- Respect the local boards and authorities. These are important to maintaining strong education in our areas.
- We value our boards.
- Multiple levels of administration carry the load a lot easier than one level.
- Echo the comments minister made to not close.
- They are effective when run correctly and representing the people who have put them there.
- I place a high value on locally elected boards.
- Please pay more attention and focus on Northland School Division schools please.
- I want ASCA to make it clear how valuable locally elected school boards are to the Minister of Education. Not only do we need them, but they should be given the flexibility to do their jobs. I have only experienced professional exchange from any trustee I have dealt with.
- Changing the system WILL NOT get rid of issues such as personality conflicts and ideological battles; people need to learn to disagree and work through ideological differences (hard on ideas, easy on people).

Summary

Member feedback reveals that a majority see the value in locally elected school boards continuing to act in the same capacity.

By staying unified and continuing to work together with other organizations and partners, and providing the essential local representation, school boards will continue to provide the necessary support, connection, and communication in education.

