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**Provincial Initiatives to Restructure Canadian School Governance in the 1990s**

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A recent Globe and Mail editorial observed: "The trouble with school boards as they exist . . . is that they are somewhat accountable in theory, but barely accountable in practice." Voicing what has become common sentiment within government, and some public quarters, the editorial continued: "All residents may vote for the school board, but hardly any do; these large and barely visible institutions start to look like a little like taxation without representation."

The editor's comments, which reflect a simmering public unease about school costs and the accountability of school governance institutions, have not gone unheeded by politicians. Since the early 1990s, provincial governments across Canada have been restructuring school governance systems within their respective jurisdictions. Commenting on this restructuring movement, the Canadian Teachers Federation has accurately observed: "The drastic reduction in the number of units of local government for education has been one of the most dramatic of all changes in Canada's pattern of government. And yet, it has occurred and is continuing with relatively little public concern or debate."

Although these initiatives to reduce the numbers of local school boards and, in one province, to eliminate them entirely, are of relatively recent origin, they are certainly not new in their intentions. They simply represent the latest form of a larger century-old movement to reorganize public school governance at local levels and to make boards and their administrative systems more efficient.

But it is not the history of school consolidation in Canada that this paper wishes to address--that has been treated elsewhere. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to examine the character of developments in the restructuring movement now underway in Canada.

The following discussion is divided into three parts. The first part reviews the broad historical context in education and government which has given rise to the restructuring movement. The second examines the main forms, features, and traits of restructuring initiatives as they are now presenting themselves in provinces from the Atlantic to the Pacific. More specifically, it describes the particular provincial conditions that have produced these organizational changes, the agendas and objectives associated with them, the planning and implementation strategies governments have adopted, and outcomes achieved to date.

The third part of the discussion is more analytical than descriptive in character. It explores several of the central ideas underlying provincial restructuring efforts, the agendas and implications of restructuring largely unstated in official documents, or what might otherwise be described as restructuring's "sub-text." Attention here is directed toward examining why senior governments have selected school district consolidation, euphemistically known as "restructuring," as the principal instrument for such reform, given that government commands various other legislative and policy tools to bring about efficiency and change. In addition, it suggests why other strategies or approaches have not been chosen. What is it about school district consolidation that has made it so fashionable in the 1990s as a way of demonstrating government's commitment to efficiency and reform' Understanding such questions constitutes an important part of understanding the real character and meaning of current restructuring exercises.

**The Context for Restructuring**

*Centralization and Decentralization in Historical Context*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 would develop. Section 93 of the BNA Act granted authority over education to the provinces in the following terms:

*In and for each province the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to education, subject and according to the following provisions:*

*(1) Nothing in any such Law shall prejudically affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union.*

The meaning of this legislation, and the historical context in which it was passed, has been described by various scholars and legal historians. Of these things, Enns has written:

*Having received virtually complete authority in educational matters, the provinces had the theoretical right either to establish or not to establish educational systems. In practice, at the time that these rights were granted, to the provinces, educational systems were already in existence and legislatures could hardly have eliminated them. All provinces have thus enacted legislation dealing with education. Once having activated this power, they have assumed full legal responsibility for education. . . . For various reasons, 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.*

Along the same lines, Mackay has observed:

*Practically speaking, there are three levels of government in Canada-federal, provincial, and local. In constitutional terms there are only two levels of government; local governments are simply agents of the provincial government. Power is delegated by the province to the local units, such as city councils, and can be taken away. Local government is analogous to the administrative branch of government.*

Similarly, Zuker has noted:

*Aside from the limitations of our Constitution with respect to denominational, separate, or dissentient schools and minority language educational rights, the provinces have full authority to determine the educational structure within their boundaries. Provinces have the power to enact laws governing their educational system.*

Historians and others have described divisions of authority in school governance in various ways but have made the same general point, namely that: "School boards are creatures of statute. As such they have only those powers expressly granted them by statute." In this respect, it is noteworthy that the legal basis for school governance in the United States is similar to that in Canada.

In summary, then, by granting the provinces authority over education, the British North America Act, hereafter the Constitution Act, 1867, provided the legal basis for the centralization of school governance. Importantly, it also meant that Canada, unlike other Western nations, would remain without a federal education office to direct or coordinate the educational activities taking place in the 10 provinces and two territories that would come to comprise the country.

*Centralization, the School and the State in the Nineteenth Century*Even before Confederation, events were taking place that would, in time, help centralize control of schools in provincial departments of education. The following discussion examines the nature of these events and how they came to influence the shape and character of school governance today.

The shift from local to provincial control of schooling in Canada was a long and complex historical process that took more than half a century to complete. And, it occurred at different times across the country. For example, it can be fairly said that the school system of Canada West (Ontario) was centralized at the provincial level by 1850, that British Columbia's school system was centralized in 1872, and that the school system in Alberta was centralized by 1892 or, at the latest, by 1901.

Centralization of school governance and control was a movement animated by many forces-some in and some outside education. Curtis views it as "a key element in nineteenth-century state-building:" Fleming considers it as an expression of liberal politics in the Victorian age; and radical revisionists such as Katz attribute its roots to "prejudice, narrowness, and intellectual limitation." As the following discussion shows, the centralization of educational power in provincial offices, in effect, was a response to problems of modernization and national identity that had troubled school and social reformers alike for much of the nineteenth century.

The idea of centralizing school governance, as Child reports, had its earliest origins in the common school movement and the spirit of nationalism that gave rise to the first public schools. The common school in the western world was the product of the nation state, and designed to serve the interests of the nation state. All common-school systems tended to be basically similar whether they originated in France, Germany, the United States, Australia, or Ontario. So that all citizens would be trained to serve the nation, it was necessary that schooling be free, universal, and compulsory. National identity required cultural conformity, which in turn required uniformity of teaching methods and curriculum. To ensure unity, schools had to be secular, or, at the very least, non-sectarian, and it was essential, furthermore, that the schools promote social stability. All this could be achieved only if the schools were centrally controlled.

Opposition to central control at the provincial level, although strong initially in some quarters, eventually receded as perceptions about the value of common schooling grew. The purposes that such schools could accommodate seemed boundless: they could prepare children for the world of work, assimilate the poor and foreign born, civilize society in general, inculcate in their clients a sense of provincial and national identity, and prevent crime, delinquency, and idleness by keeping youngsters off the streets. "The middle classes know," Lord Shaftsbury of England's upper chamber remarked, "that the safety of their lives and property depends upon their having round them a peaceful, happy, and moral population." In the Victorian era when family, church, and community sometimes seemed unable to provide social stability in the wake of industrialization and urbanization, it became a principal purpose of the public school to ensure this state of social equilibrium by directing children's social as well as intellectual development.

Because schooling was equated with progress, at least in the mid-nineteenth-century liberal mind, the task of redeeming society, or "salvaging the lowest classes," as Houston puts it, "could not be left to chance." Another historian, Lazerson, observes: "Without regular attendance, there would be illiteracy and no moral code, and thus continued social disorganization and criminality. Attendance was necessary, moreover, to justify the increasingly elaborate organiz ational and training mechanisms that had become central to public education." Accordingly, rules to make school attendance compulsory were introduced in various laws and amendments by provincial governments from the 1870s onward.

Public confidence in the importance of state control, which became a hallmark of the nineteenth century, was expressed in the kinds of educational policies developed at the provincial level. With few exceptions, state authorities prescribed a common, provincially-controlled curriculum, and developed systems in which textbooks were selected and purchased centrally. Provincial authorities, likewise, assumed responsibility for drawing school district boundaries, limiting tax levies, determining criteria to open and close schools, and making provincial grants conditional on the favourable reports of provincial inspectors who patrolled both city and rural schools on behalf of education departments. Under such policies, schooling, which for centuries had been viewed as a parental right and responsibility, became a matter of state interest in less than a generation. Opposition to such control, and to the monopolization of education by the state, was viewed by early school advocates as resistance to social and educational reform and, indeed, to the very notion of national development itself.

**Restructuring School Governance in the Twentieth Century**

Since the beginning of the 20th century, provincial authorities in Canada and state governments in the United States have embarked on two broad movements to reshape the face of public school governance and administration within their jurisdictions. The first of these, which began at the turn of the century and continued to the end of the Great War, sought to amalgamate urban schools and school districts as a means of creating new and more efficient organizational structures to bring better order and management to school populations that were doubling every decade as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration.

A second, and even more eventful, movement to restructure school governance and administration began in the early years of the Great Depression. This movement to consolidate schools and school districts resulted in the closure of tens of thousands of school districts across North America by mid-century. In the United States, alone, the number of school districts has declined 87% in the 20th century, from 117,108 to 15, 367. The restructuring initiatives that marked the post-1930 period were directed principally at redressing the plight of rural schools and, in particular, at broadening tax bases in rural districts through school and district amalgamations. Only through such means, the educational reformers of the day believed, could educational equality for children, and fiscal equity for taxpayers, be achieved in small country settlements.

Even jurisdictions across the continent that initially proved resistant to these reforms gradually adopted consolidation as an instrument for change by the end of the 1950s and 1960s. Consolidation in Ontario, for example, meant that some 5,700 school districts were reduced to 3,200 in 1964 and, within five years, to 1,670 and, by 1969, to 192, a number only slightly larger than the 169 that exist today. Over roughly the same period of time, consolidation decreased the size of local school governance in Quebec from 1,788 to 189 school boards, from 1,500 to 57 in Manitoba, from 422 to 42 in New Brunswick, from 432 to five in Prince Edward Island, from 270 to 20 in Newfoundland, and from 85 to 22 in Nova Scotia. Wholesale consolidation of school districts during the interwar era and after marked the end of the second restructuring movement and ushered in an era of stability in school governance that continued across North America until the 1980s and 1990s.

**Post-1980s International Developments**

Although school district restructuring was swept aside as a central issue of educational discussion in Canada during the 1970s, important developments served to refocus attention elsewhere on governance questions. 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." Following this decision, similar suits, challenging the property basis of public school finance, were filed in many states. In the decade after 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. Moreover, Serrano accelerated a movement toward greater state control of education, a movement already taking form around numerous calls for school reform and educational "excellence."

Movements toward greater state control over school governance were also manifested in other countries. In 1984, Great Britain's state educational authority established "a new framework for school government" for county, special, and voluntary schools in England and Wales, which effectively re-centralized senior government's authority and, at the same time, decentralized new powers to individual schools. This new governance framework greatly reduced the influence of municipal educational authorities by allowing parents and teachers to elect school governors in specific schools.

In December, 1995, the British government announced plans to "free all 25,000 state schools" in the two countries from the grip of local authorities, making the governance of such schools similar to that of the 1,000 existing self-governing grant-maintained schools. "We want to put power in the hands of the parents and the schools," one government source reported, "this will leave more money for teachers, books, and pupils." Under the government's plan, 95% of the schools' operating budgets will devolve to the schools, a sum estimated at an additional 700 million pounds a year. Moreover, to insure that local authorities do not dominate the new "self-governing" schools, the number of local council representatives on governing bodies may be limited by legislation.

Equally profound measures were also introduced in New Zealand during the past decade. Prompted by a national economic crisis in the late 1980s, New Zealand greatly curtailed its public sector spending and , as part of this retrenchment process, eliminated school boards in 1989, and replaced trustees with elected councils of parents, teachers, and representatives from business and industry.

Restructuring began in mid-1987 when the Picot Committee was established to review national education. In its report the following year, the committee recommended that educational reform be centred around three principles: "reorganization of the central state, including a shift from operations to policy as a central focus, devolution of operational activities to school level, and [the creation of] new systems of accountability." A key reform element was the establishment of councils exclusively comprised of parents to govern schools. Legislation introduced in 1991 allowed non-parents and business representatives to be elected. Nevertheless, a majority of those who serve on school councils continue to be parents.

**Restructuring in the United States**

Important, but less dramatic, efforts to restructure school governance and administration were also evident in the United States during the 1980s. In Iowa, for example, a movement to consolidate school districts gradually emerged out of various 'sharing' initiatives between contiguous districts. These initiatives led to decreases in district numbers from 438 to 384 in the post-1985 period. Sharing has consisted principally of arrangements whereby one district provides high school instruction for students in another and, in return, receives junior high school or instruction at other levels for its own students. Football and industrial arts programs have also been shared, making it possible for small adjacent districts to offer programs otherwise unaffordable. Over time, such sharing arrangements have led to joint appointments of superintendents and, in some cases, to district amalgamation. These arrangements have worked because, although many of Iowa's communities are rural, none are 'isolated and remote.' No community in the state, as one official described it, is located more than 'one hour's drive from a modern shopping mall.' Amalgamations have prompted some small adjustments to school governance structures, including increasing the size of 'consolidated' education boards from five to seven members. Along with Iowa, other states have embarked on similar kinds of restructuring activities.

District-level restructuring has also had more profound effects. In the wake of shrinking state revenues, school governance and administration in urban school districts has been downsized considerably across the country since the mid-1980s. Chicago remains, perhaps, the most notable example of this restructuring. In 1988, full site-based governance and management was introduced into Chicago's public schools. Since then, each school has been governed by a local school council consisting of one appointed official (the school principal), two elected teachers, four elected parents, and four community representatives, two of whom represent business. Councils have been accorded full responsibility for all decisions affecting school financial operations and staffing, including responsibilities for hiring, evaluating, and dismissing principals. This school governance model, however, has been marked by political divisions within councils, as well as the inexperience of council members.

Such experimentation has been one response to the financial plight of urban schools. Notwithstanding the fact that urban districts in the United States contain approximately 40% of America's 'at risk' children, state revenues for urban districts declined by more than 14% in the 1980s. Paralleling this decline in resources has been a general restructuring or, more precisely, reduction in the ranks of central administration. On average, the ratio of teachers per central administrator in the 'great cities' rose from 27:1 in 1989-90 to 35:1 in 1992-93, the most recent year for which data are available. In some cities, change in the ratio of teachers to supervisory and other administrative staff has been staggering. In Detroit, for example, the teacher to central office administrator ratio rose from 15:1 to 42:1, in Omaha from 17:1 to 39:1, and, in Chicago, from 39:1 to 91:1. In Cincinnati, central office administrative positions have been slashed by 50% through a deliberate downsizing and employee "buyout" program.

National and regional movements for educational reform, as well as district and school restructuring efforts, have also spurred state education departments to restructure the form and function of their own organizations. One 1994 survey reported that 42 states have started or have recently completed the reorganization of state education departments. These reorganizations have been prompted by various factors, including budget and state personnel reductions, governors' orders, and legislative action. Many state department reorganizations have sought to redefine the way that government education bureaucracies work, most notably by shifting state activities away from traditional regulatory and monitorial roles toward roles that lend greater support and technical assistance to districts. In 18 states, reorganization has meant, among other things, that state personnel now provide 'direct services to local school district efforts through . . . field service teams, serve on local district school improvement teams, and work with local district staff . . . in the development of standards and assessments.

**The Faces of Restructuring**

As in the United States, widespread attention to broad questions of school reform in the 1980s has led Canadian provinces to revisit questions of educational governance in the 1990s. As the following brief summaries of provincial activities illustrate, the motives for restructuring, the contexts for change, and the approaches vary among provincial governments across the country.

**Provincial Restructuring Initiatives**

*Newfoundland and Labrador*In Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, the recent initiative to restructure school governance has its roots in both a 1992 royal commission report, Our Children, Our Future, and in a 1994 information bulletin from the royal commission implementation team, Adjusting the Course: Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence, which called for reducing the province's 27 school boards to 10 and delegating greater responsibility for school operations and leadership to the local level. The commission's proposal to dissolve denominational education committees has met with stiff church resistance and obliged government to hold a referendum in which 54% of voters endorsed the commission's--and the government's--proposed restructuring. But Newfoundland's restructuring has sought more than to correct small school and school district inefficiencies. It has also attempted to address troublesome economic and social issues concerning declining populations in small settlements, the lack of educational competitiveness among the workforce, and long-standing educational inequalities throughout the province.

In explaining the restructuring agenda, the Newfoundland and Labrador government maintains that "structural change is not an end in itself [and that] the purpose of restructuring is to streamline and refocus the system so as to better concentrate on the goal of higher achievement for our students." As the government defines it: "The purpose of restructuring is to streamline the system to make it easier to attain our basic goal. The most effective structure is a simple one, which minimizes the number of administrative bodies, and facilitates decision-making." Accordingly, the government has recommended that "school boards should continue to exist, but that the number of boards should be reduced from the existing 27 to eight to ten regional interdenominational boards, with boundaries aligned with the economic zones identified in the [provinces'] Strategic Economic Plan. Furthermore that: "All boards should be comprised of ten members elected at large, and up to five others appointed by the denomination, where numbers warrant in a particular region."

Such change, government suggests, also requires reorganizing the province's education department:

*Specifically, there will have to be a shift in emphasis away from direct management of the system towards direction-setting and accountability. . . . [I]t can be expected that the department will refocus its attention, placing emphasis on standards-setting, curriculum development, and monitoring. The department will also retain responsibility for routine functions such as payroll and data base management, which are more efficiently performed by a central agency, and which are required for monitoring system performance. [Also] . . . under the proposed restructuring, the province will assume responsibility for establishing school construction guidelines and standards, as well as for establishing school viability.*

*Prince Edward Island*In Prince Edward Island, passage of a new school act, as well as government reforms in the health sector, set the context for questions about the province's school governance system and led to the appointment of a government-convened task force on education, which examined assorted educational issues, including school governance. With the release of the task force's 1993 report, Towards Excellence, the government moved to implement its recommendations. Although Prince Edward Island's five existing school boards were retained, much of their authority was reassigned to a provincial education services commission and to local school councils. School board membership was also reduced from 15 to nine members. In 1994, the minister scrapped the education services commission, complaining that 'it was becoming a costly level of bureaucracy that the education department couldn't afford.' Further consultation with school boards, teachers, parents and the public led government to reduce the number of boards to two English school boards (each with 15 interim trustees), one for the province's east and west region, and one French board with nine trustees.

*Nova Scotia*Nova Scotia's restructuring initiative may be traced back to 1991 when the legislature's select committee on education traveled the province to record Nova Scotians' concerns about education. Public consultations were again held in 1993 while the province's education department was preparing its strategic plan for educational change. In 1994, the education department released a discussion paper, Restructuring Nova Scotia's Education System, which outlined various proposals to address the educational issues identified earlier.In February 1995, the government's white paper, Educational Horizons, was published and outlined the government's intentions. In it were proposals to mandate school councils, restructure school boards, harmonize services for Francophone and Acadian school boards, and otherwise develop a more cost-effective and efficient system. On June 9, 1995, the education minister announced that 22 school boards would be reduced to a minimum of seven. Restructuring, as the government defines it, is not designed as a cost-saving exercise but, rather, as a way of directing administration and governance savings into schools, thereby achieving greater educational value for school expenditures. Restructuring, as such, is intended as part of a larger school reform effort.

*New Brunswick*In New Brunswick, the provincial government's restructuring initiative began in 1992, when the province's 42 boards were reorganized into 18, of which 12 were Anglophone and six were Francophone. The government's action was prompted by several factors, including a shrinking resource base and a need for greater financial efficiency. Government also wanted larger and more accountable boards that would focus on governance tasks rather than deciding 'where the school bus stops,' to quote one department official. The fact that two-thirds of all trustees in the province were elected by acclamation suggested a high level of public apathy toward school governance as traditionally constituted, as well as a need to involve parents more directly in school affairs. The restructuring initiative was also part of a broader strategy of educational reform originating in the work of a commission on educational excellence. The commission's recommendations raised provincial consciousness about education's economic value to the province and convinced government in 1992 to invest an additional $60 million in schooling.

New Brunswick's dramatic plan to replace elected school boards with parent councils was reported nationally in the Globe and Mail, on February 23, 1996. In announcing the province's decision to make this change, the province's education minister stated: 'This is a significant move towards transferring authority to parents. . . . We feel that we've got to have parents involved at every level. Teachers and schools can only do so much, so this is designed to put more control in the hands of families.' To this, the minister added: 'this system will be more democratic than the direct election of school-board trustees.' The province, he continued, has 'categorically decided [they are] not doing charter schools . . . [because] they go against the principle of equal opportunity which has served New Brunswick well since 1967.' Part of the government's reform effort also involves reducing the size of the educational bureaucracy. According to the Globe and Mail: 'On July 1, 123 regional school-district employees will be laid off, and a further 30 full-time employees in the provincial Department of Education will lose their jobs. New Brunswick's 18 school districts currently employ 469 people.'

*Quebec*In Quebec, the province's 149 school boards, each with 17 to 25 unremunerated commissionaires, have so far remained untouched by the effects of a massive restructuring program, although some form of public sector retrenchment is currently anticipated and restructuring is, politically, 'on the table,' to quote a government source. Over the past decade, the question of whether to replace religious or confessional boards has surfaced in the province as a major educational issue. Two developments are of note. First, in 1992, the education ministry 'eliminated all but one (confessional) regional board.' Second, a gradual amalgamation of small boards has taken place in recent years and, if a decision is made to replace confessional boards with linguistic boards, further consolidation of the system will occur.

Various reasons exist for the government to be concerned with reducing educational costs. In 1992, Quebec spent 8.8 % of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education, compared to 7.5% in Ontario, and 7.6% in the Western provinces. In comparative terms, 'the share of the GDP allocated to education is higher in Quebec than in the rest of Canada as a whole (7.9%) and the United States (7.5%).' So, too, is school board spending per student higher in relation to per capita GDP in Quebec (26.2%) than in other Canadian regions (23.8%) and the United States (21.7%). Moreover, due to assorted factors, school board operating expenses increased by 8% in constant dollars between 1989 and 1992.

*Ontario*Although the 1994 Ontario royal commission on learning criticized school board operations and trustee accountability, it stopped short of recommending that the province's school governance system be restructured. Shortly after the publication of the commission's report, however, the province's education minister commissioned a task to public concerns over rising educational costs, and allegations about school board inefficiencies and their lack of public accountability.

Under a new government, the work of the task force was continued in 1995 with the same specific mandate to recommend 40% to 50% cuts in board numbers. As part of its work, the task force met with all major provincial stakeholders, including teachers, trustees, and parents, reviewed relevant academic literature on amalgamation in Canada and the United States, and concluded, among other things, that there was a 'dearth of useful studies' to inform the process. Accordingly, the task force prepared a 'model' that factored in for consideration important provincial conditions and values. On the basis of its study, consultations, and 19,000 responses generated from publishing two million copies of an interim report, the task force published a final report recommending that the province's 168 boards be reduced to 87, of which 15 would be French-language boards. Whether government will act upon the recommendations of the task force remains to be seen. The matter has now been put in the hands of the province's MLA's for discussion.

*Manitoba*In Manitoba, restructuring was prompted by several factors, including provincial outmigration and a decline in the student population in recent years from 200,000 to 178,000, a decline affecting all but three school divisions. The idea of reorganizing school districts was also prompted in part by concerns about improving educational opportunities in rural areas, as well as the possibility of redirecting savings from governance and administration into classrooms, especially in rural areas.

Within this context, the government established a boundaries review commission in 1993 to study the question of school district reorganization and to 'design a system which would best allow for quality education to be delivered to students using available funding and minimizing duplication.' After 16 months of study, the commission released its first report in November 1994. In it, the commission concluded 'that the likelihood of net savings occurring, particularly in rural Manitoba, was extremely slim' and recommended that 'any [savings] that did materialize should be redirected within the education system to address needs at the classroom level.' According to the commission's chair: 'The commission's goal was to review the importance of boundary lines and continue to emphasize the use of common sense, distance, and appropriate education course choices as the primary determinants of the location where students attend school.' The commission recommended reducing the province's 57 school divisions to 21 and, after further public consultation, proposed changes to the boundaries of three of the 21 divisions, as well as the creation of one additional division, for a total of 22 divisions to be established over a three-year implementation plan.

*Saskatchewan*In Saskatchewan, two reviews of school district boundaries during the past five years have proposed school board restructuring but these proposal have met with considerable rural resistance, even though they were endorsed by urban districts. One review, sponsored by the Saskatchewan School Trustees, suggested that the province be divided into a new system consisting of between 25 to 30 public divisions. An earlier study estimated that consolidation could save approximately $8 to $10 million out of a provincial operating base of about $1 billion, these potential savings engendered little public support in the face of deep community attachments to schools and to rural values.

Saskatchewan is currently in the midst of large-scale public consultations to examine how educational administration and governance can be integrated into the administration and governance of other public sector services (including post-secondary education, employment training, health, and social assistance). Driving this discussion are a number of issues, including high levels of outmigration, declining rural populations (36% drop in enrolment in rural areas since 1971), and the problems of providing social and educational services to small communities (75% of school districts teach fewer than 1500 students). Saskatchewan is also, by all accounts, overgoverned. One recent government document notes: 'Saskatchewan has a higher proportion of local governments than any other province in Canada [847 municipal governments, 119 school boards, and 30 health boards],' governments it can no longer afford. Table 1 illustrates this point.

**Table 1: Municipal Government Structures/Provincial Populations in Selected Provinces  
(1991 Census Data)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province | Population | No. of Municipalities/  Governments | Average Population  Per Municipality |
| Alberta | 2,545,553 | 370 | 6,880 |
| British Columbia | 3,282,061 | 176 | 18,648 |
| New Brunswick | 723,900 | 118 | 6,135 |
| Nova Scotia | 899,942 | 66 | 13,635 |
| Manitoba | 1,091,942 | 201 | 5,433 |
| Ontario | 10,084,855 | 831 | 12,137 |
| Saskatchewan | 988,928 | 847 | 1,168 |

Along with the overgovernance issue, federal cuts to transfer payments are also threatening the province's capacity to 'maintain the current system.' At present, the province is currently re-examining 'the priorities and structures of government' and searching for new public sector structures to serve as 'the groundwork for the new century.'

*Alberta*In response to a general public view that Alberta's schools were overgoverned at the local level, Alberta's government began restructuring its school governance system in 1993 when the minister of education eliminated 40 non-operating school boards, bringing down the number of local school boards to 141. In the process that followed, the education minister led the way, assisted by a team of MLA's who toured the province consulting with local trustees. The legislator-trustee discussion resulted in recommendations for change, which were considered by the minister and, then, acted upon. In February 1994, government announced that the 141 boards would be further reduced and set a six-month period for voluntary agreements to be reached, with a target date for reorganization set at January 1, 1995. This process brought about the establishment of 70 school districts, which the minister subsequently reduced to 63. Throughout this process, the larger urban districts remained unchanged. According to one ministry official, there was 'little to be gained' from restructuring urban school organizations.

*British Columbia*The publication of the Korbin report on public sector spending in June 1993 awakened political interest about the efficiency of local school governance. After several years of quiet discussion in government circles, the education minister announced on November 17, 1995 that a government-led steering committee would make recommendations about consolidating the province's 75 school boards and, in default of a suitable consolidation plan, the government would cut the number of boards to 37. Against the backdrop of a provincial election, and the minister's resignation, the government received the committee's March 1996 report and announced that the number of school districts would be reduced to 57 by amalgamating 34 small districts into 16 new districts.

**Summary of Developments**

The following tables provide brief summaries for reference purposes. Table 2 lists the provinces that have passed legislation related to restructuring school governance: Table 3 identifies provinces in which restructuring legislation is intended; and Table 4 lists provinces that are considering restructuring but have not specified if, or when, it will take place.

**TABLE 2: Provinces with Restructuring Legislation, 1990-1996**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province/ Date | Source | Number of Districts | | Number of Trustees | |
|  |  | before | after | before | after |
| Prince Edward Island  School Actrevised  1994 | 1993 task force on  structure and governance  Towards Excellence | 5 | 3 | 45  15 per board | 29  9-11 per board |
| Nova Scotia  School Actrevised  1995 | 1993-1995 consultation  amalgamations part of overall  education reform | 22 | 7  (6 amal.  1 French) | -- | -- |
| New Brunswick  Jan.-July 1992 | minister announces plans for  restructuring  implementation committees  established; elections for new  boards within 6 months | 42 | 18  (6 French, 12 English) | 402 | 220 |
| Quebec  1992 | ministry eliminated all but one  regional board (confessional) amalgamations have gradually  taken place | 200 | 165    149 in 1995 | -- | -- |
| Alberta  Feb.-Aug. 1994 | minister announced reductions,  gave boards six months to plan  proposals, four months to decide  and implement | 141 | 60 | 1400 | 450  (9 per board, one with 10) |

**TABLE 3: Provinces Awaiting Legislation for Restructuring, 1990-1996**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province/ Date | Source | Number of Districts | | Number of Trustees | |
|  |  | before | after | before | after |
| Newfoundland  1993-present | restructuring on hold pending  action of new premier and  resolution of constitutional  question | 27 | 10 | -- | -- |
| Ontario  February 1995-  present | consultation since 1995  task force announced  recommendations  February 1996 | 168 | 87  (to include 15 French) | 2100 | 680  7-13 per board based on # of pupils in district |
| Manitoba  1994-present | plan before cabinet May 1995  boundaries review  commission recommended  amalgamation of divisions | 57 | 22 | 9-11 per board | 5-9 per board |

Table 4: Provinces Considering Restructuring, 1990-1996

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province/ Date | Source | Number of Districts | | Number of Trustees | |
|  |  | before | after | before | after |
| Quebec | no restructuring at  present but issue is politically  alive | 149 | -- | 17-25 | -- |
| Saskatchewan | two reviews have proposed  restructuring  large-scale consultation underway | 119  includes 9  French | 25-30  17 | -- | -- |

**Purposes of Restructuring**

According to official documents and other sources, the purposes associated with restructuring initiatives across the country vary considerably. In Newfoundland, denominational schooling became intertwined with equality of opportunity and access questions, with school quality issues, and with governance efficiency issues. Redirecting savings from governance and administration into classrooms was of express concern in Newfoundland, as it was also in Nova Scotia, where a movement to reform schools, to involve parents in schooling, and to improve educational quality, likewise found expression in restructuring. New Brunswick was also concerned with improving accountability and defining more clearly governance and administrative functions. Defining system roles was also a primary purpose in Prince Edward Island, as was redirecting governance and administrative savings toward schools. At the same time, restructuring in Prince Edward Island was also associated with facilitating province-wide collective bargaining.

In contrast, saving money by reducing governance and administrative structures was not an original objective of the Manitoba government when it began to consider reorganizing school divisions and districts. However, over the past two years, it has become an objective in the face of declining federal funding. Yet, the province's boundaries review commission has warned: 'It would appear that there is not a lot of money to be saved from assimilation of rural school divisions. There is even a possibility that some portions of integration could end up being more costly.' Altogether, the Manitoba government has maintained that restructuring should produce: greater student choice in school selection; greater rationalization in the use of teacher and administrative resources; greater teacher mobility among districts; greater student access to special programs; less duplication in services; and, last but not least, lower costs of governance across the system(as defined in average cost per trustee).

In Alberta, restructuring was directed principally at making the school system more efficient, reducing bureaucratic expenditures, and focusing the system's attention on instruction. Restructuring in Alberta meant closing 118 districts, reducing the number of trustees from 1400 to 450, and eliminating a small number of administrative support staff because of duplication. Government estimates that the province saved approximately $13 million during the first year following district consolidation, and that this amount will be saved annually in future years. Considerable sums may also be saved in future years, projections show, through larger economies of scale and more efficient board operations. So far, the province has not attempted to recapture these savings directly. But the education ministry has 'capped' administrative overheads to ensure that 'saved' funds are used for instruction. Restructuring has brought no school closures in Alberta, nor has it led to teacher lay-offs. But three offices, which coordinated regional operations, have been closed. According to the province, the larger 'regional' divisions have proved more efficient and effective as administrative units.

Table 5 summarizes the various purposes associated with restructuring across the country.

**Table 5: Summary of Provincial Purposes for Restructuring**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Nfld | PEI | NS | NB | Que. | Ont. | Man | Sask. | Alta. | BC |
| To affect cost savings |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| S in district governance | ' | ' | ' | ' |  | ' | ' |  | ' | ' |
| S in district administration | ' | ' | ' | ' |  | ' | ' |  | ' | ' |
| S at the provincial level |  | ' |  |  |  | ' | ' |  |  |  |
| S in negotiating teacher  contracts centrally |  | ' |  |  |  | ' |  |  |  |  |
| To reallocate savings to  classroom level | ' | ' | ' | ' |  |  | ' | ' | ' |  |
| To improve |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| S educational opportunity |  |  |  |  |  | ' | ' |  | ' |  |
| S quality of education system | ' | ' | ' |  |  |  |  | ' |  | ' |
| S educational equity | ' |  |  |  |  | ' |  | ' |  |  |
| S educational opportunity | ' | ' |  |  |  |  |  |  | ' |  |
| S efficiency |  |  | ' |  |  | ' |  |  |  | ' |
| S accountability |  |  |  | ' |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other purposes, to: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| S correct public apathy |  |  |  | ' |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| S provide a stronger role for  parents |  |  |  | ' |  | ' | ' | ' |  |  |
| S provide a stronger role for  business |  |  |  |  |  | ' |  |  |  |  |
| S enhance student and parent  choice |  |  |  |  |  |  | ' |  |  |  |
| S address declining population |  |  |  |  |  |  | ' | ' |  |  |

**In-System Responses to Restructuring**

For most people across the country, restructuring has simply not been an issue of vital importance. It has, however, been an issue of far greater significance to school board members, administrators, and others who work inside provincial systems. In Newfoundland, for example, the government's plan to reduce the role of denominational committees in schooling has opened up a constitutional question on which Ottawa will be eventually obliged to rule. Until then, pastoral resistance to the government's proposed changes is likely to continue. Within the schools themselves, plans for restructuring have led to administrator and teacher concerns about displacement and the difficulties that may ensue when senior teachers and administrators 'bump' those less senior to them as contracts and collective agreements allow.

In New Brunswick, restructuring led to considerable trustee resistance and fears about declining local control over schools. Teachers, it appears, were more concerned about restructuring's effects on staffing. Nova Scotia school boards, in contrast, supported some parts of the government's plan but, again, provincial teachers registered their concern in terms of restructuring's effects on jobs and opposed the wage 'roll-backs' that government also introduced. In Prince Edward Island, where two district offices were closed and a half-dozen administrators displaced, some trustees refused to serve on newly-amalgamated boards.

In Ontario, the report of the government's task force which proposed that boards should be reduced from 168 to 87 was greeted by mostly negative comments by trustees. One press release from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association claimed that 'taxpayers should be aware of bogus 'cost savings' associated with new school board boundaries contained in the report by Ontario's restructuring task force,' and charged that 'the task force has recklessly chopped $800 million for the province's funding for education. These cuts--which would be in addition to the $400 million in cuts already announced for the 1996-97 school year--erroneously give the impression that the task force's recommended boundaries will automatically save money.' Reportedly, radio phone-in shows became the focus of a 'say no' campaign to district restructuring.

Compared to Ontario, the 'in-system' response to restructuring in Manitoba was less noticeable. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the boundaries commission's consultations. Save for the resistance that restructuring provoked in the Winnipeg area, opponents to amalgamation were generally less vocal than in Ontario. Perhaps, too, restructuring was also very much in the air: the education department had been slashed some 35% during the three previous years, which represented an employee cut of some 250 employees, (including post-secondary staff). Twenty-five to 35 of these displaced professionals (psychologist, speech pathologies, and other professions) were subsequently employed by local school divisions.

**Restructuring Criteria**

Across the country, provinces varied appreciably in the criteria they set out to guide their restructuring efforts. Newfoundland, for example, proceeded without conducting impact studies and without setting out explicit criteria as reference points for discussions and decisions. New Brunswick, in contrast, considered geography, history, and tradition as important variables to be factored into realignments. New Brunswick, however, began with no fixed idea about what constituted optimum size for new districts because of other complex and intervening variables. Nor did the province conduct studies about restructuring's possible impacts. Other issues, instead, took the foreground, especially public concern with educational quality, rural population decline (some districts losing as many as 5% of student population each year), and the effects of an aging educational workforce (46.5 years on average).

Ontario's task force on restructuring set out an extensive list of criteria to guide its activities, including: respect for constitutional rights, economic and social conditions, natural affiliations, existing joint ventures in social services, district size, population, extent of natural barriers, and economies of scale. Neither district geographic size, nor district population size, the task force concluded, should be deemed 'overriding' factors; of greater significance to the task force was 'marrying like districts to like districts.'

In Manitoba, the boundaries review commission compiled a list of criteria similar in character to those of Ontario's task force. Chief among the conditions they examined were: equality and equity, linguistic affiliation, physical patterns, cultural geography, population patterns, Winnipeg's dominance, rural-urban inequities, rate of population change, population distribution and trends, cost of district operations, assessments per pupil, permeability of boundaries, as well as existing distance education delivery systems. Manitoba's boundaries review commission also reported that, in their view, data on optimum school district size was inconclusive, and that it was difficult to connect economies of scale with size because of complex historic, geographic, and cultural factors. Likely no optimal district size exists, they concluded, although they pointed to research that identified 5,000 to 35,000 or even 50,000 students, as within an optimal range. In simpler terms, one hour busing limits for students in rural areas, they noted, is likely a district's territorial limit.

In Alberta, district size, student population, provincial geography, history, trading and transportation patterns, and economies of scale were all considered as criteria of importance in reorganizing districts. Government officials regarded student population as a key factor and estimated that the smallest districts should ideally consist of at least 3,500 to 4,000 pupils. Although no impact studies were conducted in advance of restructuring, government tried to ascertain if the proposed remapping of districts made sense to the communities affected.

**Implementation Models and Processes**

One feature common to most restructuring initiatives across the country is that they generally followed a top-down model of implementation. That is to say, government, or government-sponsored agencies, assumed full responsibility for developing the models and processes that guided reorganization.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, restructuring proved a difficult and complex process, covering a period of almost four years. The government's proposal to move from a denominational model of governance to 10 regional areas has been resisted by the Roman Catholic Church. Only a constitutional amendment will clear the way for legislative change expected later in 1996.

Compared to Newfoundland, New Brunswick's consultation process was short. The minister set a goal of reducing the province's 42, primarily small, rural boards to 15. After consultation with existing boards he agreed to 18. A map of proposed changes was released as a model in January 1992. By February's end a decision was finalized to reduce board numbers to 18 rather than 15, and implementation teams, comprised of department officials and members of previous boards, were established. These implementation teams supervised board elections in the new districts and facilitated the administrative changes required. During consolidation, one of the former district superintendents was usually appointed to serve the new board, and the others were reassigned or retired. Restructuring in New Brunswick did not necessitate teacher layoffs. Recent events, however, have brought even more significant change. In February 1996, New Brunswick's education minister announced that boards will be completely replaced in the near future by a system of parent councils.

Following a government-led discussion process, the Nova Scotia education department presented the province with several restructuring models from which to choose. The 1995 release of a white paper, Education Horizons, which came after more than a year of public meetings, signaled that the education department was prepared to move forward and implement a new school governance structure for the province. In Prince Edward Island, the consulation period leading up to discussion took almost two years, as did the implementation period that followed. The three boards that now exist, the government maintains, keep the spirit of local representation in schooling alive, even though board membership has been 'downsized' by six members in two of the boards (from 15 to 9) and by four in the other (15 to 11).

Restructuring in the prairie provinces assumed different forms. In Manitoba, a government-appointed boundaries review commission studied the question, met with the public and the education community, and made recommendations. Of special concern to the Manitoba commission was that sufficient 'lead' time, 'expressed preferably in years rather than months,' be provided to communicate the nature of the restructuring changes so that appropriate planning and preparation could take place. In this regard, the commission recommended a three year phase-in period for boundary realignment.

In Alberta, the process to amalgamate school boards was more directly orchestrated through the minister's office and consisted of two stages. Government allocated a six-month period for boards to study three reconfiguration scenarios prepared by the education department and, following this, boards were required to submit responses. This process was assisted by a government-produced handbook which outlined criteria and guidelines for district amalgamation. The scenarios outlined considered various factors, especially district population size, which emerged as the critical variable in decision making. If geographic reconfigurations did not make sense when minimum student numbers were considered, then reconfiguration proposals were re-examined. Throughout the deliberations, government held that the minimum size for school districts was to be at least 3500-4000 students, except in areas where special circumstances applied. No maximum was ever set for districts in terms of student population and no academic studies were commissioned to forecast possible impacts.

Restructuring's second stage in Alberta consisted of a four-month period during which the minister and staff reviewed the proposals for changing boundaries and made final decisions about the shape of the reorganization. As planning and discussion moved along, various questions were raised. For example, trustees were at first unsure about how to reorganize, as well as which electoral procedures to use in selecting new board members. Eventually, existing board members recommended nine 'new' trustees from among their ranks to the minister, who appointed these trustees on an 'interim' basis. Harmonizing contracts for administrators in newly-configured districts also proved difficult at first but has now been resolved. Altogether, the Alberta education department claims that 'feedback' from the newly-constituted districts is positive.

**Estimated Cost Benefits**

Historically, the case for organizing schools or districts into larger units has usually been made on either efficiency or equity grounds. The efficiency argument holds that it costs more to deliver similar educational services or programs in small districts than in larger ones. The argument for equity holds that, without a broad base for taxation, taxpayers in small districts will either bear disproportionate costs, or student access to equal educational opportunities will be diminished. Such arguments were central to the first two movments for restructuring school governance this century.

Although economy of scale arguments have been generally used as principal forms of support for restructuring in the 1990s, this does not necessarily mean that recent reform efforts share the same dedication toward equality and equity goals as earlier movements. Advocates for restructuring today appear considerably more focused on reducing governance and administrative costs than on other goals.

Close to the heart of the current restructuring movement are questions to do with the efficiency and costs of administrative structures. The assumption that administrative costs in schooling have somehow increased disproportionately to other costs constitutes part of the sub-text of discussion about restructuring in the 1990s. Analysis of Canadian Education Association questionnaire data, collected in 1978 and 1985, indicates that administrative numbers in select urban school districts across the country generally rose over this seven-year period in relation to student numbers (see Tables 6 and 7 in Appendix 1). Figure 1, based on these data, illustrates that in five provinces--Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia--the number of administrators grew between 1978 to 1985, shown by the appreciably smaller ratio of students to administrators in 1985. Figure I also shows that, for the same period, the ratio remained static in Quebec and increased in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where the relative number of administrators to students declined.

Exactly why greater numbers of administrators were required and hired in select urban districts in a majority of provinces over this period is unknown. Research in the United States suggests, however, that various factors have led to increases in administrative ranks, including "dis-economies of scale," high "coordination" and "information" costs in bureaucracies, and the high managerial costs in administering "peripheral," "social," and "non-educational agendas" in schools. In Chicago, for example, over a recent ten-year period, the city's student enrolment declined by 10% but staff grew by 21%. Unfortunately, the absence of sound descriptive data about what school administrators actually do, and how their work has changed over time, forbids much in the way of explanation about whether recent additions to administrative ranks in some city school districts are either warranted or unwarranted.

Nevertheless, the belief appears to be held strongly in government and public circles that schools are over-administered and that savings can be obtained by reducing the number of administrative structures, especially at district and middle-management levels. Certainly, projected savings from governance and administration have been used as a "driver" in various provinces to support current restructuring initiatives in whole or in part. Table 8 summarizes, by province, the savings in governance and administrative costs estimated by provincial authorities.

**TABLE 6: Estimated Savings From Restructuring in Canadian Provinces**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | District Reductions | | |  |  |
| Province | Date | Before | After | Savings | Source of Savings |
| Newfoundland | pending | 27 | 10 | not identified |  |
| Prince Edward  Island | 1993  1994 | 5  4 | 4  3 |  | closure of district offices, half a dozen administrators affected |
| Nova Scotia | 1995-1996 | 22 | 7 | $11-12 million | efficiency in administration restructuring not intended to reduce expenditures on schooling |
| New Brunswick | 1992-1996 | 42 | 18 | $5-6 million | administrative costs |
| Quebec |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ontario | 1998 | 168 | 87 |  |  |
| Manitoba | pending | 57 | 22 | $1.4 million | trustee election costs |
| Saskatchewan | pending | 119 | 17-30 | $8-10 million | no real public appeal for saving money if it destroys rural values |
| Alberta | 1994 | 141 | 60 | $13 million in first year | savings in administration and governance  amounts saved due to lager- scale operations unknown. |

**Analysis of Developments**

The restructuring movement in local school governance now taking place across Canada is a complex and many-sided phenomenon. The following analysis of recent developments confines itself to examining four important dimensions of this movement: the relationship of this movement to earlier restructuring movements; the meaning of this movement, and whether it signifies an attempt to 'de-gover' or 're-govern' schools; the reason governments have chosen to reform district governance and administration; and, the expectations restructuring has imposed on school councils.

**Differences in Strategies Over Time**

Approaches to the way local school governance and administration is being restructured vary across the country. From data analyzed in this study, it appears that three different strategies are being applied in different jurisdictions.

First, there is what might be termed the 'historical strategy revisited.' This has been, or is being applied, in a majority of provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. It involves redrawing governance boundaries, reducing the number of districts, and reducing the numbers of trustees and school district administrators, much in the way that school districts were traditionally consolidated.

However, the purposes of revisiting the 'historical strategy' are different today than those of earlier consolidation movements--movements which were generally directed toward equality of opportunity and access for students, as well as fiscal equity for taxpayers. Today's restructuring in Canada and the United States is more reductionist in purpose and is intended to address financial exigencies of the day. In the United States, it has been described as a 'government business adjustment' that seeks to constrain educational spending in accordance with declining or static public revenues. In relative terms, it is generally less concerned with achieving educational outcomes than the consolidation movement of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Although, in fairness, it should be noted that some provinces appear to be motivated, in part, by the idea of improving educational outcomes. In the main, however, restructuring in the 1990s seems to be directed toward achieving better system-wide efficiency, reducing 'out of classroom' expenditures, and shrinking governance and administration. In its own way, it celebrates system efficiency and practicality over established traditions of local representation in schooling.

Within the current restructuring movement, a second--and new--approach to restructuring may be identified. For want of a better term, this approach might be described as the 'radical restructuring strategy.' This has been applied recently in New Brunswick where the traditional system of school governance consisting of school districts, boards of trustees, and their administrative officers, has been replaced by a new structure marked by greater centralization of control in the provincial ministry and a mandated system of parent councils responsible for individual schools. The New Brunswick government's plan calls for legislation (on or around March 1, 1996) to abolish the province's 18 local school boards (down from 42 three years ago), and to replace them with a new governance system. This new system will consist of three levels--elected parent committees at each elementary and secondary school, 18 regional parent advisory councils elected by the school committees, and two province-wide parent boards, one for English and one for French-language schools.

The primary purposes of this strategy are obviously directed toward relocating greater control and responsibility for schooling in the hands of parents, and flattening or de-bureaucratizing the traditional governance and administrative system. In eliminating governance and administration at the district level, it gives far more responsibility and authority to principals and parents in individual schools. Also, by establishing regional and province-wide parent councils, it allows parents, who are arguably most directly affected by the system, greater influence over provincial policy and educational direction. One significant feature of the New Brunswick governance model is that it removes educational control from taxpayers who do not have children in schools. Although non-parents will be permitted to run for positions on school committees, they will not be permitted to vote for committee members. Overall, this approach appears to be, at once, about tightening and loosening the system's controls. It differs from the historical strategy model, which essentially serves to de-govern the system, in that it is clearly intended to provide a means for re-governing provincial schools. Although it appears to run contrary to established governance practices, the New Brunswick restructuring strategy represents a return to the idea of direct community control over schools, the idea that, ironically, first gave rise to the development of the original school boards in New England during the mid-17th century.

Finally, the outlines of a third approach to restructuring are visible in Saskatchewan, an approach constructed around what might be described as an 'integrated services strategy.' After several attempts to restructure school governance and administration on the basis of task force studies, Saskatchewan has recently examined the broad question about whether school governance and administration could become part of a larger governance and delivery model for public sector services. Discussions about an 'integrated' model of service delivery may be traced at least as far back as 1992, when Saskatchewan introduced an 'Action Plan' for children. This action plan, which sought to combine 'social, health, and educational programming for children' led to an integrated schools pilot project.' Looking ahead, one government document explained: 'In the future this approach could be applied by further integration of health, social and educational programs as well as other government services.'

As a result of such thinking, the Saskatchewan government has been engaging in a large-scale public consultation process to examine the possibilities of integrating educational governance and administration structures with those of other public services. Under consideration is the idea of developing an overarching structure that would integrate K-12 school programs with post-secondary institutions, as well as integrate educational structures with existing and emerging agencies for employment, social assistance, and health.

Movement toward an integrated services model can also be found in the Northwest Territories, where the Territorial Government has responded to the request of the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, located outside Yellowknife, to be reconstituted as the Dogrib Community Services Board as part of a development toward Aboriginal self-government. Beginning on April 1, 1996, the Dogrib Board, along with its earlier educational responsibilities, will assume responsibility for coordinating health, social services, and employment programs for five communities ranging in size from 200-1,000 people.

**De-Governing, Not Re-Governing**

Most of the provincial restructuring initiatives introduced during the 1990s appear to be principally directed at modifying existing structures of local school governance and administration--in other words, reducing the number of structures where local school governance now takes place and enlarging the territorial boundaries of newly-amalgamated districts. Save for New Brunswick and, perhaps, Saskatchewan, discussions about restructuring have seemingly ignored the question of whether existing governance and administrative structures actually work. What governments appear to be saying, in effect, is that small governance structures are inefficient and, therefore, cannot be rationalized on any terms. Only larger structures, this line of argument seems to hold, make financial sense as organizations for governance and administration. The reasoning implicit in this seems to suggest that district administrative costs, and governance costs, decline as district sizes increase. The logic of this, at least in terms of administrative costs for which data are readily available, is questionable. Recent British Columbia data on district size and administrative costs suggest that savings may only occur by restructuring districts with fewer than 5,000 students. Figure 2, which graphs administrative cost for students by district size for the 1993-94 school year, shows clearly that administrative costs stabilize in school districts of around 5,000 students, and that little, if any, fiscal advantage is secured by increasing the size of school districts through larger student population.

In a broader sense, perhaps what should be under scrutiny is not the size of school districts but other questions related to measures of district effectiveness or relevancy. For example, it might be interesting to plot high school graduation rates, or some other measure of educational effectiveness, against district size in select districts, where social, economic, and cultural factors are held to be similar. If graduation rates increased as district size increased, this would suggest that educational effectiveness was somehow related to larger governance and administrative units. On the other hand, if no change in educational effectiveness was associated with larger governance units, or if a negative correlation was found, surely this might raise questions about the value of larger structures. Of note here is research on American schools. Since the 1960s, a growing body of literature has questioned the value of school and district consolidation, and has suggested that various academic and social advantages are associated with small schools and small rganizational structures.

Likewise, the issue of organizational relevance might deserve greater attention in discussions about restructuring. School boards are, arguably, artifacts of an earlier organizational age and, perhaps, no longer suited to an era in which learning, as well as educational and intellectual work, has been transformed by modern information and communications technologies. It might be a more useful line of investigation for government to examine new or different organizational possibilities for governance and administration, and whether these structures might make educational organizations more effective in their work, before deciding to amalgamate districts, which is little more than a 'back to the future' approach to district governance and administration.

So too should questions be raised about the effects of restructuring's tendency to centralized control at both provincial and local levels, a tendency several education departments have acknowledged. Prince Edward Island's education department, for example, has advised that restructuring school district governance may potentially increase centralization and bureaucracy. Manitoba's boundaries commission put it this way: 'The greatest negative consequence of reduction in the number of existing school divisions could emanate from increased centralization and bureaucracy if allowed to develop. More centralized administration could increase the distance between parent and student and [between] senior administrator and trustee.'

More to the point, does centralization simply mean that administrators purged with the closure of small district offices will only be added to the administrative roster of larger and more bureaucratic district offices' Similarly, will reductions in district administrative staff mean fewer or greater numbers in provincial education departments--a fascinating question but one that has been almost totally ignored' And what of the relationship between centralization and the objectives of provincial governments to empower local communities and their schools through school councils and fewer bureaucratic structures' The possibility exists that, regardless of its intentions, restructuring could reinforce mid-19th century traditions of administrative colonization rather than prepare school systems for the present and the future.

**Low-Risk Targets: Boards and District Administrators**

It seems no accident that provincial governments have chosen school boards and district administrators as a focus for restructuring. Stemming the tide of public sector spending necessitates cuts somewhere and district governance and administration represent low-risk targets for government, given that policy decisions of this order are usually defined in political costs. In the ecology of educational politics, trustees and district bureaucrats have few natural allies and enjoy relatively little public support. They have no political constituencies save for themselves: parental concern about schooling usually extends no further than the local school and, for large elements of the public, 'representativeness' at the district level is simply not an issue. Indeed, slashing 'officialdom' has been a long-standing popular cause, and a 'safe' political response, even before the end of the Great War when 'bureaucracy' was first coined as part of common speech.

Shrinking or flattening district governance and administrative structures may, indeed, produce some immediate savings as estimated by various provincial authorities. But such actions, even by these estimates, yield only small savings when calculated as a percentage of total provincial spending on schooling. Put another way, it seems apparent that senior governments' restructuring efforts across the country signal that government authorities are, for now, content to doodle in the margins of public spending, and are indisposed to cutting back in any significant way the huge labour force costs that comprise by far the greatest part of educational spending.

In selecting its targets carefully, senior governments seem to have signaled that they are unwilling to challenge what some believe to be the 'real' governing authority in education--the teacher unions and other bargaining units that provide school services--organizations which have become increasingly influential in defining the character of services provided. Through contractually-established salaries, benefits, and conditions of employment, teachers' unions in the past two decades have greatly reduced the capacity of public education to respond to change, to redirect resources toward emerging priorities, or, for that matter, to do little else but to maintain the system in its current configuration. In short, it appears highly significant that the current national arithmetic on school governance and public sector restraint has left collective bargaining and teacher influence on school services out of the equation. One might ask: If existing school governance structures are no longer taken as a 'given,' should existing contractual and other relationships between provincial governments, school boards, and teachers be taken as a 'given.'

Finally, even if a case can be made for reducing the number of district governance units and trustees, does it necessarily follow that district-level administration should also be cut' On this point--and quite apart from the problems of managing the school's intellectual program--it might be asked who will superintend education's vast system-wide emphasis on social and human development, and who will police the details of collective agreements' Given that the school's non-intellectual agenda, an agenda that consumes enormous human resources in education, is to be administered at a level somewhere above the individual school and below the provincial level, can this be accomplished with fewer administrators' Or, given that individual schools are to be given greater control over their own operations, who will ensure the accountability of such institutions at regional or provincial levels' One fundamental assumption about the discussion on local school governance and administration is that these two functions are somehow coterminous. This assumption may be worthy of closer examination.

**More than Efficiency: Populism and Political Faith**

Various studies and commissions of inquiry in British Columbia and elsewhere over the past 10 years have underscored public and parental demands for greater direct participation in public schooling. Thus, it is not surprising that provinces such as New Brunswick, most notably, as well as Alberta, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Quebec, and others, have tied their restructuring initiatives to a mounting mood of populism for greater parental and public influence in school affairs, for less bureaucracy in schooling, and for more direct forms of democratic participation, principally in the form of parental access to school councils. Today, eight out of 12 provinces and territories either have, or are installing, legislatively-based school advisory councils. In Manitoba, for example, 86% of schools feature some form of advisory committee which allows for parental participation.

School councils, to some extent, have become restructurings Trojan horse in that they reduce resistance to the loss of local representation that occurs when school boards are amalgamated. Manitoba's boundaries commission made the point this way: 'Parents who typically take a strong interest in their local school may feel that they would be losing a level of representation if trustees had larger areas and numbers of electors to represent. However, parental involvement through advisory councils and increased freedom for schools to operate as units could mitigate these fears. . . . Parents are more concerned about the school their children attend, and the programs offered there, than the division in which the school is located.'

No doubt, New Brunswick has responded in more dramatic fashion than other provinces by replacing school boards with school councils composed entirely of parents which, in turn, provide members for similar advisory councils at regional and provincial levels. By any standard, New Brunswick's actions appear to be an act of considerable political faith inasmuch as the short history of school councils in Canada offers little in the way of perspective or, indeed, a record of performance by which to estimate the effectiveness of such bodies. In the interest of rationality, it might be useful to collect some empirical evidence on the nature of parent participation on such councils (turnover and length of service), and to conduct some objective evaluation on how these councils perform.

As matters stand, questions about the efficacy of school councils abound. For example: Can parent councils work harmoniously with school boards and school staffs over the long term? Can they, as in the case of New Brunswick, effectively replace school boards? How does their kind of representativeness relate to the kind provided by school boards? Can they, as parent-dominated bodies, fairly represent the larger local public interest in schooling? Are they really intended to give parents a voice, or simply to serve as a mechanism to siphon off parental discontent and co-opt opposition to school policies? Or, do they simply signal that the providential state in schooling is nearly over, that traditional government structures in education no longer work, and that de-bureaucratization of governance is but a first step in other, larger kinds of de-bureaucratizations to come?