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**School Boards, District Consolidation, and Educational Governance
in British Columbia, 1872-1995**

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It was not surprising to see that Education Minister Art Charbonneau's November 17, 1995, plan to "reduce significantly the number of school boards" in British Columbia was greeted with a certain amount of skepticism both within and outside the educational community.1 Criticisms of the NDP Government's proposal to restructure educational governance in the Province by reducing the number of school boards from 75 to 37 were immediate and largely predictable in nature. Reactions ranged from arguments that district consolidation invariably diminishes community representation to accusations that the Minister's plan is flawed because it panders to the public's growing distaste for bureaucracy.2 A Times Colonist editorial, published the morning after the Minister's news release, depicted the government's reorganization scheme as "a crude plan [which] does a massive disservice to education in British Columbia."3 Further to this, the editor charged that Charbonneau's initiative failed to consider the "educational needs," of children, and alleged "that parents will lose their voice in how their children are educated."4 Judging by the press coverage that followed the government's announcement, few critics were prepared to accept Charbonneau's assertion that "restructuring will assist . . . in cutting costs while preserving the quality of our public education system."5

Unfortunately, these reactions to the government's consolidation plan seem limited in their grasp of the educational past. They assume that there is something about a local governance structure comprised of 75 school districts to which the Province is historically bound, something that is durable, constant, and that should be beyond question. Criticisms of the government's proposal also seem to assume that the concept of local representation in educational governance is meaningful to the community at large and that school boards continue to play a vital role in public education. Some responses to the government's plan likewise associate the creation of larger governance units with a decline in educational quality, while others portray the proposed change as an issue that can somehow be examined by itself, apart from other important educational issues.

This paper will examine these assumptions as it reviews the historical record pertaining to school governance in British Columbia. It will attempt to establish a context in which to view the government's current consolidation proposal, as well as outline some of the major factors that have conditioned the Province's governance and administrative traditions. Accordingly, it will describe the legal foundations of public schooling, the traditions of central and local control that characterize the educational past, the status and responsibilities historically assigned to trustees, and the effects of early and recent consolidation efforts in British Columbia and elsewhere.

**School Boards as Creatures of Provincial Authority**

The defining moment in Canadian history--and, indeed, the defining moment in the history of Canadian school governance--was Confederation. Passage of the British North America Act in 1867 (renamed in 1982 the Constitution Act, 1867) established Canada as a nation, and set out the legal framework under which public institutions were to develop. Under the terms of this legislation, provincial legislatures "assumed full legal responsibility for education" within their jurisdictions.6 "For various reasons," as Enns has pointed out, "they chose to implement systems which were partly centralized and partly decentralized. Centralized functions were placed in the administrative charge of departments of education, while decentralized functions were delegated to locally elected or appointed school boards."7 This decision, in large part, acknowledged the pioneering activities of local authorities to organize elementary and grammar schools in Upper and Lower Canada in the 1830s and 1840s.

The British North America Act, in essence, furnished the legal basis for the centralization of school governance. In British Columbia, the passage of the first School Act in 1872 and subsequent legislation enacted over the following one hundred years embodied the idea that only a strong, central, and secular authority could provide the vision and control necessary to establish a school system in a vast territory with a diverse population and uncertain economic prospects.8 As Fleming has written:

*A century of school law was, therefore, written in such a way that the government minister with the educational portfolio was charged with the ultimate policy and decision-making authority in schooling and empowered to intervene in any matter, at any level, for the good of the system. This body of legislation also made it clear that government officials and their staffs in the Education Office would be liberated from the problem of actually delivering school services; this responsibility would accrue to local trustees who were, in the final analysis, 'creatures of provincial authority' and ever 'subject to the constant scrutiny, and if warranted, intervention' of provincial officers. Thus free, the government's men in education could walk the high ground to organize, manage, supervise, and inspect the operations and policies of a system others maintained.*9

In short, although senior governments maintained overall responsibility for providing public schooling within their provincial jurisdictions, the actual task of delivering school programs and services was assigned to local boards. Amid the welter of social change transforming Canadian life in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, centralized control seemed a small price to pay for a governance and administrative structure that promised "free" common schooling for all, as well as a sense of social and educational order at a time of turbulent national growth and expansion.

Across the continent, the school legislation enacted by senior governments commonly held that state and provincial authorities, alone, would determine the number and type of school boards within their jurisdictions, the number of trustees to be elected by communities, the size of local territorial or district boundaries, and the frequency of school board elections.10 This legislation gave state and provincial authorities absolute control over the most important aspects of public schooling, namely: the curriculum to be taught; the level to which schools were financed; the training and certification required of teachers; the methods of assessment and standards for student testing; the establishment of school boards; the design and distribution of curriculum materials; and criteria for opening and closing schools.

British Columbia's first school legislation in 1872 made it clear that local boards of education would be restricted in their powers. As Johnson has observed:

*An annual school meeting had to be held in each school district to elect the trustees and to hear their report on school business. It would seem, after considering the very extensive powers of the Provincial Board of Education, that there could be little left for the local boards to do. They were, however, charged with the responsibilities of accounting for all school moneys and disbursing the salary grants to the teachers. In their hands was placed the custody and safekeeping of all school property, its repair and maintenance. They were also empowered to visit their school from time to time to see that the school laws and regulations were being carried out. Annually in January each local board was to send a report on its school district to the Superintendent of Education.*11

Enforcement of provincial laws and regulations rested chiefly with the school inspectors, who served as the principal agents of central control. The inspector's duties in British Columbia were described in the following way by Hindle in 1918:

*In practice, each room or division of a graded school and each non-graded school is visited twice a year by the official inspector, who usually spends half a day in the room, during which he examines the order, discipline, methods of teaching, etc., and reports on these and the general progress of the school. It is his duty to discuss with teachers all matters which may promote their efficiency, and the character and usefulness of the school. Furthermore, it is his duty to furnish teachers and trustees with such information as they may require regarding the Public School Act and the performance of their respective duties. In addition to the work of inspecting schools, the inspector must render aid and direction to new school districts in the process of formation. He is often detailed to visit a locality petitioning for the establishment of a school district, or an assisted school, and the fate of the petition depends almost wholly on this report. It is his duty to encourage the establishment of schools where none exist by holding public meetings in the localities. He has power to appoint trustees in all cases where the rate payers have neglected to do so at their annual meeting.*12

In all but the major centres of the Province, school boards remained dependent of the Department of Education and the twice-yearly visits of its inspectors to expedite educational matters on their behalf until 1958, when the provincial inspectorate closed. With the subsequent establishment of provincially- appointed district superintendents, professional school officers began to work more closely with local boards, a development that led, in 1974, to the advent of complete local control over senior appointments and the creation of district administrations.

**The Shadowed Status of Local Authorities**

Even before Confederation and the passage of provincial school legislation, the trustee's status had been shaped by public and professional perceptions. Trustees' lack of scholarship--that is to say their modest levels of formal schooling-- and their inexperience in school management were sometimes cited as reasons why early school board officials were incapable of providing the stewardship that schools required. In 1823, trustees of the board of education for the "Home" district of Upper Canada were asked by community leaders not to choose teachers for their own district: "The board was declared incompetent by the district authority to carry out its task."13Later, in Ontario, the Province's first superintendent, Egerton Ryerson, criticized trustees in Haldimand for selecting an unqualified teacher.14 Such instances may have been among the first recorded criticisms of trustees but certainly not the last.15

Much of the historical concern about trustee effectiveness has to do with the alleged susceptibility of locally-elected officials to community pressures. Curtis, for example, has observed that a movement to place the schools "above politics" originated in Ontario as early as the 1840s and served to de- localize educational control:

*The education office attempted to make the sphere of public instruction a neutral sphere, a sphere above politics, where the rich man and poor man (and women) would be on conditions of equality. This meant the elaboration of a set of common conditions to which all students in the educational sphere would be subject. A common curriculum, a common pedagogy, and a common Christianity would form the substance of educational treatment, and this formally equal treatment would create conditions of social harmony.*16

During the Victorian Age, it was believed that pursuit of these objectives could not be left to small thinking, village politicians. Governance, as the Victorians saw it, was a task for provincial politicians and civil servants shielded from the pull of local politics. Local school government, they believed, simply could not represent the larger public interest, a point made bluntly again in 1905 by the Vancouver Province's editor when he wrote: "the interests of the province at large are safer in the hands of a central administration than when placed in those of the municipal boards."17 Although educational officials at the provincial level have not proven immune to political pressures, public sentiments, even in recent years, continue to favour traditions of central over local control as Ontario's 1994 royal commission report on learning suggests:

*For many people, boards are the unknown components in the system. Trustees are elected by a tiny proportion of the electorate, if indeed they don't win by acclamation. It might be embarrassing to discover how many constituents know their trustees' names. Board agendas too often reflect matters that are light years away from what happens in their schools; anyone who has sat in on a meeting of a school board knows that it can be a truly surrealistic experience. The line between trustees as determiners of policy and administrators as implementors of policy is often anything but self- evident. On the other hand, trustees sometimes involve themselves too intimately and inappropriately with the direct lives of their schools.*18

Ontario's commission noted further that "the primary responsibility of school boards" should be to "translate general Ministry guidelines into viable local practice."19 Or, as the commission put it: "Their job is to make local policy consistent with both provincial policy and local realities. They set clear expectations and guidelines for their schools and work with them to make sure they're progressing toward those ends."20 Trustee status has thus been overshadowed for more than a century and a half.

**The Illusion of Local Control**

Although school boards were granted responsibility in law for managing schools within their district, supervising school construction and maintenance, setting tax assessments rates on residential and, sometimes, commercial property, and hiring, promoting, and dismissing teachers and administrators, this control has proved, historically, to be more apparent than real. Since 1872, when public education began in British Columbia, provincial authorities in Victoria have greatly circumscribed the scope of local authority by controlling capital expenditures, defining cost-sharing formulas, and enforcing regulations over virtually all aspects of schooling. Even in the area of staffing, supposedly a local responsibility, the long arm of the Province intruded throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that boards could, in law, hire and fire teachers, trustees were, in practice, guided by inspectors' views about teacher competence, and reluctant to challenge an inspector's report.21 Nor, indeed, was the inspector's influence confined to teacher selection. In municipalities with large schools, few appointments or dismissals of principals took place without senior government's tacit permission.22

What this meant was that trustees enjoyed latitude in but few areas, notably over such things as determining who would supply water and wood to the school, who would supply "slates" for children to write on, or provide other furnishings, and what social uses would be made of the schoolhouse when instruction ended for the day. In other words, school board influence over core elements of schooling has remained largely illusionary in character.

Board authority was, perhaps, most pronounced in the control individual trustees exercised over the social lives of the usually-young female teachers who staffed the majority of the province's schools from the late-19th to the mid-20th century and the trustees could, and did, insist that teachers adhere to locally-set standards of behaviour.23 Often, teachers found lodgings with the family of the board chair, with the family of the secretary treasurer, or with someone else of standing in the community recommended by the trustees.

Robert Harris' celebrated painting, "A Meeting of School Trustees," illustrated the relationship between school trustees and teachers in rural Canada from Confederation to World War II.24 In it, Harris portrays a young female teacher, frocked, one hand on a school desk and one hand outstretched and raised upward, standing in front of four bearded, seated, and somewhat stern-looking, male trustees. The teacher appears to be making a presentation to them, or is involved in some form of explanation. In any event, Harris' portrait of the board pointed to several enduring educational themesthe tradition of lay control over professional staff, the lines of teacher accountability, and, last but not least, a governance structure in which one staff member was supervised by, what would later seem to some, an excessive number of trustees.

**A Tradition of Restructuring**

In light of the circumscribed legal powers granted to school boards, the questionable public status held by trustees, the historical pattern of strong central control, and the fact that school boards have not always functioned properly, it is understandable why provincial authorities have proved historically disposed toward reorganizing school governance structures as circumstances seemed to require. Even before the end of the 19th century, questions had been raised about the efficacy of small school governance units. British Columbia's second school superintendent, Colin Campbell McKenzie, wrote in his 1883 report on the Province's schools:

*The question of the number of trustees for a school district was discussed, but though some advocated an increase from three to five trustees it was argued that the former was more workable. . . . The opinion was also expressed that in the course of time it would be advantageous to amalgamate adjacent districts, and as an instance the case was given of the three districts in the Saanich Peninsula with nine trustees which could be amalgamated into one district with three trustees.*25

Small districts of the kind McKenzie mentioned grew rapidly in the closing decades of the Victorian age as the Province became settled, and as demands for mass public schooling increased. The 24 school districts visited in 1872 by the Province's first school superintendent, John Jessop, had grown to 257 in 1902, and, by 1932, numbered an all-time high of 830.26 Significant, of course, in this growth was the fact that these 830 districts were comprised of only 1,163 schools, more than 1,000 of which taught only the elementary grades.27 To meet provincial operating standards, these small schools required an enrollment of 10 pupils to remain open, a number "fudged" on more than one occasion by kindly inspectors who counted the noses of all in attendance, including infants and family pets.28 Indeed, most late 19th and early 20th century school districts in the Province consisted of no more than a three-person board who exercised jurisdiction over a one or two-room school, usually of simple log or frame-construction. Not surprisingly, such districts could not even hope to offer the range of educational programs that an industrializing society was beginning to demand. Of this historical condition, found commonly across the country, Johnson has reported: "The case against the small school district was that it was inefficient and over-administered (three school trustees for one teacher) and that the calibre of trustees left much to be desired. The chief fault with the rural school district, however, was that it was far too small an area with too slender a tax base to provide modern educational facilities."29

Collapsing school districts into larger governance units first gained popular appeal in the early 20th century. Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland pioneered legislation to consolidate schools in the early 1900s. Saskatchewan provided legal measures to consolidate school districts in 1913, and British Columbia introduced measures to consolidate high schools as early as 1905.30 However, not until the Great Depression of the 1930s--and the devastation it caused in public finance--did provincial governments generally began to insist that districts and schools be integrated into larger administrative units.31

The motives underlying school and district consolidation during this time were many and varied. Government officials and school professionals across the country assembled a catalogue of reasons to support such change. These included: disparities in educational opportunity between urban and rural schools; inefficiencies in small governance units; inequities in the spread of rural tax assessments; and vast differences in conditions of employment for rural teachers.32

**District Amalgamation in the West**

In British Columbia, the first experiment to reorganize rural school territories was conducted under the direction of Bill Plenderleith, Inspector of Schools for the Peace River region. In a 1934 report to the Department of Education, Plenderleith described the physical condition of the 63 schools in his inspectorate in these terms: "[T]he schools themselves were of the crudest possible structure--usually built of logs--consisting of four bare walls . . . no ventilation except doors and windows, and no heating arrangements except an unjacketed stove which provided excess warmth in some parts of the room and insufficient warmth in others."33 For the 1,200 youngsters attending these schools, there was only crude outdoor lavatory facilities, few library books, little playground equipment, and no extra-curricular activity. Such educational conditions bespoke the generally impoverished conditions of a region at a time where seven out of ten families were living on government food stamps.

On the basis of Plenderleith's recommendations, four large units of school administration were established in 1934 by amalgamating 39 former school districts. By 1935-36, when the larger unit plan had been applied generally to all schools in Plenderleith's inspectorate, "a saving of some $12,000 had been recorded, largely due to economies in secretaries' fees, bulk buying of supplies, a proper system of budgeting and accounting and other measures."34 Plenderleith's plan, Superintendent of Schools, S. J. Willis, advised Premier Pattulo, served "to remove anomalies in the rate of school taxation and to encourage the adoption of a fair schedule of salaries for teachers throughout the district, and generally to administer the schools with even greater efficiency than in the past."35 But not everyone was happy with these changes. Consolidation, and Plenderleith's appointment as the government's official trustee, provoked a sharp reaction among Peace River residents. Some called the government's action "arbitrary, undemocratic, coercive, despotic, fascist," and, even, "un-British."36

Emboldened by the success of the Peace River experiment, and with similar reorganizations in the Fraser Valley, in 1945 the British Columbia Government appointed Max Cameron, an education professor at the University of British Columbia, to investigate the state of provincial school finance and governance and to address administrative concerns raised two decades earlier by Putman and Weir's 1925 inquiry into provincial schools. "Nature," Cameron observed, "with an irritating disregard for the problem of school administration, has decreed that no system will produce perfect equality."37 Nevertheless, Cameron claimed, British Columbia was not well served by some 700 school districts, and recommended they be reduced to 74 larger districts, of which seven were already in existence, and that the Province retain 16 isolated districts as unattached schools.38 The government heeded Cameron's advice: by 1947, the number of school districts had been reduced to 89; and, by 1971, had been further reduced to 77.

Throughout the West, similar developments were taking place. In Alberta, early attempts to consolidate school districts met with community and trustee resistance--as they had in British Columbia's Peace River country. In 1929, Education Minister Perren Baker addressed the Alberta School Trustees' convention. In his speech, he tried to persuade trustees to accept a restructuring proposal consisting of 20 divisions, each made up of 150 districts.39 Baker's plan, although rejected at this time, resurfaced a half dozen years later when William Aberhart's government came to power. Under Aberhart, the "division" system was introduced to Alberta in 1936. The following year, 774 rural districts were amalgamated into 11 divisions; and, by 1941, school governance in Alberta was organized into 50 large divisions.40 In 1950, the County Act gave county councils the powers of divisional school boards and, by 1965, 28 counties were established.

The Saskatchewan government likewise passed a Larger School Units Act in 1944 and, one year later, placed all northern schools under one administrative district, whose costs were borne entirely by the province. As Johnson has observed: "The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life in 1956 strongly endorsed the larger units and recommended adjusting their boundaries to conform with those of the communities."41 Similarly, by 1950, in Ontario, 536 "township areas" were designated by the provincial government to replace the nearly 3,500 small rural school districts that had dotted the province.

By 1945, district amalgamation had meant that the governance structures of the Canadian school system had been reframed and modernized. The inter-war years had seen the consolidation of thousands of small, or single-school, units of local governance and their replacement with larger school districts which, decades later, would culminate in the appointment of school superintendents and their staffs at municipal levels. As part of this consolidation, small high schools were unified into comprehensive secondary schools, complete with academic, general, and technical branches of study. Secondary schooling was now held to be within the grasp of many young Canadians.

South of the border, the situation was much the same. When the National Commission on School District Reorganization made its survey in 1947, some 104,000 local school districts existed in the United States.42However, by 1956 this number had been reduced to 59,000 and, by 1980, fewer than 16,000 remained.43Reasons for this change were explained in one recent history of school administration: "As school districts grew in complexity, demands for efficiency rose. And as they increased in size and scope, the need to equalize educational opportunities became more evident."44

**International and National Developments in the 1970s and 1980s**

Although district consolidation faded from the centre stage of legislative and educational discussion from the 1940s to the 1990s in Canada, events elsewhere in the 1970s gradually began to refocus public and professional attention throughout the world on governance issues. Of particular importance in this regard was the California Supreme Court's ruling in the Serrano v. Priest case which held that it was unconstitutional to base the quality of a child's education on the "wealth of his parents and neighbours."45 Subsequent to this decision, similar suits, challenging the property basis of public school finance, were filed in many states. In the decade following Serrano, 28 states revised their systems of school finance to reduce disparities among districts, despite a 1973 U. S. Supreme Court ruling that the Texas system, based on local property taxes, was not unconstitutional.46

The Serrano case returned two important aspects of governance to the centre stage of public attention: namely the issues of fiscal and educational equity. But, more than this, by underscoring the outstanding fiscal inequities and differences in tax bases that existed among school districts, and by introducing new legal requirements, Serrano accelerated a movement toward greater state control of education, a movement already taking form around numerous calls for school reform and educational "excellence."47 This movement, Doyle and Finn have observed, is transforming the way American schools are being governed. A "shift of the centre of school governance from the locality to the legislature," they predict, "is all but inevitable."48 Moreover, Doyle and Finn have argued:

*The first sign of wisdom is to acknowledge that 'local control of public education' as traditionally conceived is in reality disappearing, even though its fascade is nearly everywhere intact. What appears to be happening is that local school systems are evolving in practice into something that they always were in a constitutional sense: subordinate administrative units of a state educational system.*49

Changes in school governance, however, have assumed a different form in Britain and New Zealand, where the re- centralization of senior government's authority has also been accompanied by a decentralization of powers at the individual school level.50 This began in England and Wales in 1984, when the state educational authority established "a new framework for school government" for the nearly 25,000 county, special, and voluntary schools in the two countries.51 This framework grouped "many schools together under a single governing body" and allowed school governors to be directly elected by parents and teachers.52

Since then, even more drastic measures have been implemented in New Zealand. Spurred by a national economic crisis, New Zealand embarked on a major retrenchment of its public sector and, as part of this process, eliminated school boards in 1989 and replaced trustees with elected councils of parents, teachers, and representatives from business and industry."53

Although dormant in much of Canada during the past half century--at least as a subject of direct discussion--questions about school governance have been implicitly raised in other ways. Two general trends of the post-1945 era--the rising costs of schooling and the gradual transfer in responsibility for school support from local to provincial authorities--have had important implications for school governance.54 In British Columbia, for example, the provincial government provided approximately 80% of school revenues in 1987, compared to about 38% in 1924.55 Across the country, three provinces currently operate without any property taxes (Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland) and, in the remaining provinces, local taxes for schools account for only about 10 to 40 percent of overall educational spending.56

But, as Chalmers has observed: "transfer [of] the tax burden from local units of government, with their relatively inelastic sources of revenue, to the provincial government with its almost infinitely greater financial resources"has not been without consequence. This shift in responsibility has meant that provincial educational authorities now exercise "virtually as tight a control over the externa of education buildings, furniture, and equipment, bus services, school borrowings [as they have] long done over the interna."57

This change has led directly to the imposition of new provincial controls, including the introduction of provincial legislation to: cap school expenditures; remove commercial and industrial property from local taxation; and set levels of taxation at the provincial level. In Alberta, amendments to the School Act (1994) have also been passed to reduce inequities in taxation and educational spending among districts:58 likewise in Ontario, the recent royal commission has charged the provincial government with ensuring "equal per pupil funding across the province."59 More than this, the commission added: "because of our overriding belief that Ontario school kids need a largely common and equitable learning experience, we recommend the transfer of several key responsibilities away from boards. We believe that determining the level of each board's expenditures, for example, should be the Ministry's job."60

**Moving Governance Closer to the People**

One important theme in the emerging discussion about restructuring school governance involves the idea of decentralizing school control, in effect moving school governance structures closer to the families and communities they represent. Discussion about reconstituting the basis of school governance first appeared in the literature on governance in the 1970s but, in fact, had far deeper historical roots.61

Constituencies traditionally ignored within public education's mainstream made their voices heard for the first time in the 1970s. Parents, taxpayers, business leaders, and others dissatisfied with the direction and quality of public schooling coalesced into special interest groups and began to petition provincial and local governments for greater direct involvement in school decision making. Their influence was immediately felt. By the late 1970s, new programs and avenues for consultation were created to deal with these new constituencies who represented special needs children, the socially disadvantaged, the cause of gender equity, multiculturalism, and other social justice issues.62 By the early 1980s, forums for participation in educational policy had been opened to virtually everyone in the province; that is to say, everyone except parents and members of the general public. This would change in the 1980s.

Growing community demands for greater public and parental involvement in schools, as well as public concerns that school board bureaucracies had grown too large and complex, were expressed throughout the 1980s to government-appointed commissions of inquiry. British Columbia's 1984-85 Provincial School Review Committee, for example, found that more than 80% of the approximately 6,000 written responses they received called for greater public and parental participation in school matters, and 75% of respondents supported the notion that school councils, comprised of parents and other community members, should be established.63 Two years later, these views were echoed in the findings of the Province's 1987-88 royal commission when it reported: "Evident in the course of the hearings was a considerable public appetite, especially on the part of parents, for participation in local school affairs."64 Accordingly, the commission recommended: "That each of the province's 75 school districts adopt policies and procedures which would provide a designated role for parents and others through membership on parent-community advisory committees at the district level and at each school within the district."65 Acting on the commission's recommendation, the government's 1989 School Act gave parents the right to form a parents' advisory council in each school to advise "the local board of school trustees, the principal, and staff, on any matter relating to the school."66

Developments in British Columbia reflected broader changes across the country that aimed at shifting the locus of school district governance downward to local school levels, thereby securing greater democratic participation and representativeness closer to the people. In Newfoundland, the importance of expanding parental and public involvement in educational decisions was likewise emphasized by the province's 1992 royal commission. As the commission put it: "If the school system is to reach its maximum potential with the resources available . . . it is essential to establish the means for effective parental involvement in the governance of the province's schools."67 Accordingly, it advised that school councils be established consisting of "elected representatives of parents and teachers, the school principal, as well as appointees from the churches and members of the business community selected by the council itself."68

Quebec's Bill 107, which became law in 1988, likewise redefined the role of parents, and sought to redistribute responsibility and power among partners in the provincial system. This legislation provided for increased parental involvement at school, district, and regional levels through two committees. The first of these, the orientation committee, was charged with determining specific school objectives. The second, the school committee, was designed to "promote parental participation in defining, implementing, and evaluating the school's educational project."69 It is significant that Quebec's legislation outlined parental participation in educational decision-making in a way that went beyond an advisory role. Non-compliance with this legislation by boards, the government warned, would result in suspension of their powers.

Ontario's 1993 royal commission also called for greater parental and public participation in schools. "Many schools and school boards have become highly adept at using the language of openness and sharing with their parents," the commission observed, "now the deed must replace fine words."70 In line with this sentiment, it recommended "school community councils on which parents would have significant representation."71

Legislation to encourage greater parental participation in decision-making was also passed in Alberta in 1988.72By 1992, a Department of Education survey on the state of school councils in the province revealed that no school board had delegated any significant authority to school councils, thus defeating the spirit of what the government originally intended.73 This resistance provided part of the motivation for legislating a governance role for parents in the School Amendment Act, 1994. Although Alberta's legislation differs from other province's across the country, except for Quebec, in making school councils mandatory, it permits parents to serve, if they wish, in a purely advisory role. In this respect, AlbertaOs legislation parallels the legislative provisions enacted by other provinces. In addition to the provinces mentioned above, school councils have also been established, or recently proposed, in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba.

Apart from providing a more direct structure for communication and educational accountability than previously existed, proponents of school councils argue that they are important for other reasons. Such advocates contend that school councils: reduce the distance between parents, the public, and the schools; provide direct means for parental expression and support at school-sites; reduce bureaucracy; and, serve as important links in building school-community partnerships (membership on these advisory councils is generally comprised of parents, other members of the public, in some cases business and labour representatives, teachers, and school administrators). They are also said to be an important part of any system that wishes to feature "school-based" management.

However, critical questions remain unanswered with respect to the role of school councils in educational governance, namely: Could the historical tradition of local representation be maintained through alternative governance structures such as school councils? Could provincial systems operate effectively without district structures for governance and administration? Could individual school councils be relied upon to represent the general public interest, as well as particular local interests in schools? and, Are provincial governments prepared to introduce a new governance model that will situate decision making at provincial and community levels, while reducing or eliminating governance functions at the district level?

**Coast to Coast Consolidation in the 1990s**

For various reasons--including the promise of greater efficiency, the need for fiscal restraint, and the aim of reducing inequities among districts--provincial governments from coast to coast have recently begun to amalgamate school districts into larger units.74 Newfoundland has proposed reducing the number of its school boards from 27 to 10. New Brunswick has reduced its boards from 41 to 18 (12 English and six French), and is currently considering further reducing their numbers or even eliminating them completely.75 In Nova Scotia, the 1982 Nova Scotia Education Act, which arose from the Walker Commission on Public Education Finance, has centralized authority at the provincial level and reduced the roles of "both school boards and municipal units."76"Although local control is still significant," one authority has written, "the primary actors are now at the provincial level."77 Nova Scotia is taking steps to reduce its roster of 22 boards to either seven or five.78Alberta's School Amendment Act, 1994 cut the province's school boards from 181 to 63 and, in so doing, reduced the number of trustees from 1100 to 450.79

Late in 1994, the Ontario royal commission on learning released its report on the province's schools. And, although it did not propose changing the number or kind of school boards, it did advocate a more constrained governance role for them.80 Since this time, however, the government of Ontario has apparently chosen to disregard the commission's views by announcing that some of the province's 169 boards will be amalgamated in the near future. A further announcement made in late February, 1995 states that Ontario intends to cut its number of school boards by 40- 50%, thereby saving millions of dollars.81 It has since been reported that Ontario may cut its number of school boards to 82 and its trustees from 2,000 to 540.82 Saskatchewan's 119 school boards may also be reduced in the months ahead as part of a regionalization plan to reduce public sector spending.83 Reports have also be made that Quebec school boards expect major cuts in the near future, with possible reductions in district numbers.84

**District Consolidation in British Columbia**

The consolidation of hundreds of small school districts and schools during the 1930s and 1940s in British Columbia had important effects. It led immediately to the emergence of larger school districts which, in turn, increased the political power enjoyed by locally-elected school trustees, as well as their association.85 In time, it also prompted the closing of the provincial inspectorate, and the establishment of district administrative offices.

Larger district size after 1946 meant that trustees, generally, were farther removed from buildings where schooling took place and, with the appointment of local administrative staff, less directly involved with teachers who staffed the district's schools. Obviously, this was less true in districts that remained small and isolated. With the advent of district administration in the late 1950s, trustees' relationships with educators were increasingly confined within district central offices. So, too, were trustees freed from carrying out some of their historical tasks, such as buying chalk or fuel for the schoolhouse, or filling out forms for provincial authorities. Professional staff now assumed these responsibilities.

By mid-century, the work of board members was also changing in other respects. Instead of safeguarding budgets of hundreds of dollars, as they once did, they began to oversee budgets of millions of dollars for local schools scattered across broader and more diverse jurisdictions. Their autonomy grew in several areas during the 1960s and 1970s as they were able to shape capital construction projects through their taxation powers. Curriculum change and relaxation of provincial regulation during these decades also allowed trustees greater influence in shaping parts of the educational program.

However, by the early 1980s, trustee autonomy was being constrained by new developments. Rising educational costs prompted the provincial government to introduce public sector restraint legislation, which capped local spending and removed board authority to tax commercial and industrial property.86 Since this time, other provincial policies have further weakened the power of school boards to shape the size and nature of their educational budgets. Such policies have reflected a larger national and international trend toward recentralizing educational authority at the senior levels of government. Board autonomy has also increasingly been constrained since the 1970s by collective bargaining agreements with teachers, contracts with public sector unions, and by school district obligations to comply with federally-mandated language, multicultural, equity, and immigration policies. These contracts and policies have greatly reduced the latitude of school boards in budget allocation and other aspects of governance.

Amid these developments, questions about school governance and the issue of district consolidation continued to surface from time to time, although no action was taken. In 1971, for example, Education Minister Donald Brothers expressed his concern to the Legislature that 'there were five school boards with 39 trustees, five secretary-treasurers, and three district superintendents, all within one-and-a-half hours' driving time of each other.'87 Similarly, during William Vander Zalm's tenure as education minister, discussion reportedly took place about reorganizing the province's school districts into a half dozen or 10 regional boards.88 By the early 1990s, taxpayer concerns about rising public sector costs led to the establishment of the Korbin Commission on the Public Sector. In its report, the commission called for a review "to determine the number of school boards needed to provide education," and "to identify which, if any, boards can be amalgamated immediately."89 It also pointed strongly to the possibility of province-wide collective bargaining in education and, with that now in place, a major reason for maintaining local school boards has been removed.90 Added to this, on January 19, 1995, the Official Liberal Opposition pledged to reduce the number of school boards, if elected.91 Such was the immediate context in which the Minister's November 17, 1995, announcement to consolidate school districts was made.

**Lessons From the Past**

This historical review strongly suggests that the provincial government's recent action to reduce the number of school districts and, presumably, the overall administrative costs of the provincial system is not a radical departure from tradition, but simply part of an established historical pattern of centralizing educational governance. The historical record shows in British Columbia and, indeed, in other Canadian provinces, that the legal foundations of schooling, public perceptions about school boards, and the challenges of providing common and equal educational opportunities across sometimes vast provincial jurisdictions has led provincial governments to centralize school policy and decision making. It also shows that school boards have been traditionally cast in a subordinate role, assigned to implement standards, decisions, and policies determined by senior government.

Examination of the educational past illustrates that, at times of educational and economic exigency, provincial governments have acted to reconfigure the size and numbers of school districts. At various points in the history of education in British Columbia--and elsewhere--school board numbers have been sharply reduced, to the point where they are lower now than at any time since the frontier era of provincial schooling in the 1880s. A review of school history also indicates that, since the mid-20th century, a fundamental structural change has taken place in school finance, with provincial authorities now providing the largest share of school funding. With this continent-wide shift in the basis of school finance from local to provincial and state levels has also come greater provincial and state controls over governance, as well as a concomitant reduction in the influence of school boards. Mounting public debt and deficits, particularly since the mid-1980s, have recently triggered a movement throughout Canada in the 1990s to reduce the numbers of school boards or, perhaps, even to eliminate them completely. So, too, has this discussion suggested that increasing parent and public demands for more direct forms of participation in schooling promises to make redundant, if they have not already done so, certain functions traditionally assumed by school boards.

What is also apparent is that recent public and academic discussion in British Columbia and, perhaps, in other jurisdictions has increasingly held that school districts and the boards that govern them are outmoded institutions, in effect organizational anachronisms. This line of argument holds that modern organizational developments, particularly communications systems introduced over the past decade, have relegated certain aspects of district administration to the status of historical curiosities.

Electronic management information systems in provincial and school district offices date back to the mid-1970s but, until recently, technology's impact on educational structures-- especially governance and administrative structures--has been minimal. This, however, is changing. Through the use of technology, provincial governments in British Columbia and in other provinces can now correspond directly--and, arguably, more efficiently--with individual schools and, indeed, with individual teachers and classrooms. Such technology promises to transform how provincial systems are administered.

Electronic networks, for example, easily allow provincial departments to bypass the administrative offices of local boards, thus making all but redundant the management functions now carried out by superintendents and their staffs. Such change also mean that many, if not most, of the communications and policy directives that now flow from provincial governments to school boards and their staffs could be routed directly to individual schools. Obviously, if implemented, this communications system would have profound implications for district management and for the nature of school board governance and supervision. Carried to the extreme, this could make all but obsolete many of the boards' business, educational, and supervisory functions. As in the case of New Zealand, where senior government has eliminated school boards, school principals would likely emerge as the pre-eminent local educational leaders, instead of superintendents, as responsibilities for governance were shifted away from school boards to public and parent groups charged with overseeing individual community schools.

What is less clear from this discussion of provincial restructuring, however, is the answer to several larger political and pedagogical questions that continue to perplex studies of school governance in British Columbia and elsewhere. These questions include: Are school boards necessary in the 1990s and beyond? And, if so, how many? Do larger boards offer improved educational opportunities for students and, if so, how? Further, if larger boards mean better service (as defined by improved opportunities), why not move to one board, or 20 boards, rather than the 37 the British Columbia government first proposed as a default position? Or, finally, is the political debate around consolidation better framed in terms of saving money, or in terms of improving educational outcomes for youngsters?

This discussion has not attempted to explore these questions nor some important economic questions related to British Columbia's current restructuring proposal. It still remains unclear whether school board administrative costs are more a function of the number of boards or the number of people employed by each board. Likewise, it is not clear whether decreasing the number of boards will necessarily decrease the number of employees in board offices. If decreasing the number of boards only leads to increasing the number of administrators in the remaining boards has anything worthwhile been gained? These questions, however, are for another paper and another form of analysis.

**End Notes**

1 Province of British Columbia, News Release (NR35/95), "B.C. School Districts to be Restructured," 17 November, 1995, p.1.

2 Province of British Columbia, News Release (NR 35/95), "B.C. School Districts To Be Restructured," 17 November, 1995, p. 1.

3 Vancouver Sun, "NDP plan to cut numbers of school districts draws fire," 18 November, 1995, p. 3.

4 Times Colonist, "Bigger school boards won't help students," Saturday, 18 November, 1995, p. 7.

5 Ibid.

6 Province of British Columbia, News Release (NR 35/95), "B. C. School Districts To Be Restructured," 17 November, 1995, p. 1.

7 Frederick Enns, The Legal Status of the Canadian School Board (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), p. 4.

8 Ibid.

9 Thomas Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency 1849-1988," BC Studies , No. 81 (Spring, 1989), p. 53. Prior to Confederation, Vancouver Island's first schools did not have school boards. In 1852, schools were established for "the children of the labouring and poorer classes" in Victoria, Craigflower and Nanaimo. The schools were administered directly by the colonial authorities. However, increasing public dissatisfaction with private and sectarian institutions led social and educational reformers to mount a vigorous and eventually successful campaign for state-controlled, non-sectarian schooling. Under the guidance of John Jessop, a graduate of Egerton Ryerson's teacher training college in Ontario, and British Columbia's first Superintendent of Education, a Public School Act was passed in 1872. Section 9 of this Act provided for three trustees to be elected for three-year terms in each of the 25 school districts the province established when it joined Confederation.

10 Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After," p. 53.

11 The number and kinds of school boards vary somewhat across the country. Since 1994, Alberta, for example, has a total of 60 public boards. British Columbia has 75 public boards and Manitoba has 57 boards, 56 of which are public. New Brunswick has 18 boards, 12 of which are for children of English-speaking families and six for Francophone families. Newfoundland has 27 boards, 15 of which are "integrated" (read "public"), 10 are Roman Catholic, one is Seventh Day Adventist, and one is Pentecostal. Nova Scotia has 21 public boards and one Francophone board. Ontario has 177 boards, of which 114 are public, 51 are separate, and 10 govern schooling on Canadian forces bases. Prince Edward Island has five boards=A5four English and one Francophone. Quebec has 158 boards, 137 of which are Roman Catholic and French, and 18 which are English speaking and Protestant. In addition, three boards in Quebec are defined as "multi-confessional." In Saskatchewan, 91 of the province's 111 boards are public and 20 are separate. The Northwest Territories has 10 boards- -seven of which are "divisional," two are public, and one is separate. At the present time, schooling in the Yukon Territory is governed by the territorial government, although a process for establishing school boards is reportedly underway.

12 F. Henry Johnson. John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator: Founder of the British Columbia School System. (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1971), p. 79. In the North West Territories, or what would soon be the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the 1901 School Ordinance set out responsibilities for trustees in similar terms. Among the tasks assigned to trustees under the terms of the Ordinance were the following: to appoint a chairman, a secretary and treasurer, or a secretary treasurer; to procure a corporate seal for the district; to keep minutes of school board meetings and "proper records" for the district; to safe keep all the property in the district; to purchase or rent school sites or premises; to keep in good repair the school house, school furnishings, and all other school property; to provide "wholesome drinking water" for children; to provide toilets and, if necessary, stabling accommodation; to insure school buildings and equipment; to ensure that no school texts, other than those authorized by the department, be used; to engage, dismiss, or suspend teachers; to see that the school is "conducted according to the provisions of this ordinance and the regulations of the department;" "to settle all disputes arising in relation to the school between the parents or children and the teacher;" and to "see that the law with reference to compulsory education and truancy is observed." See Legislative Assembly of the Territories, 1901, Chapter 29, An Ordinance Respecting Schools, Sections 95-99.

13 George Hindle, The Educational System of British Columbia (Trail, B. C. : Trail Publishing Company, 1918), p. 83. Inspectors were first appointed in Quebec in 1851, in Ontario in 1855, and in British Columbia in 1879.

14 D. Becker, "The Policy Decision-Making Role of the School Trustee," in Ronald Common, (ed.) New Forces on Educational Policy Making in Canada. (Brock University: College of Educational Publications, 1985), p. 81.

15 Bruce Curtis, Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871 (London, Ontario: Althouse Press, 1988), p. 293.

16 Thomas Fleming and Carolyn Smyly, "The Diary of Mary Williams: A Cameo of Rural Schooling in British Columbia," in Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson eds., Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995), pp. 259-284.

17 Curtis, Building the Educational State, p. 370.

18 James B. London, The Dynamics of a Non-Professional Organization: A History of the British Columbia School Trustees Association, 1905-1980 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985), p. 58.

19 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning: For the Love of Learning: A Short Version (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1994), p. 50. Concern about trustees' representativeness have also been raised elsewhere in recent decades. As one 1993 study observed: "Critics of the status quo in school governance . . . complain that local school boards have become too politicized and that they represent special interest groups, especially among the education profession, more than they do public interests. Attention, too, has been directed toward the costs of local school governance and its relevance, which some view as questionable." For the context of this discussion, see Thomas Fleming, Review and Commentary on Schooling in Canada 1993: A Report to the UNESCO International Seminar, Santiago, Chile (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1993), pp. 64-65.

20 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, Report of the Royal Commission, p. 51.

21 Ibid.

22 Thomas Fleming, "Letters From Headquarters: Alexander Robinson and the British Columbia Education Office, 1899- 1919,O Journal of Administration and Foundations (forthcoming 1996). In Alberta, evidence of this can also be found in Kostek's history of Edmonton public schools : M. A. Kostek, A Century and Ten: The History of Edmonton Public Schools (Edmonton: Edmonton Public Schools, 1992), p. 55.

23 Thomas Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field: School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," in Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones, eds., Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1986), pp. 285-303.

24 Fleming and Smyly, "The Diary of Mary Williams," pp. 259- 284 describes how local communities informally shaped teachers' social and professional behaviours.

25 For an illustration of this painting, which hangs in the National Gallery, Ottawa, see Charles E. Phillips, The Development of Education in Canada (Toronto: W. J. Gage, 1957), p. 267.

26 British Columbia Department of Education, One Hundred Years: Education in British Columbia (Victoria, B. C. : QueenOs Printer, 1971), p. 22.

27 Ibid., p. 87.

28 Ibid., p. 76.

29 Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," p. 289.

30 F. Henry Johnson, A Brief History of Canadian Education (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1968), pp. 110-111.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 British Columbia Department of Education. One Hundred Years, p. 19.

35 Ibid.

36 British Columbia Archives and Records Services, Memo to Premier Pattulo from Superintendent Willis, December 13, 1934, GR 1222, Box 2, File 2.

37 Alan H. Child, "A Little Tempest: Public Reaction to the Formation of a Large Educational Unit in the Peace River District of British Columbia," BC Studies, 61, (1972), p. 24.

38 Quoted in John Calam and Thomas Fleming, Schools and Society in British Columbia, Vol. 1, Commissioned Papers, British Columbia Royal Commission on Education (Victoria, Queen's Printer, 1988), p. 17.

39 British Columbia Department of Education, One Hundred Years, p. 19.

40 T. C. Weidenhamer, A History of the Alberta School Trustees Association (Edmonton: Douglas Printing, 1976), p. 103.

41 Johnson, A Brief History of Canadian Education, p. 112.

42 Ibid., p. 113.

43 Roald F. Campbell, Thomas Fleming, L. Jackson Newell, and John Bennion, A History of Thought and Practice in Educational Administration (New York: Teachers College Press, 1987), p. 13.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980 (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983), p. 313.

47 Ibid.

48 Denis P. Doyle and Chester E. Finn, Jr., "American Schools and the Future of Local Control," The Public Interest, No. 77, (Fall 1984), pp. 81-86.

49 Ibid., p. 90.

50 Ibid.

51 It should be noted that in both Britain and New Zealand the tradition of elected school boards, common to Canada and the United States, is unknown and that the role of trustees in Britain and New Zealand cannot be historically compared to trustees in North America.

52 Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales, Parental Influence at School: A New Framework for School Government in England and Wales (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1984), pp. 2-3.

53 Ibid.

54 Debbie Edney, "Education Reform: The Search for the Perfect System," Education Today, Vol. 5, No. 3 (May/June 1993), p. 9.

55 John C. Chalmers, Schools of the Foothills Province: The Story of Public Education in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 334.

56 British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, A Legacy for Learners, p. 153; and F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1964), p. 97.

57 Globe and Mail, "School boards threatened by financial reforms," 22 January, 1996, p. A7.

58 Chalmers, Schools of the Foothills Province, p. 334.

59 Organizations representing both the public and separate school boards in Alberta have challenged the constitutionality of amendments to the School Act (1994) and the restructuring process as a whole. The Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruling of November 28, 1995 allowed both public and separate boards to opt out of the equalization scheme and thus to retain their powers of property taxation. Both the Crown and the boards have appealed different parts of the judgment.

60 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, p. 79.

61 Ibid., p. 51. On this matter, D. Becker, "The Policy Decision-Making Role of the School Trustee," p. 77 reports: "In Ontario, the educational costs borne by the Province for all schools through its grant plans, reached 9.6% in 1936, 40.08% in 1951, and are currently at the 50.09% level."

62 Centralization of educational control in the late-19th century--and professionalization of school administration in the early 20th century--effectively muted any direct expression of the public voice in educational affairs, especially the voice of parents. Schooling, at least according to the professional view, was too important and complex a matter to be left to amateurs. And so, from the late-19th century to the mid-20th century, the most important decisions about schooling, and its effects on children's lives, were made out of public sight, principally in the offices and corridors of government education bureaus, or in the officers of the inspectors who supervised the large municipal systems. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did this pattern of centralized decision making begin to unravel. A better-educated public, and one generally more conscious of individual rights, began to take greater interest in the behaviour of public institutions and, in particular, in the school's role as a social institution. As part of the great political awakening that swept North America after 1960, traditionally quiescent parent-teacher associations were swept aside by an array of special interest groups and organizations which were considerably more vocal in nature, and more intent on challenging the way that long-standing school policies and practices were controlled.

63 British Columbia Education Minister Eileen Dailly proved to be one of the staunchest advocates of decentralizing educational decision making in the early 1970s by promising that the NDP Government would focus the system around "the teacher, the parent, and the child instead of centering it on "the superintendent, the principal, and the teacher," as it had been in the past." See Stan Persky, Son of Socred (Vancouver: North Star Books, 1979), p. 138.

64 British Columbia Provincial School Review Committee, Let's Talk About Schools: A Report to the Minister of Education and the People of British Columbia (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1985), p. 8.

65 British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, A Legacy for Learners (Victoria, Queen's Printer, 1988), p. 10.

66 Ibid., p. 261.

67 Yvonne M. Martin, "Parental Participation Policy for Schools: A Comparative Legislative Analysis of Reform and Dynamic Conservatism in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec," in Martin and MacPherson (eds.), Restructuring Administrative Policy in Public Schooling , p. 128.

68 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education. Our Children Our Future: Summary Report. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1992), p. 11.

69 Ibid.

70 Martin, "Parental Participation Policy for Schools," pp. 130-131.

71 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, p. 50.

72 Ibid.

73 However, the nature of this legislation was shaped by the lobbying activities of trustees who persuaded government at the time to allow boards to set up school councils and to delegate authority to them under Section 45 (i)(c) of the 1988 School Act. See Alberta Education, "Restructuring and Refinancing Education," February 1995, p. 12.

74 Ibid.

75 By the early 1990s, Fears about mounting government debt and deficits, as well as unease with large public sector costs, have led federal and provincial authorities in the 1990s to begin restructuring activities in almost all branches of government. Within this broader context, attention has naturally turned toward proposals about how to control and reduce educational costs and, in particular, to questions about how to achieve greater efficiencies from school governance and administrative systems. One 1993 report on the state of Canadian education described the new context for restraint and reorganization this way: "Today . . . a new mood is upon the land as provincial governments look to reduce educational spending as well as inefficiencies and duplication within systems. Increasing discussion has therefore been directed toward the role of local school governance and, in particular, whether it serves as an effective structure to express community priorities and aspirations about schooling." See Thomas Fleming, Review and Commentary on Schooling in Canada 1993, pp. 64-65. It should also be noted that the ongoing process of consolidation across Canada may make outdated some of the data presented here concerning the numbers of existing boards in various provinces.

76 Globe and Mail, "School boards threatened by financial reforms," 22 January, 1996, p. A7. On February 22, 1996, the New Brunswick minister of education announced the elimination of elected school boards and the creation of " school parent committees" at every school, "parent advisory councils" at the district level, and two provincial "Boards of Education," one Anglophone and one Francophone, which will consist primarily of parents.

77 A. Wayne Mackay, Education Law in Canada (Toronto: Emond- Montgomery Publications, 1984), p. 19.

78 Ibid.

79 Lewington, "Schooling Reform A Work in Progress, Globe and Mail, 27 January, 1995.

80 Thomas Fleming, Alberta's School Amendment Act, 1994 in Historical Perspective, University of Victoria, March 5, 1995, p. 5.

81 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, p. 50.

82 Canadian Press Newstex, "Ontario to Create New French- Language School Boards," 24 February, 1995, p. 1.

83 Globe and Mail, "School boards threatened by financial reforms," 22 January, 1996, p. A7.

84 Globe and Mail, "Romanow message a tough sell," 25 January, 1996, p. A3.

85 Globe and Mail, "School boards threatened by financial reforms," 22 January, 1996, p. A7.

86 Thomas Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field," p. 297.

87 Thomas Fleming, "Restraint, Reform, and Reallocation: An Analysis of British Columbia Education Policies, 1982-1984," Education Canada, 25 (1), 1985, pp. 4-11-11.

88 British Columbia Department of Education. One Hundred Years, p. 22.

89 Vern Storey, "Uncertain Days: British Columbia's School Superintendents and Local Employment," unpublished paper, University of Victoria, September, 1995, p. 8.

90 British Columbia, "Final Report: The Public Sector in British Columbia," The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Services and Public Sector (Victoria: Queen's Printer, June 1993), p. xxiii.

91 Ibid., p. xxii.

92 British Columbia Liberal Official Opposition, "News Release," January 19, 1995, p.1.