



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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OPSBA Submission to Quebec Election Systems Study Panel

To: The Honourable Marlene Jennings P.C, LL.B.
Via email: electionspanel@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Jennings,

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) is a partner member with the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) and we have worked together to help shape effective education policy and develop strong school board governance in the interest of optimum outcomes for students. As a school board body, we have a strong history of advocacy for student achievement and well-being and take pride in the work we have done to help build high-performing school systems.

As partner members with QESBA in the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), we felt it necessary to respond to the emerging situation in Quebec where the current Minister of Education has indicated his desire to abolish school board elections and possibly establish an Electoral College in their place. We would like to highlight some serious concerns that warrant reconsideration of this direction.

OPSBA supports our Quebec colleagues in their establishment of the Quebec Election Systems Study Panel which is tasked with studying your province's past elections and the options for electing your commissioners. This will offer a robust context for effective decision-making on this issue.

Here in Ontario, our Association maintains a strong advocacy focus on student achievement and well-being. At the same time we invest in supporting the governance and community representative role of trustees and in building their leadership capacity since these are key aspects of effective decision-making and responsiveness to the needs of students, parents and the public at large.

We have, and will continue to promote and support the role of the locally democratically elected trustee -- the only publicly elected official with the direct responsibility for the education of our children. We know this is equally true for the Quebec English School Boards Association.

We offer the following comments to support the importance of good governance, elected school boards, and the role of municipal elections. While our point of reference is Ontario, we would suggest that the issues addressed are equally relevant for education governance in Quebec.

Governance

OPSBA has provided a number of professional development resources for our trustees including [Good Governance: A Guide for Trustees, School Boards, Directors of Education and Communities](http://cge.ontarioschooltrustees.org/en/) (<http://cge.ontarioschooltrustees.org/en/>). In this reference book an entire chapter is devoted to Board Governance, which states,

“Governance provides a framework and a process for the allocation of decision-making powers. Good governance is the exercise of these powers through ethical leadership. School boards are the embodiment of local governance in action. Through their decisions and policies they demonstrate to their communities effective stewardship of the board’s resources in the interests of students and the community as a whole.

Ultimately, governance is the exercise of authority, direction, and accountability to serve the higher moral purpose of public education. A governance structure defines the roles, relationships, and behavioural parameters for the board and its staff.

In education, the true test of any board’s governance structure is its effectiveness in promoting and sustaining a board’s achievement standards, accomplishing goals designed to bring positive results to communities, and demonstrating accountability. Effective board governance relies on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Trustees, as individuals do not have authority to make decisions or take action on behalf of the board. They are members of the board and it is the board as a whole that exercises authority and makes decisions and does so in the interests of all students of the board. Trustees are required to uphold the implementation of any board resolution after it is passed by the board. As trustees communicate with their constituents and hear their concerns, they must at the same time convey that changes to existing board policy require consideration by the board as a whole. Trustees facilitate the concerns of their constituents by advising them as to which board staff can answer their questions or deal directly with their concerns. In some cases, trustees may bring problems that affect the entire jurisdiction to the board for resolution.”

Good governance, as exemplified by a board of elected trustees, provides for an effective, locally responsive approach to education that combines high standards of goal-setting and decision-making with transparent accountability. This ensures that students come first and that their success and well-being are at the centre of all efforts.

The effective role of elected school board members (trustees)

Trustees are the crucial link between the school board and their local community. Trustees are of the community; they live in their communities, know their community and advocate for their community. Some of their responsibilities include:

- operating schools according to provincial legislation;
- having a vision statement that reflects the board’s philosophy and local needs and priorities;
- the development of a multi-year strategic plan;
- setting the board’s budget within the provincial grants and accompanying regulations;

- making provision for resources and for the hiring of teachers, other staff;
- accountability to the public for implementing curriculum according to ministry curriculum policy;
- developing and delivering other programs that reflect provincial policies and local priorities;
- providing for the hiring of teachers and other staff required in their schools;
- providing for the maintenance of school buildings and property with regard to student safety and in accordance with provincial legislation;
- monitoring the policies of the schools and the achievement of students and, through the director of education, holding the entire system accountable for meeting provincial and board standards;
- hiring and performance appraisal of the director of education /director general.

There is local control that ensures a centralized bureaucracy does not lose sight of the ability of the education system to reflect the needs and aspirations of unique and diverse communities. Trustees serve as advocates, as ombudsmen, as originators of ideas, as guideposts and hold both the government and staff accountable. Advocacy for student mental health strategies, a fair and coordinated ministry approach to education and services, for equity within aboriginal education and funding, fairness in special education funding, inclusiveness and equity, and effective use of technology in teaching and learning are a few of the ways that trustees make a difference.

And trustees do not do this for the money. Across Ontario, the annual average honorarium amount is \$10,000. Trustees contribute long hours in the decision-making processes at committee and board meetings, reading and reviewing board/ministry correspondence and interacting with their constituents in a variety of ways (email, social media, face to face, telephone and public meetings).

Trustees are interpreters and messengers for government initiatives. They provide and allow for local perspectives. They help families navigate complex rules and processes to get children the support they need from their schools. They initiate innovative and effective programs that improve student achievement and well-being.

Elected trustees are devoted to public education and want to make changes to improve the system for all children.

Ontario Municipal Elections 2014

In Ontario school board trustees are on the ballot in the municipal elections and are elected at the same time as other municipal officers. This has proven to be an effective and economical approach. Ontario recently conducted municipal elections in October 2014. It is worthwhile to note that with financial support from the Ministry of Education, we, along with our partner school board associations in the province, developed a suite of bilingual election resources to promote the role of school board trustee and encourage voter participation. These included the above mentioned Good Governance guide, a pre-election candidate information guide, a guide to hosting an all-candidates meeting, Public Service Announcement videos, promotional materials and a dedicated School Board Election Website. The government saw this as an important initiative as did we. Public response was very positive as was engagement in the electoral process.

We are hopeful that through your consultation the importance of the locally elected school board trustee will become evident. We would submit that if trustees were “appointed” they may have no

established connection to the school communities or contact with schools and parents. School councils play an important role but they are not elected by the larger community.

It is the elected trustee who is passionate about reaching out to all of their communities, about equity for all those who contribute inside and outside of the classroom, about ensuring the voices and needs of our children are being heard; and about reform, visioning and results.

Through the school boards that they elect, parents and other taxpayers can participate meaningfully in their community schools, contribute to school values, priorities and needs, and help shape the future of the province which is embodied in the students who are in our schools today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Barrett,
President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.

cc.

Stephen Burke, Acting President, Quebec English School Boards Association
Valerie McLeod, Executive Director, Canadian School Boards Association