

Local Voice in Decision-Making at the School System Level Across Canada:

A Report Prepared for the Canadian School Boards Association

Dr. Katina Pollock

September 2023



KP

Land Acknowledgement

The authors of this report would like to acknowledge the traditional territories from which this research is produced. Western University researchers work from the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. However, this study spans regions across what is now called Canada, covering the lands of diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit nations. Our research team acknowledges the historical and current oppression perpetrated to these nations under the guise of education, and we commit to using our work to support reconciliation.

We sought the participation of stakeholders and representatives from Indigenous education authorities (e.g., [Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey](#) in Nova Scotia), school systems (e.g., [The Manitoba First Nations School System](#)), and advisory boards (e.g., [The First Nations Education Steering Committee](#) in British Columbia) in sites where they were available. We also reached out to Indigenous representatives, organizations, and stakeholders for input and participation within all identified case study sites. We sought to work with Indigenous groups and individuals to honour knowledge sovereignty on their terms.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) for supporting the research upon which this report is based. We would also like to thank the following groups and individuals for their contributions to this study:

- ♦ The CSBA members who reviewed draft documents and supported recruitment.
- ♦ The trustees and administrators who provided feedback on the interjurisdictional scan.
- ♦ Our interview and focus group participants for sharing their knowledge and experience and for encouraging further participation.
- ♦ The members of the public who participated in the questionnaire.



Research Team

Lead Investigator

Dr. Katina Pollock

Lead Research Associate

Ruth Nielsen

Research Associates

Dr. Pamela Osmond-Johnson

Dr. James Ryan

Dr. Donna Swapp

Dr. Adrienne Vanthuyne

Dr. Annette Walker

Research Assistants

Alfred Adu-Bobi

Samah Al-Sabbagh

Asad Choudhary

Chloée Godin-Jacques

Bushra Mairaj

Omotoyosi Ogunbanwo

Translators

Amélie Perreault

Tina Sollazzo

Dr. Adrienne Vanthuyne

Project Manager

Kelly Bairos

Editor and Writing Associate

Sydney Gautreau

Executive Summary

This inquiry was commissioned by the Canadian School Boards Association. The Association was prompted to do so because of trustee concerns around the loss of involvement of the general public—or as many of our respondents termed it, local voice—in decision-making for publicly funded K–12 education in parts of Canada.

This inquiry is based on a multicase study focused on provincially and territorially funded school system governance in six jurisdictions that have different decision-making processes and structures: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Between September 2021 and March 2023, the research team explored the participation and perceived impact of “local voice” in system-level decision-making in Canadian jurisdictions that have, or had, democratically elected school boards.

This report is organized into four sections that mirror the study objectives. Section 1 describes the overall methodology and case study approach, including the data collection and analysis procedures. The second section presents the case study findings by jurisdiction: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Each subsection begins by describing the structure and processes of each jurisdiction in detail. This detail is included because there is such a wide level of variation between each jurisdiction—no two jurisdictions are the same. The third section provides a multicase analysis and reports the themes related to democratic voice in system-level decision-making. Lastly, the fourth section includes a list of recommendations for the Canadian School Boards Association.

All six sites were analyzed to discern how democratic voice is supported in the different systems. Our inquiry found that the public seems to be increasingly less involved in system-level decision-making, either by their choice or because of procedural changes that restrict opportunities for them to exercise their democratic voice. Overall, it was concluded that the removal of democratically elected boards of trustees impedes local democratic voice. The study found the greatest loss of democratic voice was in Anglophone Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec, where democratically elected boards of trustees have been replaced. This claim was based on:

- ♦ Less public engagement in education,
- ♦ Less transparency in decision-making processes,
- ♦ Less accountability of the education system to the public that it serves,
- ♦ Less representation in decision-making, and
- ♦ Less perceived freedom to express opposing views, both publicly and privately.

In jurisdictions that retain boards of trustees, reductions in democratic participation were also observed.

Participants recognized that there are issues with public engagement within non-traditional school board systems that do not have the basic infrastructure of democratic boards of trustees. The challenges associated with these new structures become barriers that obstruct democratic engagement. Further, the refusal of some to participate in the study for fear of personal or professional risk was deeply troubling. In a democratic society, no member of the public should express fear when contemplating participating in a study conducted by a third party with no formal or professional relationships with any of the study sites, and that had several checks and balances in place for both autonomy and confidentiality. Without freedom of expression, democracy cannot function effectively.

In total, 24 recommendations are presented to the Canadian School Boards Association under the following areas:

- ♦ Create a public awareness campaign,
- ♦ Encourage the auditing of citizenship and social studies curricula,
- ♦ Enhance accessibility of engagement practices,
- ♦ Foster partnership and networks,
- ♦ Increase Indigenous involvement,
- ♦ Increase immigrant and new Canadian involvement,
- ♦ Increase targeted parent involvement,
- ♦ Consider ways to increase student and youth involvement,
- ♦ Encourage democratically elected boards to implement clear strategic plan,
- ♦ Expand trustee professional development,
- ♦ Revisit elected school board structure and processes, and

- ♦ Convert existing communication strategies to a knowledge mobilization (KMb) approach.

Our research team offers these recommendations with an acknowledgement of the challenges associated with implementing broad, systemic change across these diverse jurisdictions. Some of these recommendations require additional resources, such as professional development or educational materials. Other recommendations go beyond providing resources: reaffirming the position of the CSBA as a facilitator to support its members in promoting institutional cultures within each province to influence whose voices are heard in public education.

In each of these cases, the CSBA may be required to take on a different supporting role for its members: as mediator, educator, advocate, or otherwise. It should also be noted that these recommendations are interrelated and meant to build from and support each other in large-scale education system change that is meaningful, long term, and approached simultaneously from different entry points (Campbell, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Fullan, 2010). The 24 recommendations are:

- ♦ **Recommendation 1:** Plan a Public Awareness Campaign
- ♦ **Recommendation 2:** Initiate a Public Campaign That Clarifies the Difference Between Governance and Operations
- ♦ **Recommendation 3:** Audit Current K–12 Civic and Citizen Education Curricula Learning Outcomes
- ♦ **Recommendation 4:** Work with Provincial and Territorial Governments to Modify and Update K–12 Citizenship and Social Studies Curricula
- ♦ **Recommendation 5:** Increase Clarity of Participation Processes
- ♦ **Recommendation 6:** Implement Linguistically Diverse Communication Strategies
- ♦ **Recommendation 7:** Conduct Accessibility Audits Across Jurisdictions
- ♦ **Recommendation 8:** Expand and Build Partnerships and Networks
- ♦ **Recommendation 9:** Investigate Ways to Increase Indigenous Involvement
- ♦ **Recommendation 10:** Partner with Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to Advocate for Voter Eligibility
- ♦ **Recommendation 11:** Implement a Newcomer and Refugee Engagement Strategy

- ♦ **Recommendation 12:** Increase Parent Participation from Underrepresented Populations
- ♦ **Recommendation 13:** Encourage the Use of School Parent Councils
- ♦ **Recommendation 14:** Encourage and Support Paths for Parental Involvement Beyond the School Sites to Include System-Level Decision-Making
- ♦ **Recommendation 15:** Investigate Ways to Increase Student and Youth Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making
- ♦ **Recommendation 16:** Encourage Boards to Implement a Clear Strategic Plan
- ♦ **Recommendation 17:** Implement Strategic Onboarding Plans
- ♦ **Recommendation 18:** Increase Ongoing Professional Development
- ♦ **Recommendation 19:** Encourage Succession Planning
- ♦ **Recommendation 20:** Review Requirements for Those in Decision-Making Roles for Public Education
- ♦ **Recommendation 21:** Advocate for Limits on Number of Trustee or Commissioner Terms
- ♦ **Recommendation 22:** Create Alternative Engagement Processes
- ♦ **Recommendation 23:** Evaluate the CSBA's Communication Processes and Consider Including a Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) Approach
- ♦ **Recommendation 24:** Invest in Incorporating Effective Information Communication Technology

School governance systems today can learn from the challenges that may have played a part in the growing movement to remove power and authority from boards of trustees and school boards. For a new and changing Canadian future, policymakers need to find new ways to support a system that fosters democratic participation in public education.

Table of Contents

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
RESEARCH TEAM	III
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
A Note on Terminology and Language	1
Why This Study Now?	5
Reasons for Recent Changes to School Governance Systems	8
Study Design	10
Methodology	10
INDIVIDUAL CASE SITE ANALYSIS	23
British Columbia	24
Saskatchewan	51
Manitoba	76
Québec	102
Nova Scotia	123
Northwest Territories	150
MULTICASE DATA: ALL JURISDICTIONS	175
Findings	177
Thematic Trends Across the Data	193
How is Democratic Voice Affected by the Loss of Elected School Boards?	202
RECOMMENDATIONS	205
CONCLUSION	235
REFERENCES	238
APPENDICES	259
APPENDIX A	260



Introduction

Introduction

In September 2021, I, Dr. Katina Pollock, entered a service contract with the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) to study the “Impact Related to the Loss of Local Democratic Voice in Education.” The deliverables named in the contract included an interjurisdictional policy scan and a final report of study findings. Our research team completed the interjurisdictional scan in 2022 (Pollock et al., 2022) and the current document is the contractually agreed upon final report. This report includes a description of the study design, descriptions of each case study with site analysis, multicase analysis, and our recommendations.

In this report, we present a snapshot of six jurisdictions that have different decision-making processes and structures: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Because education in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility rather than federal, each province and territory has approached public education slightly differently.

The most prevalent way in which provincial and territorial governments exercise their educational responsibility is through the establishment of publicly funded school systems (OECD, 2015). The province or territory designs and delivers education for children up to a mandatory age. How public education is delivered, including how it is governed, in each Canadian province and territory is influenced by several factors such as geography, local culture(s), histories, and languages (OECD, 2015). These influences play out in such a way that no two jurisdictions operate the same, or in this case, have the same governance structure. In fact, this study demonstrates that there are many ways in which public education is governed in the provinces and territory we investigated.

This inquiry was commissioned because of concerns around the loss of involvement of the general public—or as many of our respondents termed it, local voice—in decision-making for publicly funded K–12 education in parts of Canada. Although there is interest in, and substantial research on, various aspects of school system governance such as voting (McGregor & Lucas, 2019; Piscitelli et al., 2022), effectiveness and efficiency (Bedard & Mombourquette, 2015; Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Maharaj, 2020), various models of governance (Lucas, 2016; Newton & Sackney, 2005; Sattler, 2012), and so forth, this inquiry focuses on the governing bodies, often represented as boards of trustees/commissioners, and the relationship between these governing bodies and public voice. Because we are

interested in the general public's involvement in system-level decision-making, we focused our research on boards of trustees as they are the mechanism most closely aligned with public participation via elections (Overgaard, 2019).

However, some jurisdictions do not have boards of trustees; the majority-language boards in Nova Scotia (Anglophone) and Québec (Francophone) have been eliminated while the minority language boards in these jurisdictions remain, pursuant to their protection under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For these jurisdictions we had to investigate different systems (i.e., regional centres for education and school service centre boards of directors, respectively). In these jurisdictions, we provide insights into their specific system-level decision-making structure.

Parallel to provincial and territorial public school systems are First Nations-controlled school systems on reserves. These on-reserve schools are funded through a federal formula developed by Indigenous Services Canada (Government of Canada, 2022b). As part of the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education, on-reserve schools are managed, controlled, and administered by the local First Nation and/or organizations designated by the local First Nation (Government of Canada, 2022b). As such, each First Nation has its own system for administering and organizing education in ways that are locally and culturally relevant.

In this study, we did not include the above on-reserve school systems as they are outside of the scope for this project. However, some provincial school boards have formal agreements with First Nations to support the education needs of students who live on reserve and want (or are required) to attend provincial schools. Stakeholders in jurisdictions with these agreements have been included in this study; however, the specific jurisdictions participants were from are not revealed to maintain participant confidentiality. As well, we include jurisdictions in the Northwest Territories where local First Nations have exercised their right to self-government and choose to collaborate with the territorial government on education policies while reserving their right to control education should they decide to do so in the future.

A Note on Terminology and Language

We have modified some of our original terminology to be more inclusive and accessible to people from varying backgrounds, and to be applicable to the six

different research sites. During our data analysis, it became clear that the terms *public*, *voice*, *democratic voice*, *local*, and *system-level decision-making* meant different things to different people as a result of their positions or worldviews. For this reason, we researched, debated, and revised several concepts in this inquiry.

Public

During our data collection process and analysis, we realized participants held varying assumptions about what *public* means. For some participants, it meant groups of people or groups of populations and not necessarily individuals. They talked about the involvement of, for example, associations, interest groups, organizations, or communities in decision-making but overlooked or ignored the notion of individual voice or stated that individuals needed to add their voice to a group voice. Others used the term public to mean the general population.

Within the context of this study on public education and governance, we considered the public to be any individual who has the right and potential to vote within the jurisdictions that still had a voting process, or anyone who was eligible to participate in our study. Therefore, we use the word public to refer to anyone over the age of 18 who lived in a jurisdiction that we were studying. Readers may find places where the word community is used when describing the findings because this was the term participants used. In our analysis, we consider communities to be a part of the public.

Voice

For this investigation, the notion of *voice* in education governance refers to having the right or power to influence a decision that is connected to public education. Although we are aware that democratic voice in Canada is generally understood as referring to the governance of provinces, territories, and the nation and includes voting in municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal elections, our inquiry specifically focused on the public governance structures associated with provincial and territorial public education. For most jurisdictions (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Anglophone Quebec, and Francophone Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories), the notion of voice meant individual involvement in decision-making at the local governance level of public education, while for others it was at the regional governance level (Anglophone Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec). For others, voice included the collective voice of a group of individuals in decision-making. The notion of collective voice was presented in several ways; for example, some Indigenous participants referred to collective voice in terms of

having their community represented, and some parents referred to having a collective voice through representation in school-level committees.

Others were less specific as to whether they understood voice as something individual, collective, or even a combination of both. Rather, for these participants, voice was based on geography—specifically, concerns over rural and urban representation and interests. Lastly, others associated voice with spatial location of decision-making in relation to the education system hierarchy: voice at the local school level as opposed to voice in system-level decision-making (i.e., school board level or provincial/territorial level).

In this report and our data analysis, voice refers to all types of involvement (e.g., direct voting, consultation engagement, demonstration, etc.) of individuals and groups, including communities, that influence system-level decision-making in public education.

Democratic Voice

As can be observed in the study objectives and in the overall analysis and concluding sections, the initial call for research and subsequent proposal for this work included language that focused on *democratic voice*. During the process of data collection, however, it was clear that use of the term democratic voice did not provide the rich descriptions we were looking for, and in some cases the participants asked for clarification about this concept. Therefore, rather than using the term democratic voice, we asked participants about their experiences in democratic participation. More specifically, we asked participants if and how they were involved in system-level decision-making, whose voices were heard in decision-making, and whose were not heard in decision-making. In focus groups and the public consultation, we asked if participants felt their school governance system represented their voice and community.

Although elements of different forms of democracy appeared in participant responses, our inquiry concentrated primarily on the ability of respondents to participate in the governance of public education within their jurisdiction—specifically, jurisdictions that had boards of trustees and those that had possible alternate routes for participation in jurisdictions with other governance systems.

Local

Participants used the word *local* in several different ways. As mentioned in the previous paragraph on voice, the notion of local often referred to regionality or

geography. Local meant close to where individuals lived. In many cases, participants referred to a rural-urban tension or various competing regional concerns. Others used the term local to describe where decisions were being made within the public education system. Parents in particular reported local decision-making to mean decisions made at the school or classroom level. Trustee participants, past and present, referred to the specific context-based education considerations for regions based on geography (e.g., rural vs. urban), but also included the notion of local voice when referring to specific populations being served based on race/ethnicity, religion, and so forth.

System-Level Decision-Making

Because we were interested in the governance of six very different jurisdictions in this study, we had to use a term that would be broad enough to encompass all aspects of governance across the six sites. We experimented with different phrasing; each had limitations, but we landed on the term *system-level decision-making*. Although this phrase is imperfect, it ultimately was the most appropriate.

The terminological difficulty is especially relevant in discussions of the jurisdictions that do not have the historical and traditional structures of a board of trustees. For example, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec (Anglophone) each still have a board of trustees structure within their education system and these boards of trustees are attached to school boards/school districts. In contrast, Québec (Francophone), Nova Scotia (Anglophone), and the Northwest Territories each has substantially different governance structures. The French Québec system uses boards of directors that, although elected or designated, are not elected by the public; Nova Scotia has a more centralized governance structure; and the Northwest Territories uses a combination of school boards and community-level and regional-level governance systems (details for each of these systems can be found both in the interjurisdictional scan and in each case description presented later in the report).

To accommodate these divergent governance structures, we chose to use the phrase *system-level decision-making*. *System-level* refers to the governance system in place in that public education system, whether it is attached to school boards or the provincial government or otherwise. The second half of the phrase, *decision-making*, was included because it allowed us to capture the different ways that the public can be involved in governance decision-making (e.g., voting, advising, etc.).

Why This Study Now?

Canada's school board system emerged alongside its public school systems, with the purpose of positioning local families as responsible for—and in control of—education in their communities (Sancton, 2015). Over the last 50 years, the roles and responsibilities of school boards have been changing, and, in some cases, school boards have been abolished altogether. It is these changes to school board responsibility and its consequences for local democratic voice in public education that prompts our investigation. We wanted to explore how these (and other) changes have influenced democratic voice in system-level decision-making. Below, we briefly summarize some recent school board events that have occurred in our included jurisdictions.

1982: The Northwest Territories Special Committee on Education published their final report, [*Learning: Tradition, and Change in the Northwest Territories*](#), recommending the creation of divisional boards of education, the Community Education Council, and the Arctic College. Although initially tabled in the Legislative Assembly, the report created the vision and foundation of NWT's current communities-based education system.

2003: The British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care and British Columbia School Trustees Association signed their first [*Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)*](#), committing to separate and shared responsibilities for BC education. Both parties recommitted to the MOU **in 2014 and 2018**, thereby further negotiating their co-governance relationship.

2012: [*Nova Scotia Bill 131: School Board Members' Duties Clarification Act*](#) was introduced by the NDP government, defining elected school board members' roles and responsibilities. Bill 131 specified that the superintendent was responsible for the day-to-day management of the school board, and that school board members should act in the best interests of the whole. Although Bill 131 gave new impetus to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association (NSSBA) to assist regional school boards and advocate to the government, school boards were ultimately dissolved **in 2018**.

2016–2017: **In 2016**, the Government of Saskatchewan commissioned the [*Educational Governance Review Report: Kindergarten to Grade 12*](#). The report offered three options for education reform, including dissolving local school boards in favour of a single provincial school board, four regional school boards, or multiple school divisions. **In 2017**, the [*Saskatchewan Bill 63: An Act to amend The Education*](#)

[Act, 1995](#) reduced school boards' roles and responsibilities while enhancing the Ministry of Education's power over school boards' functioning.

2018: [Nova Scotia Bill 72: The Education Reform Act](#), passed by a vote of 25–21, dissolving all locally elected Anglophone school boards. Education was recentralized under the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, with English school boards replaced by regional centres for education that maintained the same geographical region. A [Provincial Advisory Council on Education \(PACE\)](#) was developed to support public input into education, and the authority of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) was significantly reduced.

The existing Nova Scotia *Education Act* was renamed the [Education \(CSAP\) Act 2018](#), and applied only to CSAP. The CSAP's authority was reduced in two ways. First, by the inclusion of the statements 3A(1) "This Act only applies to matters respecting the Conseil acadien" and 3A(2) "In the event of a conflict between this Act and the *Education Act*, the *Education Act* prevails" ([Education \(CSAP\) Act, 2018](#)), which undermines the authority of the *Education (CSAP) Act* as secondary to the [Education Act, 2018](#). Second, the revised *Education (CSAP) Act* failed to revise the Conseil duties (Section 16) to expand pursuant to [Section 23: Minority Language Rights](#), as per recommendations put forward prior to the passing of Bill 72.

At the time, [expectations](#) were that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development would introduce a new and separate French-specific Act later that same year. The new Act would implement [recommendations](#) made in the 2018 Glaze Report, [Raise the Bar: A Coherent and Responsive Education Administrative System for Nova Scotia](#), to better reflect the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 23: Minority Language Rights](#). At the time of this report, however, the new legislation has not been introduced.

2020–2022: [Québec Bill 40: An Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act with Regard to School Organization and Governance](#) dissolved locally elected English and French school boards into a centralized system of school service centres, to be administered by boards of directors composed of parents, community representatives, and school service centre staff. However, Quebec's Anglophone school boards, led by the Quebec English School Boards Association, won a stay against the reform, suspending its application in English jurisdictions. Governing structures of school boards and school service centres are local and independent, and are reflected in budgeting, curricula, and staffing. Also **in 2020**, [Anglophone](#)

school boards went to Québec Superior Court to legally challenge Bill 40 as unconstitutional to their protected rights as the English-speaking minority, according to Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 2022, Québec Bill 96: An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec passed, protecting French as the only official language in Québec. The Bill requires all government services, except healthcare, be provided in French. Although the Quebec English School Board requested participation in the associated parliamentary committee hearings, their requests were not granted. At the time of this writing, the English Montreal School Board has hired a law firm to challenge the Bill, and more pushback is expected.

2020: Manitoba introduced three concurrent bills to reform decision-making in Manitoba's education system: (a) Bill 64: The Education Modernization Act proposed to replace Anglophone school boards with a central provincial education authority; (b) Bill 45: The Public Schools Amendment and Manitoba Teachers' Society Amendment Act proposed to remove local teacher collective bargaining power from Anglophone school boards; and (c) Bill 71: The Education Property Tax Reduction Act proposed to eliminate local education property taxation authority from school boards and replace the funding with locally generated revenue with funding from the provincial treasury.

2021: Following strong public demonstration by the Manitoba School Boards Association, the Government of Manitoba withdrew Bill 64, while Bill 45 and Bill 71 were given assent. Consequently, Manitoba continues to use a decentralized system of locally elected school boards, but school boards no longer have local education property taxation authority and local teacher collective bargaining power has been replaced with a system of centralized bargaining.

2021: In Nova Scotia, the Liberal government was replaced by the Progressive Conservatives (PC). The PC government promised that "your PC government will return school boards," arguing that "school boards enable local decision-making based on local needs" (p. 106).

2021: The Government of Northwest Territories sought public input in modernizing the *Education Act*, with specific focus on better supporting Indigenous students and supporting Indigenous governments' educational self-determination. The public suggestions for change are currently under review. It is unclear how these changes may affect educational governance at the level of District Education Authorities

(DEAs) and District Education Councils (DECs). However, a primary theme coming out of the survey was the collective agreement [against educational centralization](#).

Reasons for Recent Changes to School Governance Systems

As illustrated in the previous section, events from the last 20 years trend toward reducing the power and authority of school governance systems, such as boards of trustees. There are many reasons for this trend, but a complete explanation is beyond the scope of this report (see Wallin et al., 2021 for additional information). However, in this section we briefly speculate on the motivations for provincial and territorial governments taking authority away from local boards, and why the Canadian public may be for or against these changes.

Canadian provinces and territories may be motivated to reduce or even remove locally elected boards because local boards have, at times, been perceived to inadequately adapt to a growing populace, and as a consequence, display an inability to balance complex budgets or support the success of an increasingly diverse student population. Locally elected school boards may have, at times, shown an unwillingness to consider legitimate concerns by provincial or territorial governments, seemingly forcing the hand of these higher governance bodies. Lastly, others, such as professional groups, may believe that they, rather than boards of trustees, are strategically in a better position to make the most informed decisions around the complexity of teaching and learning; in some cases, professional groups have persuaded provincial governments to listen to their advice (Hargreaves, 2020).

However, in other instances—and demonstrated in the findings section of this report—locally elected school boards have been shown to be a vital means by which the public can exercise their democratic voice. Elected school boards allow communities to influence local schooling in ways that support contextualized education that best serves the needs of the local people. For example, rural communities have different educational needs and priorities that may not be adequately understood by decision-makers who are located in distant urban centres. In these cases, locally elected school boards can ensure that those with locally specific knowledge have the decision-making authority to contextualize provincial/territorial priorities in ways that serve the local community. Although most participants in this study advocated for the retention of locally elected school boards, there were some participants who supported increased centralization.

In Québec, for example, with the passing of Bill 40 and the move to school service centres, some participants expressed positive feelings regarding the abolition of the electoral process. These participants mentioned that elections seemed to be a costly exercise, and that voters were not coming out to vote. In some cases, participants shared that less than 10% of the eligible voters participated in the electoral vote. From the participants' perspective, it seemed superfluous to hold an election when people would not come out to vote. Participants also felt that, due to the low voting numbers, the person elected was not necessarily seen as a representative of the population. For these participants, not having an election was a strategy to remove what they perceived to be an ineffective form of exercising democratic voice.

Throughout this report, we demonstrate the differing ways participants in this inquiry understand democratic voice, how they perceive their democratic voice is impacted by changes to school governance systems, the challenges they perceive in exercising democratic voice and, where present, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges.

Organization of the Report

In this report, we:

- ♦ briefly document the structure (and processes) for stakeholders having a voice in school system-level decision-making in each research site;
- ♦ describe stakeholders' experiences (or lack thereof) with participating in/having a voice within school systems at each research site;
- ♦ conceptualize how participants at each research site understand democratic voice;
- ♦ explore the challenges experienced by key stakeholders when participating (or unsuccessfully attempting to do so) in decision-making at the school system level;
- ♦ report the various strategies stakeholders have used to overcome the challenges identified to have a voice within the selected jurisdictions;
- ♦ present the aggregated experiences of stakeholders in having (or trying to have) a voice in democratically elected school boards and where schools are centrally governed; and
- ♦ present evidence-informed recommendations to the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA).

We have organized this report into four sections according to the study objectives. In this current section, we describe our overall methodology and case study approach, including the data collection and analysis approaches our team used. In the second section, we present the case study findings by jurisdiction in the following order: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Within each subsection, we begin by describing the structure and processes of each jurisdiction in detail. We do so because there is such a wide level of variation between each jurisdiction—no two jurisdictions are the same (OECD, 2015). In the third section, we provide our multicase analysis across all jurisdictions and report the themes we observed related to democratic voice in system-level decision-making. In the fourth section, we provide a suite of recommendations for the Canadian School Boards Association. Some of the recommendations are applicable in all jurisdictions and some are intended for specific jurisdictions.

Study Design

This study focused on provincially and territorially funded school system governance. Our research team explored the participation and perceived impact of “local voice” in system-level decision-making in Canadian jurisdictions that have, or had, democratically elected school boards and jurisdictions where school systems are governed differently.

Methodology

Case Study Approach

This study uses a multicase study approach. Case studies are useful for exploring particular instances of a complex phenomenon in depth (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2020; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018). The study began in September 2021 with data collection occurring between December 2021 and March 2023. Our research team then conducted a multicase analysis that included the individual cases to explore local voice in system-level decision-making in public education.

Engaging with Indigenous Communities

As part of our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation process, we made concerted efforts to work with Indigenous communities throughout this study. We specifically sought out interview participants who identified as Indigenous in their public profiles, targeted school governance systems in regions with high Indigenous

populations, and hosted focus groups where only Indigenous organizations were invited to participate. Additionally, in our work with the Northwest Territories, we sought the participation of jurisdictions where the local First Nations were exercising their right to self-government and establishing education systems in collaboration with the territorial system (Government of Northwest Territories, 2020). Finally, in our interviews with all participants, we asked how school governance systems and other organizations were involving Indigenous communities, Indigenous knowledges, and Indigenous voices in decision-making, if at all.

Data Collection

The cases in this study are defined as jurisdictions with publicly elected boards of trustees and those with other governance systems. As mentioned earlier, boards of trustees and school boards are not structured uniformly, nor are provincial and territorial government structures and processes the same across Canada. Six jurisdictions were included in this study: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. These sites were chosen for their various differences in school governance. All six case study sites underwent an interjurisdictional policy scan, followed by interviews and focus groups, and a public consultation in the form of an online questionnaire.

Interjurisdictional Policy Scan. The governance structure for each site is described in the attached interjurisdictional scan in Appendix A. The interjurisdictional scan began in November 2021 and continued and continued through 2022. It includes policy data from provincial and territorial legislation, school governance policy documents, and internal protocol documents. In some cases, participants in the study also shared resources including historical policy documents, training and onboarding handbooks, and online blogs or other communications that were then used to inform the interjurisdictional scan.

At various times throughout the research process, the interjurisdictional scan was reviewed by individuals with insider knowledge of school governance processes in each jurisdiction to ensure its validity. In this scan, we also included demographic data such as geography and population size, socioeconomic status of the communities served (according to StatsCan data), number of students and teachers, graduation rates, and budget information, where available. The interjurisdictional scan also has the goals, including mission and vision statements, of the school boards, government branches, and/or divisions. This interjurisdictional scan allowed our research team to pick up on subtle nuances

associated with governance in the six jurisdictions during data collection and analysis.

Interviews and Focus Groups. We conducted interviews and focus groups to connect directly with decision-makers, employees, and stakeholders. Varying combinations of the following groups were included in the study sampling. Not all research sites included all of the following groups:

- ◆ Trustees
- ◆ Directors/CEOs/Superintendents
- ◆ Government civil servants (where applicable)
- ◆ Elected government officials (where applicable)
- ◆ School board advisory committee members (if present)
- ◆ School system management employees such as principals
- ◆ Professional associations (teacher unions, principals associations, trustee and school board associations, etc.)
- ◆ Educators
- ◆ Parents and representatives from parent groups (e.g., parent councils)
- ◆ Representatives from various community stakeholder groups such as Indigenous communities and other minoritized groups in each jurisdiction

It is important to acknowledge the complexity of identity. In interviews and focus groups, we asked participants how they were involved in public education in their jurisdiction, if at all, to which many participants included a categorization of their identity as one or more identity categories. Based on this interview and focus group data, we enabled questionnaire participants to select all the identity categories that they felt applied to them. Identity categories were based upon those provided in interviews and focus groups: trustee, parent, educator, community member, school system leader, other (please specify), and none of the above.

In all stages of data collection, we recognized that participants hold multiple identities simultaneously: for example, some parents are also school system leaders, and some Trustees may also identify as community members. Interrogating why or how participants select which parts of their identity to include is beyond the scope of this study; however, it is highly possible that participants highlighted the parts of their identity they felt were most relevant to school system-level decision-making. In sharing our findings, we at times streamline the results to report the data more clearly to readers. For example, when discussing who parents felt should be included in decision-making, we may group together all participants

who identified as a parent without explaining what portion of that sample also identified as a school system leader, because in that context, the identifying characteristic of “parent” is what is being reported. Given the complexity that could result from further distinguishing identities, we recommend that future research examine how identity complexity influences participation in public education system-level decision-making.

Virtual Semistructured Interviews. In our original research proposal, we had intended to complete data collection face-to-face, with members of our research team already located in, or travelling to, each of the six jurisdictions. However, due to restrictions on travel and in-person interactions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as an abundance of caution for our participants and research team, we transitioned all data collection to virtual formats. In addition to affecting data collection, we suspect that COVID fatigue (De Smet et al., 2020) has also been a factor in the response rates. In the end, our team conducted virtual semistructured interviews to gather information about how individuals understood the decision-making process(es) within their jurisdiction and what democratic voice meant to them.

Participants were asked about their role in the education system and how they participate or try to participate in system-level decision-making. They were encouraged to share any challenges they have experienced in participating in decision-making at the system level and what strategies they may have engaged in to overcome these challenges. The semistructured interviews allowed our research team to probe the subtle nuances specific to each jurisdiction while also providing a framework for the intended multicase analysis. For example, we were able to analyze how community members understood avenues for participation differently in jurisdictions that have publicly elected school boards (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories) and those that do not, such as the regional system in Nova Scotia or the school service centre system in French Québec.

Interviews were conducted between January 2022 and March 2023 and were approximately 1 hour in length. In total, there were 99 interviews. Table 1.1 shows the distribution of interviews across the six research sites.

Table 1.1. Interview Distribution Across Six Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	# of Interviews
British Columbia	24
Saskatchewan	14
Manitoba	18
Québec	13
Nova Scotia	16
Northwest Territories	14
Total	99

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using OtterAI software. The transcriptions were then reviewed by the interviewer and returned to each participant for review. All participants were given at least 2 weeks to review the interview transcription and revise their contributions.

Focus Groups. Focus groups were conducted so our research team could connect with the general public and so parents, educators, and community groups could come together with their peers to share their experiences with system-level decision-making. As with the interviews, the focus group sessions were meant to be in person; however, because of COVID-19 precautions we pivoted to an online focus group format. Focus groups were held between October 2022 and February 2023 and were approximately 1–2 hours in length; each started with the facilitators sharing the purpose of the study and answering any questions participants may have had about the study. The remainder of the focus group session was dedicated to participants responding to probes similar to the interview questions: how they understood the decision-making process at the system level; their experiences (or lack thereof) with system-level decision-making; challenges they experienced; and possible strategies they considered to overcome the challenges.

Overall, focus groups had limited participation. In some cases, attendance was limited to 1–3 participants; in others, no one attended. In total, we had 22

individuals participate in focus groups. Responses to the focus group invitations revealed that there were various reasons why many chose not to participate. These reasons included being too busy, feeling they have been asked to participate in too many studies, believing they were not a good “fit” for the focus group, and feeling that they had nothing to contribute or that it was politically too risky to participate. When we received these types of responses, we replied by saying that there was no preliminary expertise required for participation and that we wanted to hear from the public. Despite our efforts, however, focus group participation was limited. Even though this number was lower than we would have preferred, those who participated provided very rich and detailed data that helped to answer the overall study question.

Public Consultation Questionnaire. Based on our initial experiences with interview and focus group recruitment, we decided to expand the data collection process to include public consultation. The public consultation consisted of an online questionnaire that covered similar topics to the interviews and focus groups, and included questions such as, “Have you participated in school system governance in your area?” and “Do you feel your school governance system represents your community?”

We decided to add the public consultation for several reasons. During interview recruitment, it became clear to us that the majority of participants were actively or previously heavily engaged in multiple areas of their school system, including volunteer positions and parent councils. Although these participants provided valuable insights, we also wanted to hear from others who may have been unengaged or disengaged for various reasons and capture their experiences. Likewise, focus group attendance was dominated by stakeholders who were also involved in their school community. We wanted to expand our data collection tools to better include those who were not already otherwise involved in the school community, as their community voices may not currently be heard in system-level decision-making—we wanted to know why this was the case. We were also aware of historical instances of exclusion and wanted to provide another avenue for potential participants to engage in this research.

The questionnaire was launched on February 20, 2023, and closed on March 6, 2023. In addition to a few general demographic questions about ethnoracial identity, citizenship, age, and gender and sex, the questionnaire included four sections: (a) involvement in system-level decision-making, (b) community

representation in decision-making, (c) system-level decision-making, and (d) voting experience.

The questionnaire contained 39 questions in total and we estimated it could take up to 30 minutes to complete. Because skip logic was used throughout the questionnaire—the process whereby a participant chooses one of two answer options and is directed to a specific set of questions over another set of questions—no participant completed all 39 questions. The majority of questions in the questionnaire were closed-ended or multiple choice (e.g., “choose all that apply”) questions. For several questions, additional comments could be added so respondents could qualify their responses or add contextual information if they chose to do so. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and respondents were informed they had the right to not answer individual questions, or to withdraw from the study while the questionnaire distribution phase was still open.

Questionnaire Sampling. Invitations to participate in the questionnaire were emailed to 6,615 unique email addresses. The email requested recipients share the link with their network, so the total number of email recipients was higher. Additionally, a link to the survey questionnaire was distributed via paid advertisement through the Manitoba School Boards Association’s (MSBA) Facebook page to a total of 106,944 Facebook users across the six study sites, with the locations of users distributed accordingly (British Columbia: 18,464; Saskatchewan: 10,464; Manitoba: 33,472; Québec: 29,952; Northwest Territories: 1,408). The Facebook ad ran from February 15 to February 28, 2023. A total of 2,784 users engaged with the post in some manner, and the questionnaire was completed 40 times through the anonymous link shared by MSBA. In total, 1,003 participants started the questionnaire. Two potential participants were self-selected out of the questionnaire because they were not 18 years of age or older. Another nine participants started the questionnaire, were 18 years of age or older, but were in jurisdictions that were not included in the study. A further 24 participants did not indicate which province or territory they were from and therefore were not included in the study.

Of the participants who were 18 years of age or older and resided in one of the study jurisdictions, 225 did not continue past the geography question. These 225 entries were removed as there was no data inputted. In total, 743 questionnaires were included in the data analysis for an overall 15.16% response rate. Usability was determined if the participant answered at least one question after indicating their age and their province or territory.

Out of the usable responses, 710 were in English and 33 were in French. It is important to note that the questionnaire did not ask if participants were responding based on their experiences in French or English school systems; rather, the distinction between French and English shows only the preferred language of completion.

Participation was unevenly distributed across the jurisdictions. A breakdown of participants by jurisdiction is provided in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. *Number of Questionnaire Responses Per Study Site*

Jurisdiction	Questionnaire Respondents
British Columbia	111
Saskatchewan	105
Manitoba	369
Québec	59
Nova Scotia	48
Northwest Territories	51
Total	743

Based on the numbers of usable questionnaire entries, each jurisdiction met the minimum of 30 responses required to conduct site-specific descriptive statistics.

Questionnaire Participants. The participant description tables (Tables 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, and Figure 1.1) provide a general snapshot of who participated in this questionnaire. The demographic data includes the various participant roles (e.g., trustee, parent), sex and gender, age, and ethnoracial identity.

Role. Because participants can occupy multiple roles in relation to system-level decision-making, participants were asked to identify all roles that applied to them. Some participants included more than one role. Overwhelmingly, the majority of participants were somehow connected to and/or familiar with public education as a trustee, parent, educator, or school system leader, or as a

combination of these roles. Less than a quarter of the participants who answered this question indicated that they were a community member. Although we were not able to determine if the “community member” respondents had direct association with public education or not, trends in the additional comments sections of the questionnaire indicate that nearly all respondents had a vested interest in education. Very few, if any, respondents were not directly connected to K–12 public education in some way.

Table 1.3. *Role Types*

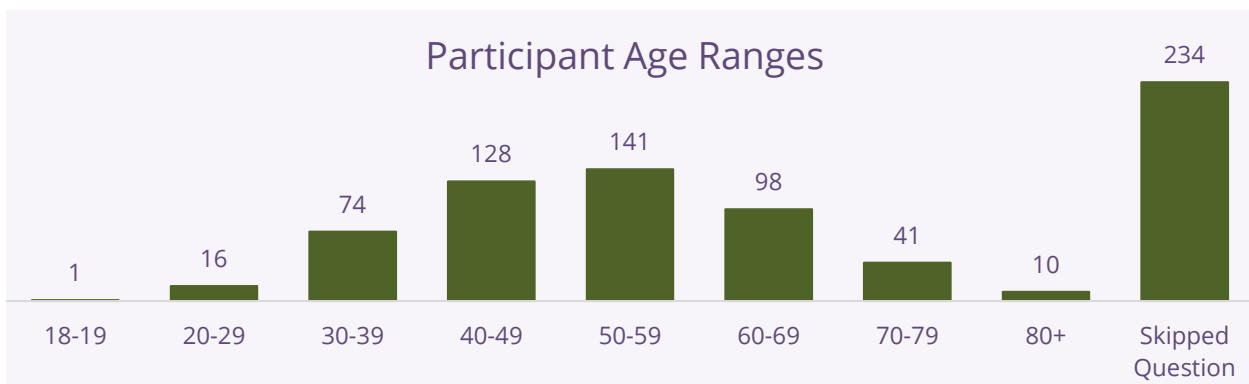
Role	# of Respondents
Parent	296
Educator	231
Community Member	214
Other	108
School System Leader	88
Trustee	74
None of the Above	0
Skipped Question	8

Sex and Gender. A total of 507 respondents answered the question asking which sex or gender described them. More participants described themselves as female ($n = 337$) than male ($n = 123$), and a small portion of respondents described themselves as non-binary ($n = 2$), preferred not to say ($n = 27$), or indicated that they identified differently than female, male, or non-binary ($n = 18$).

Table 1.4. Sex and Gender

Sex and Gender Identified	# of Respondents
Female	337
Male	123
Prefer Not to Say	27
Other	18
Non-Binary	2
Skipped Question	236

Age. A total of 509 participants indicated their age range. The responses overall fell within a bell curve distribution where approximately 36% were between the ages of 40 and 59. However, there was a substantial number of participants ($n = 234$) who chose to not indicate their age range. If this group were to have indicated their age range, the data may have been different. For this reason, we cannot make any claims about the general age of participants.

Figure 1.1. Age Ranges

Ethnoracial Identity. The categories presented in the questionnaire for ethnoracial identity were taken from Statistics Canada's Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, 2016, with the addition of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit category.¹ In total, 507 participants indicated how they identify in

¹ Note that the Ontario Human Rights Commission describes communities facing racism as "racialized." Race is a social construct, which means that society forms ideas of race based on

terms of their ethnoracial identity, and 354 indicated they identified as being White, which represents 48% of the sample. The second largest group of self-identified participants were First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (6%, $n = 44$). Twenty-nine questionnaire participants chose to respond using the “other” category. Some common themes found in these responses included those identifying as Canadian and as having multiple ethnoracial identities.

Table 1.5. *Ethnoracial Identity*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	354
Prefer Not to Answer	57
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit	44
Other	29
Black	9
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	6
Filipino	3
Latin American	2
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	2
Japanese	2
Chinese	1
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Korean	0

geographic, historical, political, economic, social, and cultural factors as well as physical traits even though none of these can be used to justify racial superiority or racial discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included multiple approaches: (a) individual case analysis, (b) questionnaire analysis, and (c) multicase analysis. The individual case analysis enabled our team to conduct multicase analysis among the cases (Lichtman, 2010). The analysis initially was driven by the study objectives: describing and categorizing participants' experiences of (or lack thereof) having a voice in school system-level decision-making; and exploring the challenges that stakeholders and stakeholder groups experienced and the strategies they used to try and overcome the challenges. We tried to determine study participants' understandings of the notion of local voice in school system-level decision-making.

Individual Case Analysis. Before examining local voice in different school system organizations across Canada, we first analyzed participants' experiences in each of the six jurisdictions. This was determined through analysis of the individual case site data with support of the policy, document, and context scan. Once there was a comprehensive understanding of the process (or lack thereof) including challenges and strategies, we conducted the multicase analysis.

In the individual case analysis, our research team analyzed participant responses in interviews, focus groups, and the public consultation questionnaire. Interviews and focus groups were analyzed by research team members who had not conducted the interviews or focus groups to provide a level of objectivity in the analysis. In analyzing interviews and focus groups, our research team read through each transcribed interview to identify excerpts reflecting the broad codes of "systems and structures for democratic participation," "challenges in participating in decision-making," "strategies in participating in decision-making," and "notions of what democratic voice means." From these broad codes, our research team further organized participants' responses into thematic categories. Once all interviews and focus groups for a jurisdiction were coded into thematic categories, our team analyzed these categories to find overall trends where challenges were met, what strategies were used to address these challenges, and how these challenges and strategies were affected by participants' understandings of system-level decision-making.

Once interviews and focus groups were analyzed, our team analyzed the public consultation questionnaire responses. Quantitative analysis was conducted for most questions (see next section). Qualitative analysis was conducted for the short-answer responses. Short-answer responses were coded similarly to the interviews and focus groups. We then compared our final analysis of questionnaire responses

to the interview and focus group responses to search for differences and similarities both within each individual case and then across the six cases.

Questionnaire Analysis. We analyzed questionnaire data using descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic coding. For example, we used frequency distributions to analyze the jurisdictions in which respondents felt they were represented by their school governance system. We used thematic coding to analyze respondents' written explanations for how they felt their school governance system could better represent their community.

Multicase Analysis. In the multicase analysis, we analyzed all six jurisdictions as an aggregated set. Although British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba may appear similar because they all have locally elected school boards, upon closer inspection we found significant differences in the context and in how the school systems operated. In the end, all six jurisdictions were understood as having unique system-level decision-making structures, although some common themes arose regarding public participation and experiences of having democratic voice.

Individual Case Site Analysis

British Columbia

British Columbia (BC), the westernmost province in Canada, is situated between the Pacific Ocean and the Canadian Rocky Mountains. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada indicated that the BC population was 5,437,722 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). According to the BC Government, there were 1,583 schools and approximately 572,906 students enrolled in the 2022–2023 school year (British Columbia Government News, 2022). In BC, provincial public education is carried out by two systems: (a) the public Anglophone school system, which has 60 public school districts; and (b) the public Francophone school system, which supports 47 schools and is governed by the [Conseil scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique \(CSFCB\)](#) (CSFCB, 2022). This study focuses on both systems.

For information about the organizing bodies, representatives, legislation, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan in Appendix A (Pollock et al., 2022). As mentioned in the report introduction, we recognize that some students in BC and across Canada also attend schools that are supported federally through the *Indian Act* (1985). Delivered by the Department of Indigenous Services, these schools are outside the scope of this study.

Structure of School System Governance in British Columbia

The BC school system is governed by the provincial [Ministry of Education and Child Care](#), through the [School Act \(1996\)](#). Under the *School Act*, the province is divided into 60 school districts, each of which is served by a board of education (Section 30[1]). Boards of education, occasionally called boards of trustees, are locally elected public representatives who advocate for and on behalf of their respective communities (BC School Trustees Association [BCSTA], n.d.). Although this type of governing body is referred to as a board of trustees in the other jurisdictions in this report, in BC they are called boards of education and they will be referred to as such throughout this section. Boards of education are responsible for the improvement of student achievement in the school district (Section 65[1.1]). Subject to orders from the Minister of Education and Child Care, boards of education are responsible for improving student achievement in the school district through (a) establishing committees and district advisory councils, (b) passing by-laws and policies for the district, and (c) governing the school board (Section 65, 68). School boards are responsible for the management of schools in the district, including the

custody, maintenance, and safekeeping of property owned by the school board (Section 74[1]).

Boards of education can consist of three, five, seven, or nine trustees elected from the school district at large, from a specified electoral area, or from a combination of both, as directed by the Minister of Education (*School Act*, Section 30[2]). School District No. 39 (Vancouver) is an exception in that trustees must be elected from the school district at large (Section 30[7]). Required qualifications to run for nomination and to be elected as a trustee are: (a) that the person is, or will be, 18 years of age or older on the voting day of the election, (b) is a Canadian citizen, (c) has been a resident of BC for at least 6 months before the voting day, and (d) the person is not otherwise disqualified under the *School Act* (Section 32[1]). Trustees can run for election for as long as they are eligible; however, trustees cannot be nominated or elected in more than one electoral area at a time (Section 32[2], 32[3]).

Elections for boards of education occur every 4 years on the third Saturday of October (*School Act*, Section 35). Bi-elections are held in some cases. For example, one might be held if an elected trustee dies while holding office or is disqualified under the *School Act* (Section 36). People eligible to vote in an election must be (a) 18 years of age or older on the voting day, (b) a Canadian citizen, (c) have been a resident of BC for at least 6 months as of the voting day, and (d) not be otherwise disqualified under the *School Act* (Section 40). Further, voters must be residents of the electoral area or, if they are not residents, must be the registered owner of real property for at least 30 days immediately prior to the voting day (Section 40–41). In addition to voting for boards of education, members of the general public are able to attend board meetings. Board meetings are open to the public unless the board believes that it is in the public interest to have people other than trustees excluded from a meeting (Section 69).

Francophone education is governed by a Francophone education authority (*School Act*, Section 166.12[1]). The Francophone education authority is essentially a Francophone board of education. They are responsible for the improvement of Francophone student achievement in the Francophone school district (Section 166.12.[2.1]). The Francophone education authority is governed by elected regional trustees at the same time, and under the same instructions, as boards of education; however, voters must also be registered as members of the Francophone education authority (Section 166.14[2]). Presently, the CSFCB is the only Francophone education authority in British Columbia.

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for BC. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction section of this report. In addition, further information regarding BC's system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Our team conducted individual semistructured interviews with 24 British Columbian participants. Twenty-two of these interviews were conducted in English, and two were conducted in French. Our team also conducted focus groups. Twenty-eight organizations were invited to one of four focus groups, scheduled in October 2022. Three individuals, in total, participated across all focus groups. Due to limited focus group participation, we have combined our focus group data with the interview data. Interview and focus group participants were made of up 12 trustees, 14 educational professionals and one participant not directly associated with the education system.

We identified potential interview participants by reviewing school division websites and the British Columbia School Boards Association (BCSBA) website, through referrals by the Canadian School Boards Association, and by snowball sampling in which existing participants recommended other potential participants. We recruited participants by sending them up to three email invitations, each one week apart, to publicly available email addresses. In some cases, existing participants forwarded the interview invitation to potential participants to create an online introduction between our research team and potential participants.

Focus group participants were recruited through an emailed invitation. Our research team emailed 34 organizations with an invitation to participate in a focus group relevant to their community. Separate focus groups were scheduled for parents, educators, community-specific organizations (i.e., newcomers to Canada), and Indigenous groups. Recruitment emails also requested that organizations forward the invitation to their members and networks. Some organizations chose to post focus group invitations to their social media accounts. Organizations were sent one follow-up email and a reminder notice on the day of the scheduled focus group. Organizations were selected through online searches for keywords such as

“community group,” “education group,” and various equity-deserving group associations.

Public Consultation

We collected public consultation questionnaire data from 111 British Columbian participants. The data collected through the online questionnaire were disaggregated for each case study site; where response rates were low, some demographic details were withheld to maintain participant confidentiality. A breakdown of participants’ demographic data is provided in the Findings section.

Findings: British Columbia

In this findings section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger BC population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we consider the structural matters that interviewees and focus group participants commented on, specifically (a) the co-governance model that is particular to the province of British Columbia and (b) Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. Following the structural matters, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described for (a) public engagement in system-level decision-making and (b) those who work in the system trying to engage the public. Finally, we provide readers with some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants shared regarding how they have been involved and how they would like to be involved.

Snapshot from British Columbia Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants’ voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts the respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 111 individuals who participated. Given that this number is too small to represent the BC population, we make no claim to share representative results; we report only the responses for the sample included in the study.

Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As demonstrated in Figure 2.1, the roles with which BC participants mainly identified were *parent* (32%, $n = 36$), *educator* (28%, $n = 31$), and/or *school system leader* (28%, $n = 31$). Smaller numbers

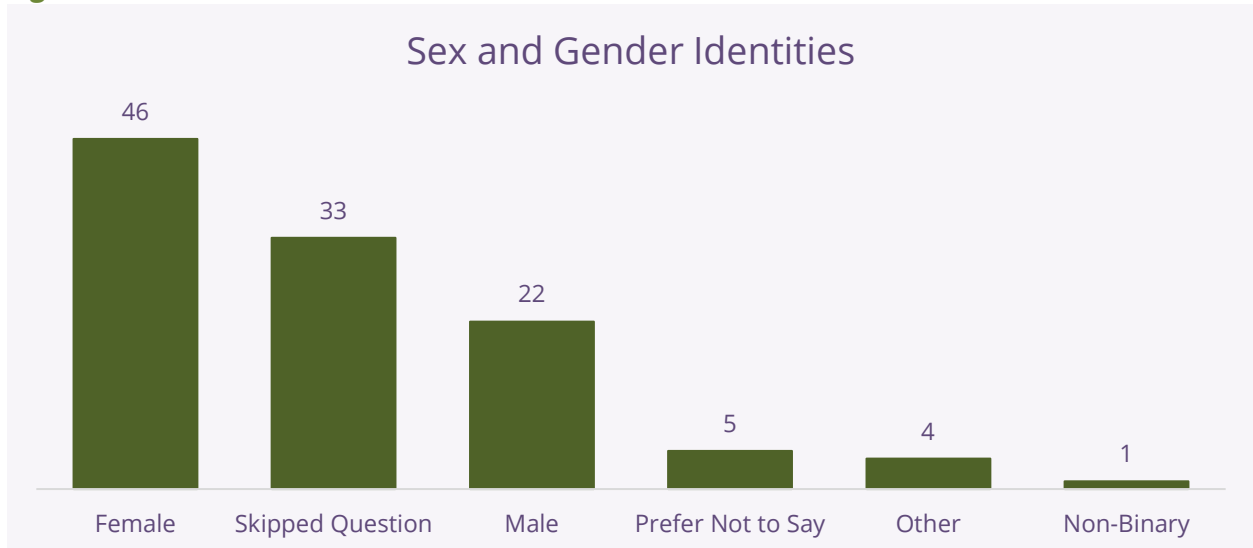
of participants identified with the roles of *community member* (18%, $n = 20$), and *trustee* (11%, $n = 12$).

Figure 2.1. Stakeholder Roles: British Columbia



In BC, twice the number of participants described themselves as female (41%, $n = 46$) than male (20%, $n = 22$), as shown in Figure 2.2. In addition, 33 participants (30%) skipped this question, and five participants (5%) chose not to answer. Accordingly, we do not claim that the findings represent participants by sex or gender identity.

Figure 2.2. Sex and Gender: British Columbia



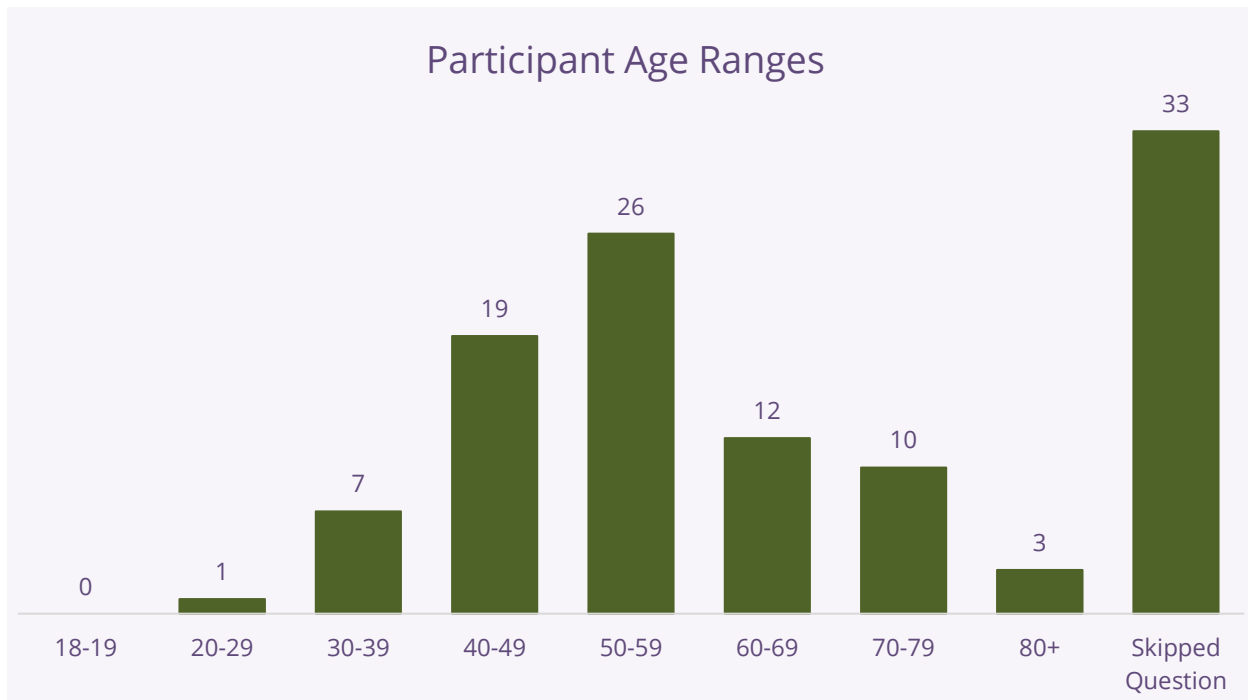
In terms of ethnoracial identity (Table 2.1), a small number of participants from BC preferred not to answer (9%, $n = 10$) while another 30% ($n = 33$) chose to not answer the question at all. Of those who did, 57 individuals (52%) self-identified as White. The second largest group were South Asian ($n = 3$). As well, one or two participants identified as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI); Black; West Asian; and Japanese, respectively.

Table 2.1. *Ethnoracial Identity: British Columbia*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	57
Prefer Not to Answer	10
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	3
Other	3
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	2
Black	1
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	1
Japanese	1
Filipino	0
Latin American	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Chinese	0
Arab	0
Korean	0
Skipped Question	33

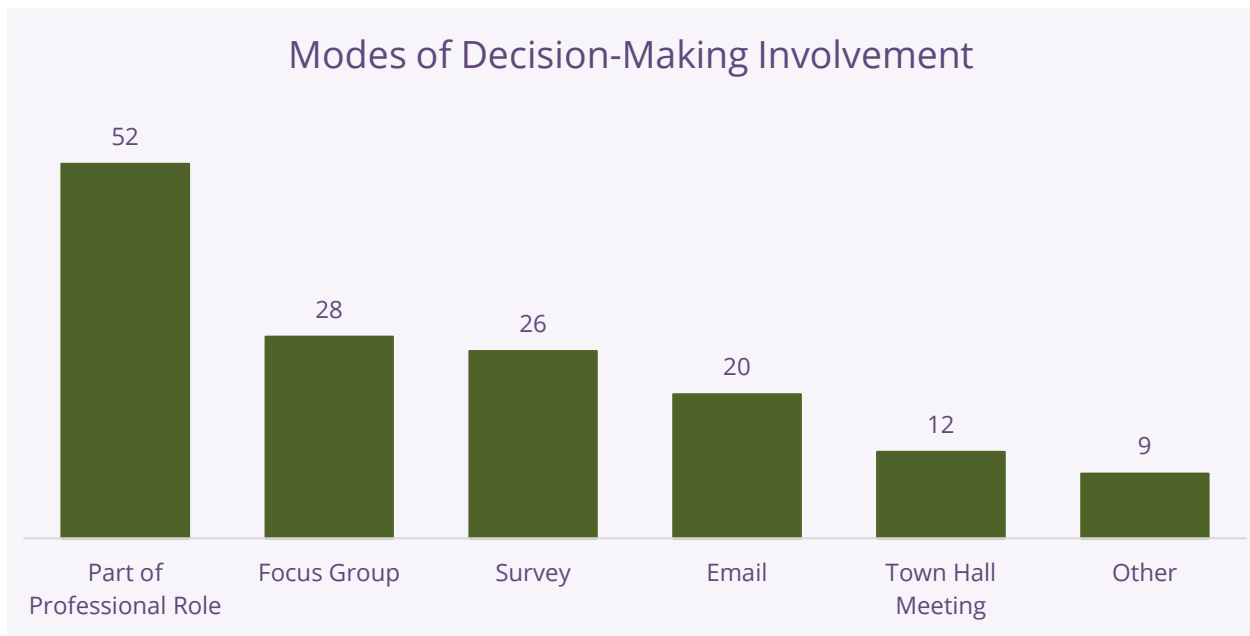
In terms of age (Figure 2.3), almost 40% of respondents from BC were between the ages of 40 and 59, and 20% were between the ages of 60 and 79 years. Less than 10 participants were between the ages of 20 and 39.

Figure 2.3. Age Ranges: British Columbia



Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 2.4), 65% ($n = 72$) of participants responded yes. Participants were given the option to “choose all that applied” regarding their involvement, and many indicated that they were involved in more than one way. When asked how they have been involved in system-level decision-making, 72% ($n = 52$) of these participants responded that it was part of their professional role, 41% ($n = 28$) indicated they had been involved in focus groups (online and in person), 38% ($n = 26$) indicated being involved via surveys, 29% ($n = 20$) indicated involvement via emails, and 17% ($n = 12$) indicated being involved in town hall meetings. A common theme found among the 13% ($n = 9$) who selected “Other” was involvement in parent groups.

Figure 2.4. *Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: British Columbia*



Most respondents did not answer the question, “Would you like to be involved in school system-level decision-making?” (Table 2.2). Of those who did respond ($n = 38$), approximately two thirds, 66% ($n = 25$) indicated that they did want to be involved in system-level decision-making. The 13 participants who indicated they did not want to be involved in system-level decision-making were asked why they did not want to be involved, and nearly all ($n = 10$) responded. Of these responses, four indicated that they did not feel their involvement would make a difference in the decision-making, two felt they did not have enough time to be involved, one stated that they did not know enough about the topic, one did not feel their voice would be heard, and one simply was not interested in being involved.

Table 2.2. *Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved in School System-Level Decision-Making: British Columbia*

Reasons Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved	# of Respondents
I don't feel my involvement will make a difference in decision-making.	4
I don't have time to be involved.	2
Other.	2
I don't know enough about the topic.	1
I don't feel my voice will be heard.	1
I am simply not interested in being involved.	1

Community Representation in Decision-Making. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community (Table 2.3), the responses were almost evenly split into *yes* (52%, $n = 51$) and *no* (49%, $n = 48$). For those who responded *no*, their school governance system did not represent their community, 43 chose to explain why: almost two thirds (65%, $n = 28$) selected “I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.” For those participants who responded *yes*, the system does represent their community, 48 chose to explain why: almost 90% ($n = 43$) indicated that the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community, 50% ($n = 24$) knew their community has a voice in the decisions that are made, 50% ($n = 24$) felt their community has a relationship with the governing body, 44% ($n = 21$) said there were people in decision-making positions who look like them, and 40% ($n = 19$) indicated that there are clear systems for how their community can be involved (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: British Columbia

School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	28	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	43
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	16	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	24
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	14	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	24
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	11	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	21
Other.	10	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	19
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	2	Other.	4

We followed up with an open-ended question asking how they felt their school governance system could better represent their community. Those who responded to this question provided detailed recommendations, such as: (a) seeking community approval before implementing changes; (b) asking stakeholders for input and having more discussions; (c) increasing transparency and involving new people in the role of school trustee; (d) actively seeking opinions from educators, parents, and students through surveys and consultation; (e) publishing voting dates and results in newspapers; and (f) being more accessible to the public.

Several participants also commented on the lack of diversity (e.g., cultural and linguistic) on boards of education, which they argued also leads to the absence of diverse voices participating in other ways. A few suggested that the lack of diversity on boards of education can be a result of financial privilege: some have the time and money to serve while others do not. A small number of participants also mentioned that political agendas influence the decision-making process as a result of boards being accountable to the government and not school communities.

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked about who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making (Figure 2.5), most of the 88 British Columbians who responded indicated that the following groups should be involved: *parents* (91%, $n = 80$), *educators* (84%, $n = 74$), *students* (78%, $n = 69$), *Indigenous representatives* (76%, $n = 67$), and *community representatives* (69%, $n = 61$). The participants also indicated that these groups should be (a) involved through a consultation process (80%, $n = 70$), (b) invited to attend decision-making meetings (75%, $n = 66$), (c) asked to provide advisory services (69%, $n = 61$), and (d) vote on decisions (38%, $n = 33$).

Figure 2.5. *Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: British Columbia*

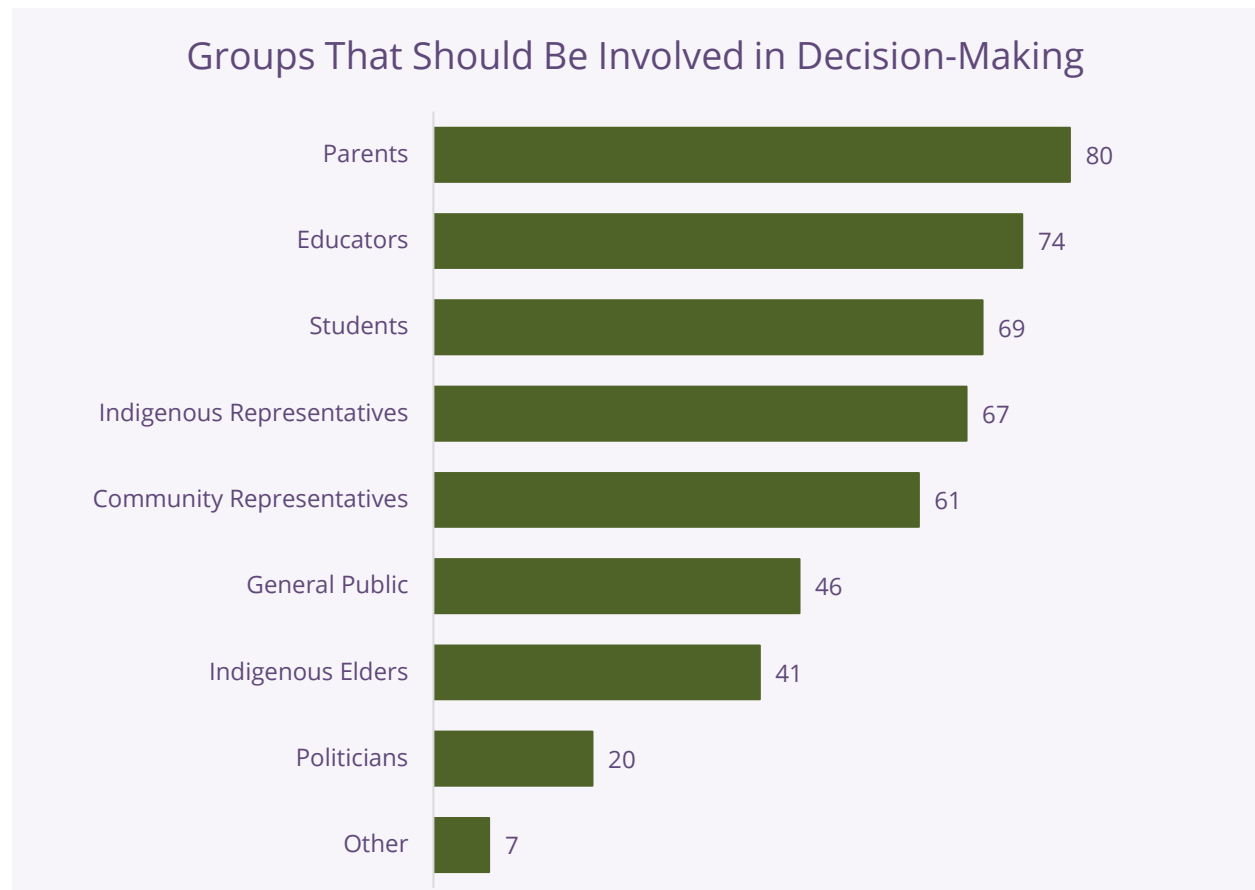


Table 2.4. *How Selected Groups in Figure 2.5 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: British Columbia*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	70
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	66
They should provide advisory services.	61
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	38
They should vote on decisions.	33
Other.	9

The survey also asked an open-ended question about the individuals and groups that participants thought should not be involved in school system-level decision-making. Based on the 64 responses, there was some consensus that politicians, special interest groups with specific agendas, corporations, and those with a conflict of interest should not be involved in school system-level decision-making. Some participants also expressed concerns about school board trustees and individuals who are not directly invested in the geographic community being involved in local school system decision-making.

Some respondents provided information about what knowledge and expertise they thought was needed for the public to be involved in system-level decision-making, such as the governance structure and process or content knowledge around a particular topic. Those who commented on this noted that decision-makers determine who should be involved depending on the nature of the decision, while others stated that teachers and parents should have a say in most matters. Some respondents also noted that individuals who do not have the necessary expertise to make an informed decision should not be involved. For example, if decisions are being made about bussing, then parents and those involved in the bussing system, rather than teachers who know little about this subject, should provide input.

Would Anything Be Lost Without Elected Boards of Trustees. The survey asked, “Do you think anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners in your area?” (Table 2.5). This question received 63

responses. Of these responses, 70% indicated that there would be a loss. When asked what would be lost, 37 participants indicated that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school system decision-making would be lost, while 30 respondents indicated that recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost. Another 19 indicated that their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost, and 17 said that the opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost. Ten participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; we observed three themes in these responses: (a) there would be a loss of understanding, (b) there would be a loss of democratic process, and (c) there would be concerns associated with accountability and oversight.

Table 2.5. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: British Columbia*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	37
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	30
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	19
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	17
Other.	10

For those few (less than 20) respondents who responded that nothing would be lost if there was no elected board of education (Table 2.6), 12 selected “I don’t believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making”; 11 selected “I believe Trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community”; and 11 indicated “I don’t believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.”

Table 2.6. *Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: British Columbia*

Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without Elected Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making.	12
I believe trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community.	11
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.	11
I believe the provincial/territorial government is better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education.	5
Other.	3

Voting Experience. Participants were asked if they had voted in the last school board election (Figure 2.6). Of the 63 responses to this question, 48 ($n = 76\%$) indicated *yes* and the remaining 15 answered *no*. When asked if there was a specific reason why they voted in the last school board election (Table 2.7), 42 respondents indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, 28 were interested in school boards, 25 indicated that they knew where and how to vote, 18 indicated that they knew the candidates, and seven indicated that they liked the candidates. Fourteen participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; we observed three themes in these responses: (a) they thought it was a democratic responsibility/civic duty, (b) they ran in the election, and/or (c) they wanted change. One participant also indicated that they voted as a prevention strategy (i.e., voting for a candidate in the hopes of preventing another from being elected). We asked participants who did not vote why they chose not to vote; only 10 responded with no clear pattern of responses.

Figure 2.6. Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: British Columbia

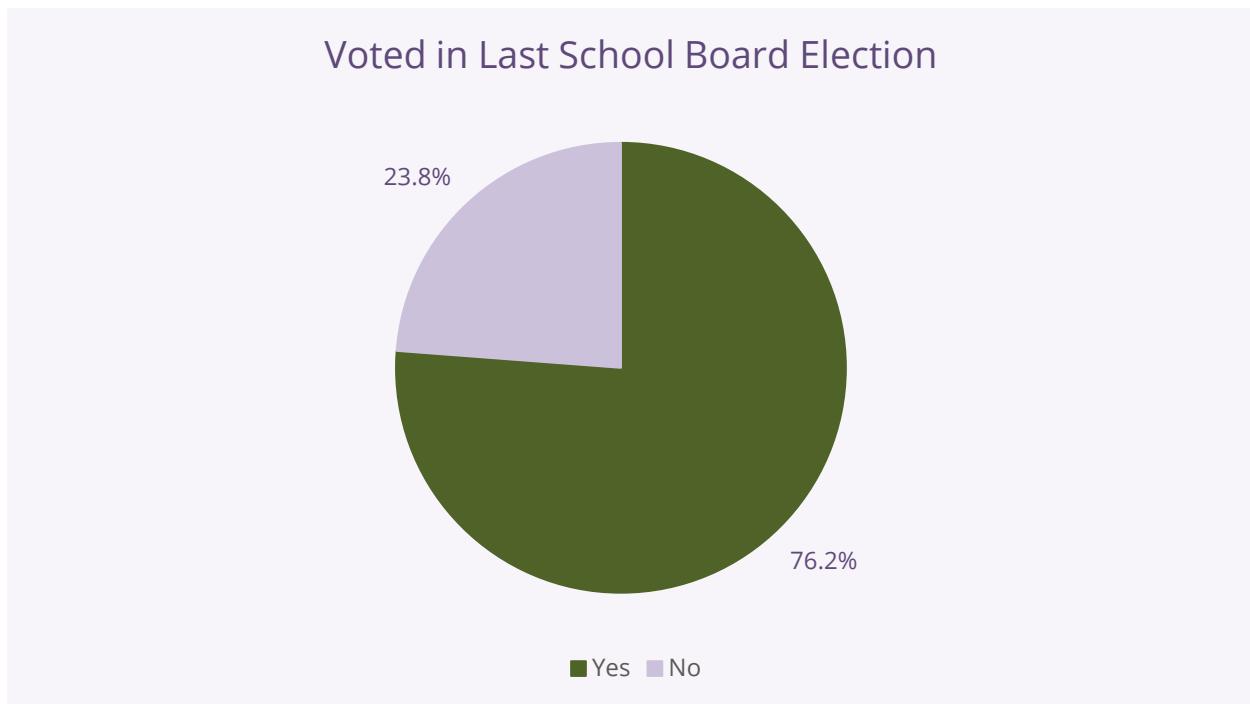


Table 2.7. Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: British Columbia

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	42	Other.	6
I am interested in school boards.	28	I didn't know the candidates.	3
I knew where and how to vote.	25	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	1
I knew the candidates.	18	I am not interested in school boards.	1
Other.	14	I didn't like the candidates.	1
I liked the candidates.	7	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	0

Meaning of Democratic Voice. All participants in this study were asked the short-answer question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” In BC, 42 people chose to respond and half ($n = 21$) of those people identified themselves as educators and/or school system leaders. Overall, for those individuals who responded, “democratic voice” meant the right of all community members to participate in the governing of their community. According to these respondents, participation included not only voting for elected representatives, but also providing input on decisions before they are made and being able to voice concerns and viewpoints on decisions after they are made. Likewise, participants felt that “democratic voice” included having elected representatives who would voice the concerns of their constituents to the higher orders of governance. A small number of respondents also included the importance of being effectively informed on governance issues and actions so that civil discourse could be actualized in their understanding of democratic voice. In other words, participants felt that to participate in “democratic voice” through respectful discussion, the public had to be first adequately informed of the issues at hand.

Participants’ Final Thoughts. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and information they felt was relevant to the questionnaire that was not necessarily captured within the questions asked. We received feedback from 34 participants in BC. Although this information reflected differing views regarding the effectiveness of the current system of locally elected school trustees in BC, the overarching theme was who should and should not be involved. We identified two main assumptions embedded within these views. The first assumption is that good decision-making can only come from those who are either directly involved with public education and/or have some degree of professional knowledge about the functioning and purpose of public education. For these participants, the system is flawed and ineffective when individuals run for the role of school trustee without understanding the role or concept of governance. The second is that some individuals felt that trustees were not qualified or knowledgeable enough to make decisions regarding K–12 schooling and that they distract educators from focusing on student achievement. For these respondents, some of this distraction came from what they referred to as noneducational issues and the influence of special interest groups on elections.

Some individuals felt diversity and equity within the school system are important ideals to strive for within the public system. These individuals indicated that the school system should work to educate minoritized community groups on how they can have their voices heard in system-level decision-making to increase their

representation. For example, although parent-school communication is seen as a vital part of public education, according to some participants, parents should also be taught about the system's values, purposes, processes, and so forth. In our analysis, we found that this belief views any form of diversity or difference through a deficit lens, meaning that any equity-deserving groups are perceived to not understand the current governance structure and/or that the inclusion of difference would decrease efficiencies in public education.

Structural Matters

In BC, the school system structure is also impacted by the co-governance relationship between school boards and the Ministry of Education and Child Care, as well as by policies and practices pertaining to Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. In the following section, we provide a brief overview of these structural matters as they were discussed by study participants.

Co-Governance Model. A distinguishing feature of school system-level decision-making in British Columbia is the co-governance agreement between the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA), which is the representative voice of boards of education, and the Ministry of Education and Child Care, as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was first signed in 2003, then renewed in 2014 and 2018 (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2014; BCSTA, 2018). The MOU is described as “an aspirational document reflecting the shared commitment of both parties to realizing the full value and potential of British Columbia’s students, in supporting the Educated Citizen” (para. 1). The description of the MOU as “aspirational” indicates that although co-governance principles are outlined in the document, they may not be currently realized in practice. Some of these co-governance principles include a commitment to work together to “improve public trust and confidence in the public education system” (Principle 1), and a promise to consult and collaborate with one another on policy or program changes that affect the other party (Principle 4).

During preliminary discussions with stakeholders prior to data collection for the current study, the MOU was repeatedly named as a key strategy for how provincial governments and elected boards of education could work together to protect democratic voice in public education. Accordingly, our team specifically asked interview participants whether or not they were familiar with the MOU. If participants were familiar, they were asked how they understood the MOU’s impact on board decision-making, if at all. Findings from these interviews indicate that participants in this study have mixed feelings about the efficacy of the MOU.

How the Co-Governance Model Works According to Stakeholders. According to the stakeholders we interviewed, the co-governance model works primarily as a promise for communication between boards of education (through the BCSTA) and the Ministry of Education and Child Care. In practice, BCSTA executives, including the president and vice-president, act as a conduit between boards and the Ministry of Education. Participants who closely interacted with the MOU surmised that because the BCSTA is the primary contact, there is significant misunderstanding by those further from the discussions (e.g., trustees and the public) around who is included in the MOU. This assumption was at times confirmed in interviews where many trustees would mistakenly correct our research team that the MOU was an agreement with BCSTA, not school boards.

In our interviews, participants who were closer to the BCSTA understood the MOU to be between the Ministry and boards of education, with the BCSTA only acting as a means of communication. Conflictingly, participants further from the BCSTA tended to understand the MOU to be between the Ministry and the BCSTA, not with the boards of education. Directly quoting the document, the MOU is “between the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA) as the representative voice of its member Board of Education” (para. 1), meaning that the former group of stakeholders closer to BCSTA had a more accurate understanding of the agreement. The findings in this inquiry indicate that many boards of education misunderstand their role in the MOU, increasing the possibility that boards of education do not take advantage of the potential of the MOU.

When sharing how this co-governance relationship worked, those study participants who had a more in-depth understanding of the agreement felt that the relationship was not an equal partnership. These participants referred to the fact that, despite calling the relationship “co-governance,” it is the Ministry of Education and Child Care that controls the budget and as a result has more control in the relationship. These participants shared that because the Ministry of Education and Child Care controls the budget, the Ministry will make the decisions it feels are best.

According to participants, rather than creating collaborative decision-making, the MOU encourages the Ministry to inform the BCSTA and boards of education on decisions that are made before the public is informed. Because they are apprised before the public, the BCSTA and boards of education are better informed about how the decisions were made, and therefore are better able to address any questions the public may have. The differing levels of power in the relationship led

one participant to share that, despite the promises made in the MOU, the province will ultimately “still do what [it] want[s] to do in most cases.” With this unequal relationship in mind, participants described the actual work of those involved in the communication outlined in the MOU more as acknowledgements and reminders, rather than discussion. For example, some participants shared that the BCSTA often referred to the MOU to remind the Ministry of its own promise to involve local boards of education in decision-making.

For and Against the MOU. Although most participants were relatively neutral about the usefulness and effects of the MOU, some were more vocally for or against. For those few who were adamantly against the MOU, their arguments largely centred on feeling that the MOU is a meaningless document created as part of a political show between politicians, with little to no effect on the education system. In contrast, those who were vocally in support of the MOU perceived the document as an important symbol of a healthy, functional relationship between the province and boards of education. These participants also felt that the MOU lays the foundation for a more collaborative relationship in the future.

Suggestions for Improvement. A very small number of participants had some suggestions for how the MOU could be improved to make it a more meaningful agreement. These suggestions included: (a) that the MOU be extended to include other ministries as well (e.g., Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Children & Family, and Ministry of Health) to ensure all decisions that affect schools be made in collaboration with boards of education; and (b) that the wording in the MOU be changed to require that boards of education be a part of all decision processes around policy and program change, rather than being left to the Ministry’s discretion as to whether or not they will be affected.

Indigenous Participation in System-Level Decision-Making. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is an educational organization that supports BC First Nations students and education through policy and advocacy work. During our data collection process, FNESC and the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA), an advocacy organization that supports school trustees, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), separate from the one described in the previous section. This MOU proposed for both parties to “engage in dialogue and joint action on specific issues and initiatives to improve the education outcomes of First Nations learners in provincial schools” (FNESC & BCSTA, 2022, 1.1). This agreement reflects a commitment from both parties to work together to improve education for First Nations learners, potentially representing relationships between boards of education and First Nations communities.

The MOU is informed in part by the British Columbia Tripartite Agreement (BCTEA) (2018). The BCTEA (2018) is a formal agreement between the Federal Government, the Ministry of Education and Child Care, and FNEC that lays out a set of principles to support First Nations education in British Columbia. Namely, the BCTEA codifies that First Nations families and communities have the right to establish and control First Nations education systems and that supporting First Nations educational success depends on collaboration between multiple governance systems.

In the interviews and focus groups, our research team asked participants if they were familiar with the FNEC or with the BCTEA, and if so, were they aware of how these organizations influenced public education in relation to school boards. Although nearly all participants were familiar with FNEC, fewer knew about the BCTEA. Given that the BCTEA is one step removed from school system-level governance—in that it is a co-governance agreement between First Nations, provincial governance, and federal governance—it is not surprising that participants in this study were less familiar with the agreement. Participants were, however, very familiar with FNEC and with the MOU between FNEC and BCSTA. With this agreement in mind, participants spoke about Indigenous inclusion in system-level decision-making as a high priority across boards, and as something that is in process in BC.

All participants were also asked how they felt Indigenous communities were being included in decision-making. Many participants felt that BC was making great strides in working toward creating a more inclusive school system based on reconciliation. Participants described boards of education working to build relationships with First Nations communities by consulting with communities on various decisions, such as developing organizational land acknowledgements, and working to incorporate reconciliatory actions into the work of boards of education, such as having Indigenous parent advisory councils. Specific to the inclusion of Métis communities in decision-making, participants shared that although the BCSTA has done considerable work to ensure Métis voices were heard in decision-making, a similar level of inclusion was not reflected at the individual board level. These participants felt that many boards of education did not know who the Métis community was, or how they differed from land-based First Nations in terms of policies, resources, and culture. An exception to this is the Great Victoria School District No. 61, which was highlighted for their work in signing the [Métis Education Agreement](#) with the Métis Nation British Columbia and the Métis Nation of Greater Victoria to support Métis education in the district. Participants from the Métis community also pointed to ongoing work occurring between the Métis Nation of

British Columbia and the BCSTA to educate trustees on the Métis community, with the purpose of building relationships through formalized workshops.

Challenges That the Public and Boards of Education Face

In this section, we outline (a) the challenges that participants felt members of the public face when participating in system-level decision-making and (b) the challenges that boards of education face when engaging in system-level decision-making.

Challenges the Public Face. British Columbia participants described the challenges they believed the public faces when engaging with or participating in school system-level decision-making: (a) lack of comfort in education spaces, (b) absence of certain communities in decision-making, and (c) feelings of disconnect between school system governance and the public.

Lack of Comfort in Education Spaces. British Columbia participants felt that some members of the public who are not directly connected to school boards or boards of education may not feel comfortable in education-related spaces. For example, participants felt that those who had negative personal experiences with the school system as a student may not feel comfortable participating in public meetings. Participants felt that this discomfort could come from an individual's negative feelings about formal education, or from lack of confidence in their knowledge of the school system and education-related issues. Participants also discussed some of the specific communities that are often missing in school system decision-making—ethnically marginalized populations, senior citizens, students, and recent graduates—and there was repeated mention of the challenges around involving Indigenous communities in decision-making.

Absence of Certain Communities in Decision-Making. British Columbia is one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Canada, with nearly 30% of residents being immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021). Many participants in this study reported that boards of education often did not reflect this ethnic diversity, and that Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour were often missing from system-level decision-making. See the previous subsection, “Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making,” for our discussion on the inclusion and exclusion of Indigenous voices in system-level decision-making.

Some participants felt that senior citizen communities were often not heard when it came to system-level decision-making. For a few participants, the inclusion of seniors was a contested issue; some participants who were parents of children in public education believed that only parents with children currently in the public education system should be involved in the system-level decision-making, and that seniors whose children (if they had any) had completed or aged out of the system should not be involved.

Regarding student participation in decision-making, although some participants reported that their school board had student representatives, most shared that these representatives were either not listened to or taken seriously in decision-making, or that the student representative roles were often left unfilled. Young adults, or those who have recently graduated from high school or post-secondary institutions, were listed among the communities that are often not heard in system-level decision-making. However, participants did little to elaborate on why this population may be missing. In addition to the public's participation challenges, participants also described challenges that boards of education and administrators face when participating in decision-making.

Disconnect Between the Public and School Boards. Feelings of disconnect between the public and school boards was a common theme in the data. Specifically, participants described two sources of disconnect: (a) disconnect due to lack of understanding and (b) disconnect due to lack of competition for elected trustee positions.

Disconnect Due to Lack of Understanding. Lack of knowledge about the public school system and feelings of disconnect between the public and boards of education was a recurring theme in the data. However, participants had different perceptions of who was responsible for the lack of understanding. Some participants blamed the public itself, feeling that members of the public had to educate themselves on the work of boards of education. These participants felt that the public lacked understanding of the work of boards of education or were unengaged in school system-level decision-making because of their own apathy toward the education system.

For others, the onus of responsibility for public engagement lay with boards of education. They believed that the lack of public understanding of the work of boards of education was due to the failure of boards of education to do their due diligence in going out into their community and educating the public about their

work. Some of these participants felt that some trustees were not going into the community because they did not view encouraging public engagement as part of their role, while others felt it was a deliberate tactic to keep the public unaware of the details of trustees' work so that the trustees would not face criticism for the decisions they made. Further, other participants explained that, even if the public did choose to attend public meetings, they often (a) did so with little understanding of the complex decision-making processes involved and (b) received little information in the meeting because the issues were discussed ahead of time with little deliberation prior to voting. Finally, the majority of participants who were trustees, past and present, shared that much of the public may not attend public meetings simply because they do not have time due to family and work responsibilities.

Disconnect Between Public and School Boards Due to Lack of Competition for Elected Trustee Positions. Some participants in this study speculated that, in some school divisions—and in particular, rural school divisions—the public may feel disconnected from boards of education because the same trustees run for many successive terms, resulting in a lack of competition. In British Columbia there is no limit on how many terms trustees can serve; as school board elections have low voter turnout (CivicInfoBC, 2023), and because much of the trustee election process relies on name recognition (Kam & Zechmeister, 2013), trustees can be elected many times, regardless of their performance and/or actions on the board. Participants in this study shared that when trustees serve multiple successive terms, they can become complacent in their responsibility to the public, meaning that they assume based on their history that they will be reelected, so they put less effort into engaging the public. In these scenarios, changing the makeup of boards of education becomes more difficult. Many of the interview and public consultation participants hinted that there can be apathy among the public; in response to this perceived apathy, some participants felt that their efforts to increase public participation would be futile. In other words, some participants believed that despite their efforts, public engagement in decision-making would not change because of public apathy.

Challenges Boards of Education Face. Several participants in BC described challenges that boards of education face in fulfilling their decision-making responsibilities. These included (a) lack of understanding about the trustee role, (b) lack of understanding about boards' responsibilities, and (c) boards lacking clear direction.

Lack of Understanding Around the Trustee Role. One issue some BC participants noted was that some trustees can be unclear about the role of a trustee. This usually presents itself as the tension between the agenda a trustee came with to get elected, and a governance mindset that requires them to be responsible to the jurisdiction they represent.

This tension also complicates how elected trustees are perceived. Assumptions are made about candidates based on the campaign platform they used to be successfully elected. They can be labelled as “having an agenda” which can make it difficult to represent broader and more diverse constituencies. Boards where some trustees are not able to transition to their representative role have experienced political infighting and instances of refusal to compromise.

Lack of Understanding about Boards of Education Responsibilities. Some participants went into great detail describing the problems that arise when trustee nominees are provided little to no professional learning about the purpose of a board of education, the structures and processes associated with a board of education, and the responsibilities of those who are hired by the board. For this reason, some trustees misunderstand the role of the trustee and the responsibilities embedded within that role. In particular, participants seemed to misunderstand the responsibilities of trustees and the responsibilities of the superintendent.

Boards of education in BC are responsible for hiring the superintendent of schools for the school district (*School Act*, Section 22[1]) and the secretary-treasurer of the board (*School Act*, Section 23[1]). The superintendent of schools is responsible for the operation of schools in the district and for the overall organization, administration, supervision, and evaluation of educational programs (*School Act*, Section 22[1]). The secretary-treasurer is the financial officer of the board and is responsible for the board’s financial operations (*School Act*, Section 23[1]). Boards of education are responsible for governing the school district, creating policies, and instituting committees and programs, but not for the operation of schools or as financial officers. When the procedures that delineate the board’s responsibility as overseeing governance and the superintendent and secretary-treasurer’s responsibilities as overseeing operations become obscured, internal tension and miscommunication can arise. This distinction between governance responsibilities and operations responsibilities was a consistent challenge brought up by not only BC participants, but also participants in all jurisdictions.

Boards Lack Clear Direction. As part of the responsibilities described above, it is the boards' responsibility to give clear direction to the superintendent and secretary-treasurer; it is the superintendent and secretary-treasurer's responsibility to use that direction to guide the administration and operations of the school board. Participants in this study shared that, without a clear understanding of these roles, boards of education cannot give clear direction. Participants indicated that, when there is a lack of clear direction from boards of education, superintendents tend to fill the gap and make decisions that should be the responsibility of boards of education. In these instances, superintendents will set their own priorities because they need to keep things operating. This move can result in disagreements between the superintendent and the board: the superintendent will present something to the board and its members will disagree on its relevance, applicability, and pertinence, because there was no clear direction from the start.

Conversely, participants indicated that having clear directions—goals, statements of priorities, and so forth—sets the tone for discussions that happen throughout the district from the school level to the board level. Clear directions result in the board speaking with an aligned message. Participants clarified that boards ought to set goals that do not get into administrative specifics, as administration is not a board responsibility.

Participant Strategies for Participating in System-Level Decision-Making

Participants in the study felt that democratic participation is important for effective governance in BC. When asked about the possible consequences of dissolving elected systems and replacing them with regional systems, participants expressed concern that the ability of the school system to meet local community needs would be compromised. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that systemic changes were necessary to boost public participation in decision-making, thereby ensuring that community voices were duly acknowledged. To this end, participants reported many real and proposed strategies for supporting public participation in decision-making, including (a) representation of minorities and Indigenous communities, and (b) engaging stakeholders.

Representation of Minorities and Indigenous Communities. To address the challenges of racism and discrimination faced by minority groups, participants felt that boards of education across the province need to have diverse representation. The strategy that participants suggested to increase board diversity

was the individual recruitment of new members from ethnically and geographically diverse communities, and LGBTQ2+ communities. Participants also stressed the importance of prioritizing the representation of Indigenous communities on boards of education, also by way of individual recruitment. They noted that the historical lack of diversity on boards of education has hindered the effectiveness of the newly launched K–12 anti-racism initiative.

Participants also discussed how current governance and decision-making in public education are not effectively engaging Indigenous communities in the process. To help increase Indigenous voices in the decision-making process, a participant suggested that schools should establish Indigenous Parent Advisory Councils to elicit greater numbers of voices. Participants suggested that boards of education need to provide reconciliation planning for Indigenous communities that have overlapping traditional territories. Participants also emphasized that reconciliation efforts made by the district require Indigenous representation in creating the strategic plan.

Engaging Stakeholders. Participants spoke about the importance of engaging community stakeholders, including educators, parents, and professional organizations in the work of school boards. More specifically, participants felt that boards of education had a responsibility to listen to these community stakeholders' visions of schools so that boards of education could align their governance-oriented vision of education with the public's vision of education. In this context, "vision" is used in the organizational sense to refer to the goals, values, and aspirations of public education (Edwards et al., 2014). Participants felt that if boards of education better aligned their vision with that of local communities, communities may feel more engaged in public education and thus better equipped to support boards of education in actualizing that vision.

Participants suggested that community stakeholders could be better engaged in conversations about decision-making through community town halls and general increased communication. Some suggested that districts have a blend of in-person and online town halls to increase accessibility for stakeholders in more rural areas for whom transportation could be a barrier to participation. To further increase attendance and engagement, participants suggested multiple avenues for advertising and inviting participation in town halls, such as using the existing networks of Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, and the BC Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA).

Participants also suggested that boards of education could better advertise town halls as public community events using newspaper and website advertisements, social networking, and having community postings in grocery stores, restaurants, and other locations popular among community members.

Many participants also felt it was important that districts involve students in discussions about their education to create a sense of inclusion and recognition in decisions that directly affect their education. These participants felt that boards of education also had a responsibility to communicate the visible impact that student participation had on school system-level decision-making to the students. This communication was seen as an avenue for fostering a sense of significance and validation among students. Participants had few specific suggestions as to how this engagement and communication could occur, but they did point out the challenge that, due to their age (under 18 years), most students would not be voting members in any system-level decision-making.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan, the middle prairie province in Canada, is situated between Alberta to the west and Manitoba to the east. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada indicated that the Saskatchewan population was 1,221,439 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). There are 27 school divisions in the province, with 18 public school divisions, eight Roman Catholic school divisions, and one Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, which governs Francophone schools (Pollock et al., 2022). According to the provincial government, there were 189,924 K–12 students enrolled in the 2022–2023 school year (Government of Saskatchewan, 2023).

For information about the organizing bodies, legislation, representatives, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan (Pollock et al., 2022). As mentioned in the report introduction, we recognize that some students in Saskatchewan and across Canada also attend schools that are supported federally through the *Indian Act* (1985). Delivered by the Department of Indigenous Services, these schools are outside the scope of this study.

Structure of School System Governance in Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, publicly funded education includes English, French, and Catholic schools. Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) education is a shared responsibility between the [Ministry of Education](#) and elected boards of education (hereafter referred to as boards of trustees for the purposes of this report). The Catholic school system is a publicly funded school system that provides Catholic education to students in the province. It operates as a parallel system alongside the public school system and is funded by the Government of Saskatchewan. French education is offered through the [Conseil des écoles fransaskoises](#) (CÉF), which is a Francophone school board that operates 15 French schools across the province. The CÉF offers education in French to students from pre-kindergarten to Grade 12.

In Saskatchewan, the number of members on a board of trustees, including the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, is specified by the Minister of Education (*Education Act*, Section 42[1]). The duties and powers of boards of trustees are set out in Section 85[1] of the [Education Act](#): to hire and direct the director of education, approve the budget and program of studies, determine the facility plans, and appoint qualified teachers. Additional rules are set out in *The Education Regulations* (2015), which are supplements to the *Education Act*.

To become a trustee, a person must be a Canadian citizen, at least 18 years of age, have resided in the school division for at least 3 consecutive months immediately preceding the day of the election, and have resided in Saskatchewan for at least 6 consecutive months immediately preceding the day of the election (Saskatchewan School Board Association, 2020). Trustees for Saskatchewan public schools are elected through a democratic process during a municipal election. Elections in Saskatchewan are held every 4 years, on the second Wednesday in November (*Local Government Election Act*, 10[1]). The process for electing trustees may vary slightly depending on the specific school division.

The provincial government's guidelines determine eligibility to vote in school board elections for public schools. According to the guidelines, the following individuals are eligible to vote in school board elections in Saskatchewan: Canadian citizens who are at least 18 years old and have resided in the school division for at least 3 months before the election date; non-Canadian citizens who are at least 18 years old, who have resided in Saskatchewan for at least 6 months before the date of the election, and who have been granted permanent resident status by the federal government; parents or guardians of students who are enrolled in the school division and who meet the above criteria (*Local Government Election Act*, Section 36[1]). Individuals who are employed by the school division are not eligible to vote in school board elections (*Local Government Election Act*, Section 36[3]).

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for Saskatchewan. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction of this report. In addition, further information regarding Saskatchewan's system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 14 participants across all Saskatchewan districts. Thirteen of these interviews were conducted in English, and one was conducted in French. Our team also conducted four focus groups, which were scheduled in September–October 2023; a total of eight individuals participated across two focus groups. Due to limited focus group participation, we analyzed focus group and interview data together.

Our team sought to interview participants with the support of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA). We targeted five school divisions (one Catholic, one public, two Northern, and one Francophone), with attention to urban and rural representation. The SSBA sent an invitation to each of the five chairs inviting them, their director, and one additional trustee to participate. Interested participants followed up directly with our team to schedule interview times. In addition, we sent invitations to participate in an individual interview to the directors/chairs from the following education stakeholders: Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA); the League of Educational Administrators, Directors, and Superintendents (LEADS); the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF); and the Ministry of Education. Recipients were asked to delegate a representative if they were unable to participate directly.

We used a multipronged approach to find focus group participants. We sent email invitations to over 30 representatives from diverse organizations across Saskatchewan. Recipients were asked to share the invitation with interested people in their organizations. We also used Twitter to promote the focus groups: #SaskEdchat and #SaskEd were used alongside tagging the Twitter handles of the organizations that had received an email invitation, such as the STF. We also sought participants with the support of the STF, who included the focus group registration information in the November member newsletter. Registration links were housed on the Federation's internal member site to facilitate access.

Public Consultation

In total 105 participants completed the public consultation questionnaire; a more detailed breakdown of participants' demographic data is provided in the Findings section. However, some demographic data may not be included if its inclusion would risk participants' confidentiality.

Findings: Saskatchewan

In this section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Saskatchewan population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we consider the structural matters that interviewees and focus group participants commented on, specifically Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. Following the structural matters, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described: (a) the

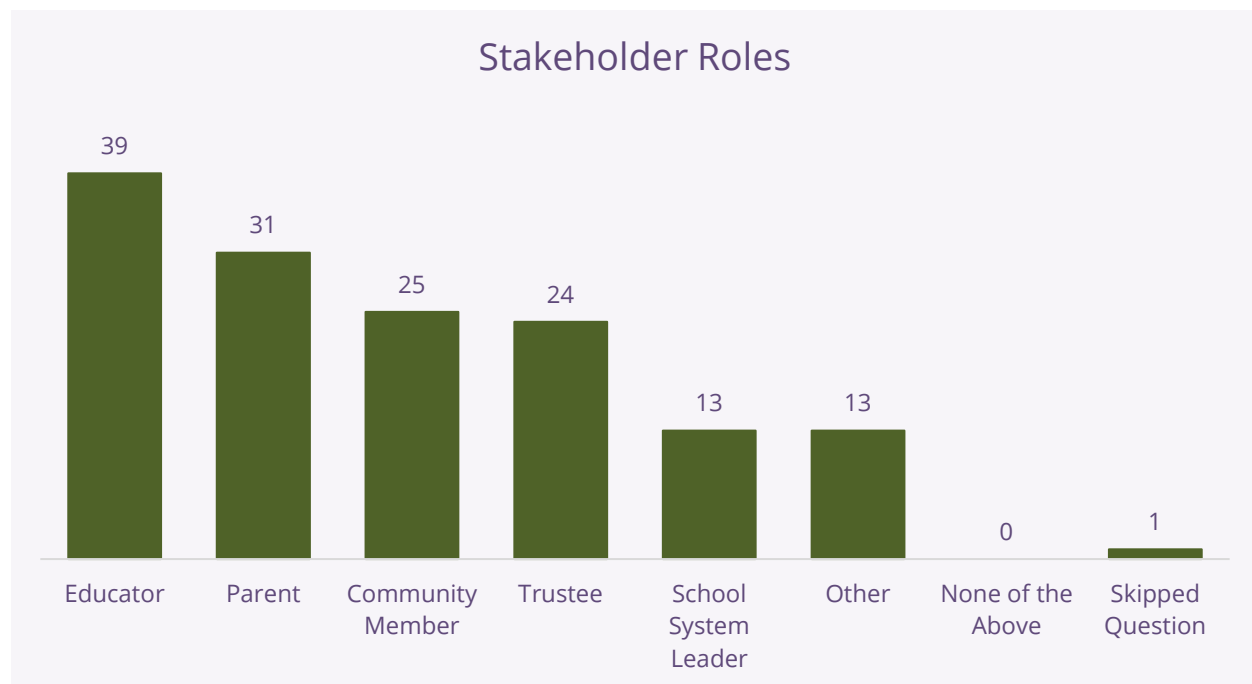
underrepresentation of some voices in decision-making, (b) funding, and (c) a lack of professional development. Finally, we provide readers with some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants described using to address the challenges they identified.

Snapshot from Saskatchewan Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants' voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts the respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 105 individuals who participated. Given that this number is too small to represent the Saskatchewan population, we make no claim to share representative results; we only report the responses from the sample included in the study.

Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As demonstrated in Figure 3.1, the roles Saskatchewan participants mainly identified with were *educator* (37%, $n = 40$), *parent* (30%, $n = 33$), and/or *community member* (24%, $n = 26$). Smaller numbers of participants identified with the roles of *trustee* (23%, $n = 24$) and *school system leader* (12%, $n = 13$).

Figure 3.1. Stakeholder Roles: Saskatchewan



When asked which sex or gender described them (Figure 3.2), approximately 31% ($n = 32$) of Saskatchewan participants chose to either not respond to this question or indicated that they preferred not to say. Of those who did respond, more participants identified as female (59%, $n = 43$) than male (37%, $n = 27$).

Figure 3.2. Sex and Gender: Saskatchewan



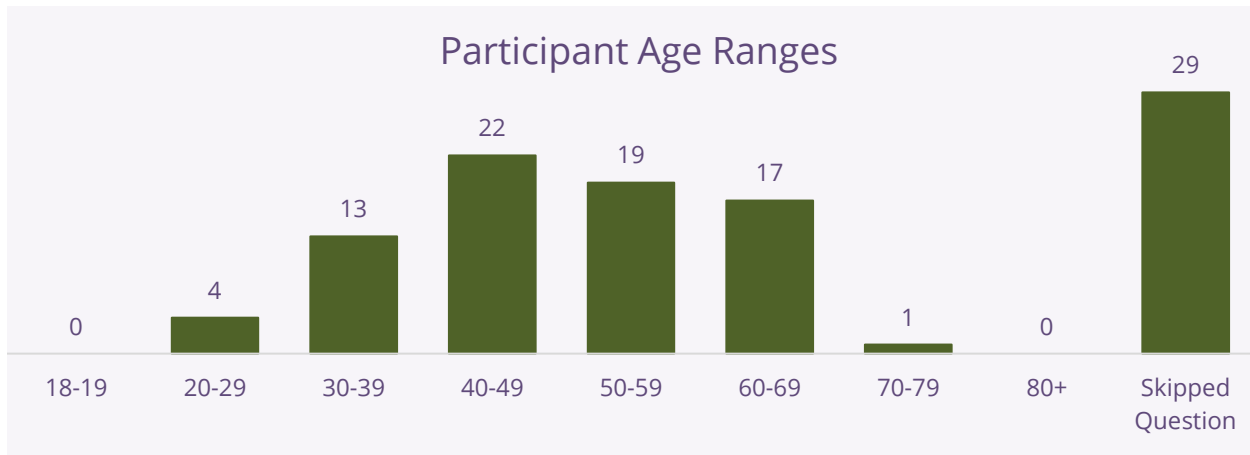
In terms of ethnoracial identity (Table 3.1), a few participants from Saskatchewan either selected “prefer not to answer” (7%, $n = 7$) or did not answer the question at all (29%, $n = 30$). Of those who did, 58 individuals (55%) self-identified as White. The second largest group of self-identified participants were First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (6%, $n = 6$), and a few people identified as Black or having multiple identities, as indicated by the “Other” write-in responses.

Table 3.1. *Ethnoracial Identity : Saskatchewan*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	58
Prefer Not to Answer	7
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	6
Other	3
Black	2
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	0
Filipino	0
Korean	0
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	0
Japanese	0
Chinese	0
Latin American	0
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Skipped Question	30

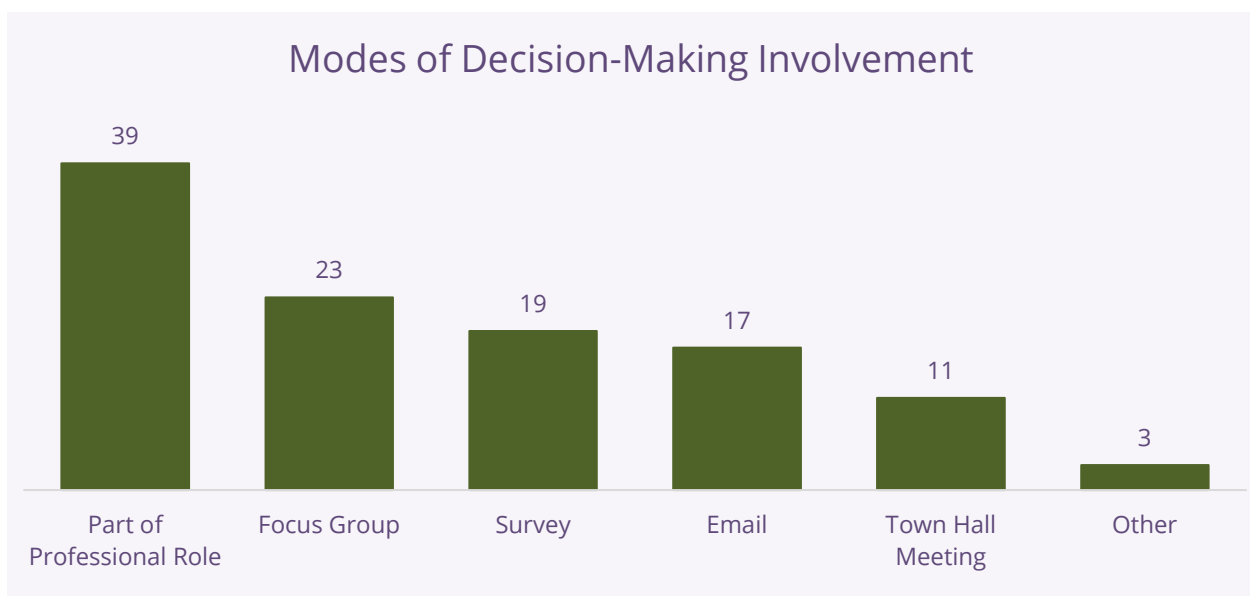
Almost 40% of Saskatchewan respondents were between the ages of 40 and 59 (Figure 3.3). There was an equal number of participants (16%, $n = 17$) who were between the ages of 60 and 69 and between the ages of 20 and 39.

Figure 3.3. Age Ranges: Saskatchewan



Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 3.4), 104 participants responded: 52% ($n = 54$) said *yes* and 48% said *no* ($n = 50$). When asked how they have been involved in system-level decision-making, nearly half ($n = 49$) of the participants responded. Participants were given the option to “choose all that applied” regarding to their involvement, and many indicated that they were involved in more than one way; 80% ($n = 39$) of these respondents indicated that it was part of their professional role, 76% ($n = 23$) were involved via focus groups (online and in person), 39% ($n = 19$) via surveys, with another 35% ($n = 17$) through email. The common theme among those who answered “Other” was involvement through a parent group.

Figure 3.4. Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: Saskatchewan



When asked if they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making (Table 3.2), half of the Saskatchewan participants responded, and of that half, approximately two thirds ($n = 33$) wanted to be involved in system-level decision-making. Of the 16 participants who indicated they did not want to be involved in system-level decision-making, three indicated they do not have enough time to be involved, five indicated that they did not feel their involvement would make a difference, five indicated they did not feel their voice would be heard, and seven stated that they did not know enough about the topic.

Table 3.2. *Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved in School System-Level Decision-Making: Saskatchewan*

Reasons Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved	# of Respondents
I don't know enough about the topic.	7
I don't feel my involvement will make a difference in decision-making.	5
I don't feel my voice will be heard.	5
I don't have time to be involved.	3
I am simply not interested in being involved.	2
Other.	1

Community Representation in Decision-Making. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community (Table 3.3), 95 Saskatchewanians responded: marginally more responded *no* (54%, $n = 51$) than *yes* (46%, $n = 44$). For those who responded *no*, almost half ($n = 22$) stated that their community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made at the system level, 37% ($n = 19$) stated that their community has no relationship with the governing body, and 33% ($n = 17$) stated that there are no clear systems for how their community can be involved. Twelve participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; the main theme we observed in these responses was that not all voices are heard in decision-making. For those participants who felt that the system does represent their community, 42 indicated why: 90% ($n = 38$) indicated that the system is representative because the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community, 57% ($n = 24$) said they know their community has a voice in the decisions that are made, 55% ($n = 23$) said that there

are clear systems for how their community can be involved, 55% ($n = 23$) said that there are people who look like them in decision-making positions, and 46% ($n = 19$) said their community has a relationship with the governing body.

Table 3.3. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: Saskatchewan

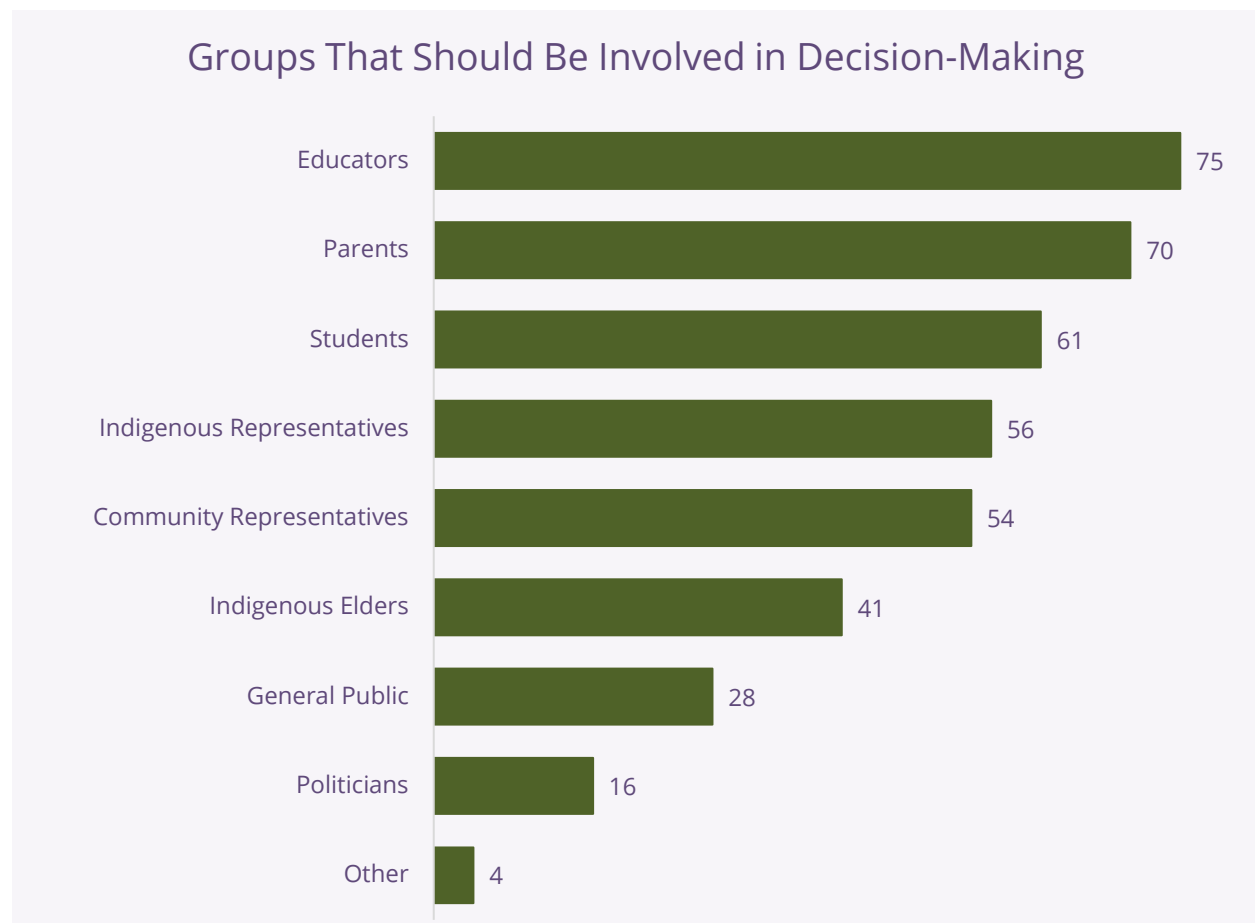
School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	22	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	38
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	19	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	24
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	17	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	23
Other.	12	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	23
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	11	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	19
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	3	Other.	1

We followed up with an open-ended question asking how they felt their school governance system could better represent their community. Overall, educators, parents, and community members felt that better representation required targeted inclusion of parents as well as cultural and ethnic minority community members.

Trustees who responded suggested additional communication could be accomplished using social media. A few other participants shared that they felt school governance systems could better reflect their community if boards of trustees had local taxation authority, given that the Saskatchewan provincial government has set education property taxes since 2009 (Saskatchewan, n.d.). Prior to 2009, Saskatchewan boards of trustees had the authority to set education property taxes for their district to help offset the cost of running schools (CBC News, 2009). Today, separate school divisions have the right to levy taxes, but public boards of trustees do not (Saskatchewan, n.d.).

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked about who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making (Figure 3.5), most of the 82 Saskatchewanians who responded indicated that the following groups should be involved: educators (92%, $n = 75$), parents (85%, $n = 70$), students (75%, $n = 61$), Indigenous representatives (68%, $n = 56$), and community representatives (66%, $n = 54$).

Figure 3.5. *Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Saskatchewan*



The participants also indicated that these groups should be involved through a consultation process (77%, $n = 63$), invited to attend decision-making meetings (73%, $n = 60$), asked to provide advisory services (62%, $n = 51$), and vote on decisions (38%, $n = 31$) (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. *How Selected Groups in Figure 3.5 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Saskatchewan*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	63
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	60
They should provide advisory services.	51
They should vote on decisions.	31
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	30
Other.	5

Some participants provided an explanation as to why they made the choices they did. Many of these were from teachers who indicated that they would like to be involved in decision-making because they are in contact with students daily and believe that when decisions are being made about the system, those who actively participate in it need to have a bigger voice. Additionally, they described feeling comfortable and secure about speaking up because they are familiar with the educational system and have relevant experience and knowledge.

We asked an open-ended question about who should not be involved in system-level decision-making. Two themes emerged. First, educators, community members, and trustees who responded argued that politicians should not be involved in decisions affecting the system because their involvement compromises the independence of locally elected trustees. Some argued that politicians preferred their political agendas over students' needs, and they also lacked the necessary expertise to make informed decisions. Second, parents responded that the general public who are not parents of students in the school should not be a part of decision-making because they felt that people without children in school should not contribute to the process.

Would Anything Be Lost Without Elected Boards of Trustees. The survey asked, “Do you think anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners in your area?” (Table 3.5). This question received 63 responses. Of these responses, 78% ($n = 49$) indicated that there would be a loss. When asked what would be lost, 45 (92%) participants indicated that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost, 44 (90%) indicated that recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost, and 30 (61%) indicated that their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.

Table 3.5. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Saskatchewan*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	45
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	44
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	30
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	19
Other.	6

For those few respondents (22%, $n = 14$) who felt nothing would be lost if there were no board of trustees (Table 3.6), nine indicated that they believed the trustees are on boards for their personal interest/gain and not for the community, seven believed that boards of trustees do not work effectively and/or efficiently, and seven did not believe that boards of trustees were responsible for meaningful decision-making.

Table 3.6. *Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Saskatchewan*

Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without Elected Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I believe trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community.	9
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.	7
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making.	7
I believe the provincial/territorial government is better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education.	4
Other.	2

Voting Experience. Participants were asked if they had voted in the last school board election (Figure 3.6). Of the 61 responses to this question, 69% ($n = 42$) indicated yes and the remaining 31% ($n = 19$) answered no. When asked if there was a specific reason why they voted in the last school board election (Table 3.7), 95% ($n = 40$) indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, 79% ($n = 33$) were interested in school boards, 62% ($n = 26$) indicated that they knew where and how to vote, 36% ($n = 15$) indicated that they knew the candidates and 21% ($n = 9$) indicated that they also liked the candidate. A few participants thought it was a democratic responsibility/civic duty and ran in the election. We asked participants who did not vote why they chose not to vote and 16 responded. A few indicated that they did not know the candidate, that they did not know when the election was and how to vote, and that they are not interested in school boards. Fourteen participants selected "Other," and some included a written response; we observed three themes in these responses: (a) that the candidate was acclaimed, (b) that they had accessibility issues, and (c) that they were not eligible to vote.

Figure 3.6. *Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: Saskatchewan*

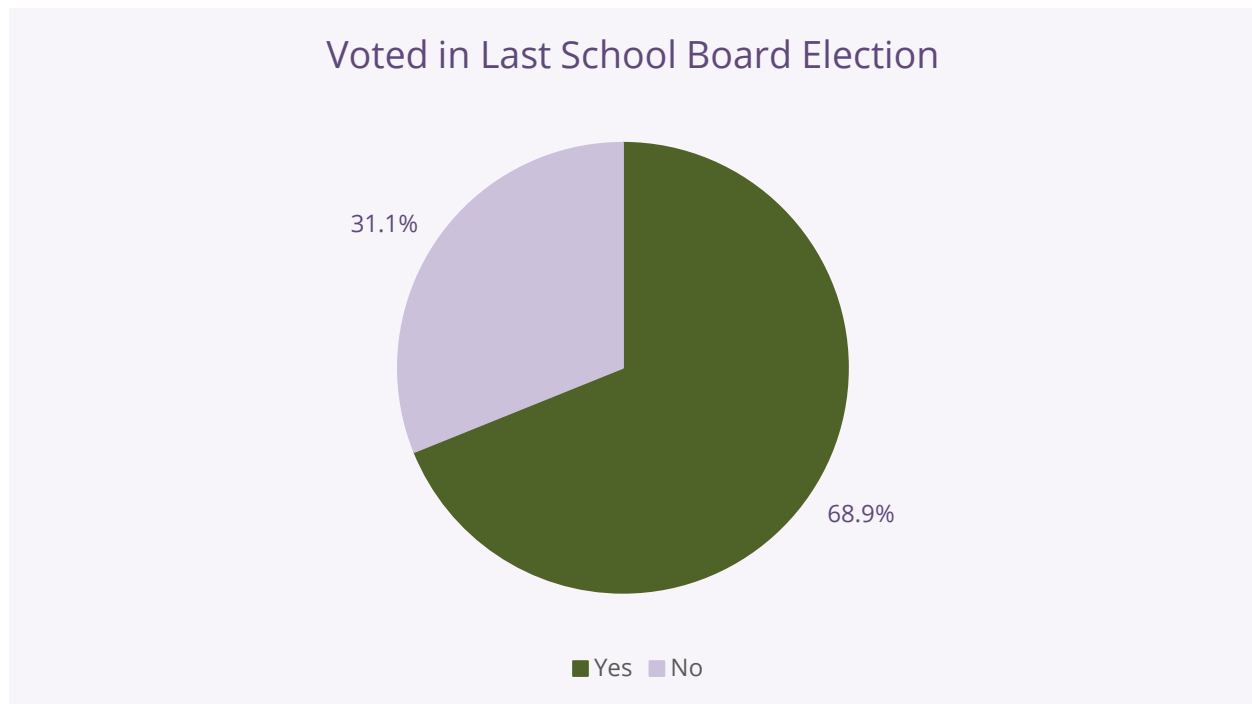


Table 3.7. *Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: Saskatchewan*

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	40	Other.	13
I am interested in school boards.	33	I didn't know the candidates.	3
I knew where and how to vote.	26	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	3
I knew the candidates.	15	I am not interested in school boards.	1
I liked the candidates.	9	I didn't like the candidates.	0
Other.	4	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	0

Meaning of Democratic Voice. All participants in this study were asked the short-answer question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” In Saskatchewan, 40 participants chose to respond. Three themes emerged from the responses: (a) being heard, (b) voting, and (c) the right to participate in decision-making.

Being Heard. The most common understanding of democratic voice among Saskatchewanian respondents was that it refers to the public being heard in decision-making spaces. Although most respondents with this understanding indicated that they felt all public voices in the community should be heard, two included the caveat that special interest groups (who were not further defined) should not be included, insinuating that special interest groups were not part of what the respondents conceptualized as “all” or “everyone.” In contrast, a small number of respondents specified that the voices heard in decision-making should represent the local community—meaning only a select few voices need to be heard in decision-making rather than the total community.

Finally, many respondents understood “democratic voice” to mean that they personally should have the opportunity to express themselves. For these respondents, democratic voice means that individuals should have the opportunity to share their opinion on decisions that are being made or that have already been made.

Voting and Election Processes. Some respondents understood democratic voice as pertaining to their right to vote on decisions and/or their right to vote for representatives who, in turn, vote on decisions. Understanding democratic voice as meaning the public’s right to vote for representatives who in turn vote on decisions closely aligns with the current system of democratically elected school boards of trustees.

Right to Participate in Decision-Making. Some participants did not specify how they wanted to be involved in decision-making, only that they understood democratic voice as reflecting a right to participate in decision-making. Participants who understood democratic voice this way felt that the public should have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making; however, there was no evident theme regarding how that participation should occur. While some respondents felt the public had a right to equal participation in decision-making, others felt that the public (or representative groups) had the right to participate by being consulted on decisions by those in decision-making roles.

Participants' Final Thoughts. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and information they felt was relevant to the questionnaire that was not necessarily captured within the questions asked. We received feedback from 32 participants in Saskatchewan. Participants' reflections can be organized into three themes: (a) expressing support for keeping locally elected boards of trustees, (b) expressing distrust in locally elected boards of trustees, and (c) reiterating the challenges that have come from removing boards of trustees' taxation authority.

Respondents who indicated their support for retaining locally elected boards of trustees felt that this system was the best way to ensure local needs were recognized and met in system-level decision-making. Those who indicated their distrust in locally elected boards of trustees said that they had difficulty seeing the benefits of boards of trustees, that boards of trustees were not held accountable for their decisions, and that boards of trustees were not representative of local communities. Finally, a few participants argued that when boards of trustees lost the power to set the education property tax in 2009 (Saskatchewan, n.d.), they lost their decision-making power. These respondents felt that, since 2009, boards of trustees have become scapegoats—rather than decision-makers—for unfavourable provincially made decisions.

Structural Matters

In Saskatchewan, the school system structure is also impacted by Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. In this section, we provide a brief overview of this matter as discussed by study participants.

Indigenous Participation in System-Level Decision-Making. In Saskatchewan, Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making differs significantly among the school divisions. While individual First Nations administer First Nations schools on reserve, off-reserve schools are administered under provincial authority through boards of education. Off-reserve schools may serve a few, or very many, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education document, *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, broadly sets out goals related to Indigenous education for boards of education throughout the province. In interviews and focus groups, our research team asked stakeholders how they felt the boards of trustees that govern provincial boards of education were working to include Indigenous voices in system-level decision-making.

Representation and Majority Rule. A common theme participants brought up was representation and majority rule. Participants shared that boards of trustees are elected by majority rule and that decisions were often made by majority rule. According to some participants, this creates tension around Indigenous inclusion where the Indigenous population is part of a minority. Although some school boards in Saskatchewan serve a population with high numbers of Indigenous residents and as such have a predominantly (or entirely) Indigenous board of trustees, others may have little to no Indigenous representation.

For many participants, communities with a lower Indigenous population faced more challenges in recruiting Indigenous trustees and even involving Indigenous community members through forms of public consultation. Although the decisions made may be perceived as equal because the community gets an equal vote, they are often not considered equitable because of the low representation of Indigenous community members. A small portion of participants felt that because their area has a minority Indigenous population it was unnecessary to include them in decision-making; however, most participants shared a belief that efforts to include Indigenous voices in decision-making were worthwhile.

While acknowledging that many boards of trustees lack Indigenous representation, some participants described ways their board of trustees is actively seeking to engage and collaborate with Indigenous communities. Participants said that they or their board of trustees wanted to encourage Indigenous community members to nominate themselves for a trustee role; however, specific examples of what this encouragement looked like were not provided. Participants also described the work their board of trustees was doing to create representative positions for Indigenous peoples, such as having Indigenous-specific subcommittees within the board of trustees, an Indigenous student forum, inviting Elders to public meetings, and, at SSBA, having a designated Indigenous constituent who is elected by Indigenous trustees across the province.

As well, participants discussed boards of trustees collaborating with provincial committees and organizations to work toward increased Indigenous community involvement in decision-making. A few participants discussed making targeted attempts to elect Indigenous trustees to positions of leadership to ensure Indigenous voices would be heard in decision-making. To this end, participants pointed to the work of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) in having Indigenous leaders and in prioritizing work related to Indigenous education and inclusion.

Legislative Barriers to Indigenous Representation. A June 2022 report by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, shared by the SSBA leadership upon review of the current report, shows that The Local Government Elections Act, 2015 (LGEA) and The Local Government Elections Regulations, 2015 (LGER) present significant legislative barriers to Indigenous representation in system-level decision-making. Namely, Saskatchewan legislation broadly limits Indigenous representation to the establishment of one elected seat on a board of trustees, under strict regulation. This legislation fails to account for jurisdictions that may serve multiple Nations, for Nations who may prefer to appoint—rather than elect—a representative, and for Métis representation. The SSBA (2022) report offers many reflections on the feasibility of different mechanisms for resolving these legislative barriers to Indigenous representation, but overall, the SSBA recommends—and we concur—that revisions be made that allow for greater flexibility within the legislation, such that boards and First Nations and Métis communities can collaboratively negotiate solutions that work in their specific context, while respecting the sovereignty and diversity of these Nations.

Overall, most Saskatchewanian participants expressed their concern around Indigenous issues and the need for more education and Indigenous representation in decision-making. However, many acknowledged that Indigenous issues are often not discussed in boards of trustees' meetings, and Indigenous representation is difficult to achieve.

Challenges Stakeholders Experience When Participating in Decision-Making

Saskatchewanian participants reported three main challenges to democratic participation in system-level decision-making: (a) the underrepresentation of some voices, (b) challenges relating to funding, and (c) lack of professional development.

Underrepresentation of Some Voices. In Saskatchewan, many participants shared that some voices are underrepresented in system-level decision-making. More specifically, participants felt that Indigenous communities, people of colour, people with disabilities, students, and those with low socioeconomic status are frequently underrepresented in decision-making. Participants felt that this underrepresentation may be due to people from these communities (a) not feeling heard in decision-making, (b) having difficulty navigating what may be perceived as an overly complicated system for participation, or (c) holding a negative perception of boards of trustees.

Not Feeling Heard. Some participants felt that some communities may choose not to participate in system-level decision-making because they assume that their voice will not be heard. According to these participants, people from communities experiencing marginalization may feel that if they were to participate in system-level decision-making, whether by voicing concerns at a public meeting, speaking to their elected representative, or nominating themselves as a potential school board trustee, their voice would not be heard by those in decision-making positions. Some of these participants rationalized that these communities may feel this way because they would be a minority voice and that majority voices are often prioritized.

Additional Workload for Marginalized Communities. Moreover, some participants felt that some people from marginalized communities may not want to be involved in decision-making—especially as a trustee—because they may not want the responsibility of speaking against the majority voices to represent their minority community. In other words, some participants recognized that minority trustees will have to do additional work to represent their community in decision-making because the needs and concerns of minority communities often differ from the needs and concerns of majority communities. In this way, minority representatives may feel additional layers of responsibility, and have additional work overall, because they may frequently have to go against the majority rule.

Overly Complicated System. As in other jurisdictions, participants felt that some voices may be underrepresented in system-level decision-making because of what may be perceived as an overly complicated system for participation. For these participants, bringing concerns to boards of trustees' meetings may be perceived as too difficult because of the formality required and the process of knowing when and where meetings are held, how the public can participate, and what issues and concerns can be raised at these meetings. Likewise, some people may not want to nominate themselves for a trustee position, despite having a passion for education and skill set that may benefit system-level decision-making, because of the perceived difficulty of nominating themselves, the challenge of running a campaign, and the uncertainty around the specific roles and responsibilities of trustees.

Negative Perception of Boards of Trustees. A few participants speculated that communities experiencing marginalization may have negative perceptions of the board of trustees, thereby reducing their trust in the board and, by association, their willingness to engage with boards of trustees. Participants had differing ideas of where this negative perception may have originated. A small number of

participants felt that some communities may perceive boards of trustees as corrupt because these communities do not perceive decisions being made in favour of marginalized communities' needs, despite the board hearing concerns from marginalized communities. Other participants felt some people may feel that boards of trustees represented a closed group, and as a result concerns voiced from those not directly associated with this closed group may not be respected. Finally, many participants felt that many communities may hold a negative perception of boards of trustees because boards of trustees are often required to make unfavourable decisions such as reducing staffing and/or programming or failing to provide adequate school resources, due to provincially controlled budget cuts. In this way, boards of trustees are perceived to take the blame for decisions made beyond their level of control.

Funding Challenges. Many participants discussed challenges related to educational funding. To review, prior to 2009, Saskatchewan school boards had taxation authority that they could use to raise education funding as needed (Perrins, 2017). Participants repeatedly described the loss of this taxation authority as leading to a key challenge that Saskatchewan boards of trustees face: inadequate educational funding. Participants repeatedly discussed the challenges in balancing what is perceived as an inadequate budget, due to the stipulation that school boards cannot hold a deficit. To balance this budget, boards of trustees are seemingly forced to make unfavourable decisions to work within provincial restrictions. In addition, participants felt that the loss of taxation authority led to a loss of boards of trustees' sense of purpose and power to make decisions effectively.

Loss of Sense of Purpose. Some Saskatchewanian participants felt that when boards of trustees lost their taxation authority, they lost their sense of purpose. For these participants, the reduced autonomy left boards of trustees struggling to understand how they could continue to pursue the goals of enhancing education in Saskatchewan. Moreover, some participants felt that boards of trustees may feel less connected to their constituents because they are no longer responsible for constituents' investment in education through educational property taxes. Likewise, some participants felt constituents may increasingly question the purpose of boards of trustees because of their lack of taxation authority.

Loss of Power for Effective Decision-Making. Some participants explained that the loss of taxation authority did more than challenge boards of trustees' sense of purpose—it also significantly reduced boards of trustees' power for effective decision-making. According to these participants, boards of trustees are very limited in what they can do because of the constraints imposed by inadequate funding and the policy that school board budgets cannot hold a deficit. Participants conjectured that, without control over generating revenue, school boards' purpose may be perceived as reduced to the extent that they simply “rubber stamp” the directives of the provincial government.

Lack of Professional Development. A few participants discussed trustees' lack of professional development—particularly in relation to differentiating between governance and operations—as a challenge to system-level decision-making. Participants in nearly all jurisdictions highlighted the need for school board trustees to understand that their role is one of governance, not operations. This means that school board trustees make decisions around policymaking and strategic planning for the overall school board. In contrast, operational decisions that have to do with the day-to-day tasks required for administering education are the responsibility of superintendents and other administrators. A few participants in Saskatchewan felt that some trustees, both new and experienced, did not understand the significance of keeping these roles separate, while other trustees deeply understood. These participants felt that the disparate levels of understanding disrupted effective decision-making because trustees would end up spending much of their time differentiating tasks as operations versus governance, rather than analyzing the issue at hand.

Strategies Participants Use to Address Challenges to Democratic Participation

In addition to identifying challenges, participants in Saskatchewan also suggested some strategies they felt may help remedy those challenges and support democratic participation in decision-making: (a) increasing representation and (b) better preparing trustees for their role.

Increase Representation. To increase representation in system-level decision-making, participants described the work boards of trustees were already doing, or suggested new work that could enable diverse communities to have a voice in system-level decision-making. As for the work boards of trustees were already doing, some participants felt that a solution was not needed because voices were already heard, while others described boards of trustees attending school

community councils and going out into their communities. For suggested strategies, participants suggested boards of trustees could identify preferred candidates in trustee elections and could invite underrepresented communities to participate more specifically.

All Voices are Already Heard. A few participants felt that Saskatchewan boards of trustees were already doing commendable work regarding representation in system-level decision-making. According to these participants, boards of trustees were doing a better job of garnering participation from diverse communities than ever before. These participants specified that, because of the way decision-making is currently organized, all voices that come forward are heard. Moreover, some of these participants referenced specific school boards that have Indigenous or new Canadian representation on their boards of trustees. For these participants, representation was no longer perceived as a significant challenge that needed strategies for improvement. Other participants described the work their boards of trustees were doing to garner this increased representation.

School Community Councils. Many participants described boards of trustees attending school community councils (SCCs) to hear the voices of the school community and bringing what they learned to their decision-making table. School community councils are school-level organizations that advise school-level and system-level decision-makers on the needs of the school community (Saskatchewan, n.d.). School community councils consist of appointed and elected members including parents, community members, principals, teachers, and students (Saskatchewan, n.d.). Many participants shared that trustees are encouraged to attend SCCs, both to get to know the school community better, and to hear the needs and concerns of the school community more directly. By attending school community council meetings, trustees can work to increase the representation of school community members in decision-making through indirect consultation (i.e., that school community members are included in consultation through having what they share at the school community council meeting be considered and included in board decision-making through the mediation of attending trustees). Some of the participants who described this work also highlighted the importance of trustees knowing when they should leave the meeting so as not to stifle the conversations that may not be intended to be heard by trustees.

Going into the Community. Some Saskatchewanian participants described the work they or their trustees do to make themselves available for consultation in their community. These participants described having community members

approach trustees in the local grocery store or other community hubs to share their comments, questions, or concerns about school system-level decision-making. These participants felt that, as locally elected representatives, trustees had a responsibility to be accessible and available to community members. Similarly, participants described trustees attending community events and festivals to make themselves more accessible to the public. In this strategy, participants described trustees working to bring themselves into community spaces to increase representation, rather than trying to bring community members trustee spaces. As identified in the previous section, some community members may not be comfortable entering into formal decision-making spaces; therefore, by making themselves available to community members in community spaces, some trustees may help eliminate a barrier to participation.

Preferred Candidates. To increase diverse representation on boards of trustees, a few participants suggested using a preferred candidate system. Under this system, boards of trustees would highlight specific candidates who were running in trustee elections. It is implied that the candidates who are highlighted as “preferred” would be candidates representing communities that may be normally underrepresented in system-level decision-making. Such a system would draw greater attention to candidates who may otherwise have difficulty being acknowledged among candidates that more closely align with the majority population in a given electoral area. Although using a preferred candidate system would retain democratically elected representation—as opposed to designated or appointed representation—it would not guarantee that the preferred candidate would successfully be elected to a trustee position.

Inviting Underrepresented Communities. Some participants suggested that boards of trustees could work to reach out to underrepresented communities more specifically. In reaching out to these communities, participants felt that trustees could inform communities of how they can participate, seek to learn why these communities may not be participating, and listen to the needs and concerns of these communities in a manner where they are not competing against other communities for time or space. Participants who shared this strategy felt that some of the communities that ought to be more specifically addressed included parents, Indigenous community members, and new Canadians.

A few participants mentioned the [Leadership Institute on Systematic Parent Engagement](#) (Pushor, n.d.). This Institute was held in July 2022 and was intended to support educators in understanding how they can better facilitate parent, family, and community involvement in schools and school systems (Pushor, n.d.).

Participants felt that is the type of work that boards of trustees could do to better communicate with underrepresented communities to help increase their participation in school system-level decision-making.

Prepare Trustees for their Role. Many participants discussed educating potential trustee nominees, candidates, and active trustees on trustee roles and responsibilities to improve system-level decision-making.

Potential Trustees. Participants felt that public education programs on the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of trustees could be beneficial for potential trustee nominees in two ways: to educate the public on the work of boards of trustees and to enable the public to better decide whether they would like to nominate themselves for a trustee role. This type of education program would include administrative information such as the cost of running for trustees, the expected monetary compensation trustees receive, and the time commitment a trusteeship would require. As well, this educational programming would describe the type of work trustees do, the significance of having an elected board of trustees, and the limitations of trustees' responsibilities.

Trustee Candidates. For trustee candidates, participants felt a training program could include this same information, while also educating candidates on how their existing skills and professional experiences may benefit them as a trustee. Participants highlighted the need for candidates to recognize both the significance and the demanding nature of the trustee role prior to committing to a 4-year term.

Elected Trustees. Once trustees were elected, participants described the need for initial and ongoing professional development. Participants highlighted the need to educate trustees on the difference between governance and operations, and the importance of prioritizing initiatives related to academic learning. Trustee knowledge of the difference between governance and operations is a strategy that was brought up in most jurisdictions in this study. Saskatchewanian participants explained that the clearer trustees are on their role as governance representatives, the more effective school boards will run.

Regarding prioritizing academic learning, participants pointed our research team to the work of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA). In broad terms, participants commended the SSBA for the professional development and leadership they provided to elected trustees—namely, professional development that helped engage trustees in prioritizing initiatives that work toward improving

academic performance. Participants surmised that, because trustees generally did not have experience as professional educators, they may shy away from education-based decisions and lean into decisions better suited to their expertise, such as managing resources and providing extracurricular programming. These participants shared that, through the work of the SSBA, trustees may become more confident in using their position to influence learning-based decisions, thereby prioritizing academic learning in decision-making.

Manitoba

Manitoba, the easternmost prairie province in Canada, is situated between Saskatchewan to the west and Ontario to the east. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada indicated that the Manitoba population was 1,444,190 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). In the 2022–2023 school year there were 212,443 students enrolled in the province (Government of Manitoba, 2022).

Manitoba hosts multiple separate schooling systems: the public school system governed under the [Manitoba Public Schools Act](#), the [Manitoba First Nations School System \(MFNSS\)](#) governed by the [Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre \(MFNERC\)](#), and independently Band-operated schools that are either supported by MFNERC or operated solely by a local band. This study only includes the public school system governed under the *Manitoba Public Schools Act*.

For information about the organizing bodies, legislation, representatives, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan (Pollock et al., 2022). As mentioned in the report introduction, we recognize that some students in Manitoba and across Canada also attend schools that are supported federally through the *Indian Act* (1985). Delivered by the Department of Indigenous Services, these schools are outside the scope of this study.

Structure of School System Governance in Manitoba

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning governs the public school system in conjunction with locally elected school board trustees, as outlined in *The Public Schools Act* and [The Education Administration Act](#). Each school board governs a specific segment of the public school system, known as school divisions or school districts, with discrete physical boundaries (*The Public Schools Act*, 2017, Section 28[1]). The Manitoba public school system is informally organized into five regions, which are further divided into 37 local Anglophone school divisions: Central (six divisions), Northern/Remote (four divisions), Parkland/Westman (10 divisions), Southeast/Interlake (10 divisions), and Winnipeg (seven divisions). The 38th school division, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM), operates across all regions. Four school divisions ([Frontier School Division](#), [Park West School Division](#), [Rolling River School Division](#), and [Fort La Bosse](#)) have agreements with local First Nations to administer approximately 30 schools in First Nations communities. All school divisions in Manitoba are members of the [Manitoba School Boards Association](#), a provincial organization that offers support and advocacy services to member

school divisions. Further, all school divisions are governed by a locally elected board of trustees.

The boards of trustees are responsible for preparing and participating in school board and committee meetings, advocating for high learning expectations for all students, holding a general election every 4 years, and speaking and voting at school board meetings (*The Public Schools Act*, Section 21.50, 29). To be nominated for a seat on a board of trustees, candidates must file nomination papers and obtain the signatures of 25 voters or 1% of the total number of voters in the ward in which they are running (*The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*, Section 42[2]). School board elections in Manitoba are held in conjunction with municipal elections in the autumn, every fourth October (*The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*, Section 86[3]). Elected trustees serve a 4-year term without restrictions to extend their terms of service on the board. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint an official trustee for any school division or school district if the affairs of that division or district are not being satisfactorily managed by the board of trustees (*The Public Schools Act*, Section 28[1]). All Manitoba residents who are over 18 years of age, hold Canadian citizenship, and have been residents of the school division or district for at least 6 months are eligible to vote in trustee elections (*The Public Schools Act*, Section 21[1]).

The *Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act* does not apply to trustees in the Francophone school board (*The Public Schools Act*, s. 21.35[3]). Rather, the nomination and election of trustees to the Francophone board are in accordance with sections 21.35 to 21.38 of *The Public Schools Act*: Individuals in Manitoba who are 18 years of age or older on the day of the election, Canadian citizens, residents of Manitoba for at least 6 months, and have children enrolled in a program delivered by the Francophone school board or who reside in an electoral division but their children are not yet enrolled in a program delivered by the Francophone school board (and is not otherwise disqualified) may vote in the Francophone school board election. To be nominated as a trustee for the Francophone school division, a person must be entitled to vote under section 21.37 of *The Public Schools Act* and be able to participate in the conduct of the school division's business in French.

Recent and Ongoing Legislative Changes

In this section, we briefly introduce some of the key legislative changes participants perceived as having significant impact on school system-level decision-making in Manitoba. Although a full history of public education governance cannot be

accommodated in this report, we provide an overview of significant events that influence the context and culture of Manitoba public education.

In 2002, a large-scale [amalgamation](#) reduced 54 school divisions to 37 with the passing of [Bill 14: The Public Schools Modernization Act](#). In all stages of data collection, participants commonly referred to this change as “the amalgamation,” and cited it as a foundational policy change impacting the current decision-making climate in Manitoba. At the time, the amalgamation was intended to improve economic and functional efficiency within school divisions, while also allowing the divisions to retain their autonomy. Although participants in this study doubted whether these intentions were realized, approximately one third of participants responded in favour of further amalgamation when asked, “If you were asked for input on an alternate model for school-level governance, what would you suggest?” However, when asked about the more recent proposed changes to abolish school boards altogether, nearly all participants stated a preference for retaining some level of locally elected school governance. These results favouring amalgamation while retaining locally elected school governance were also demonstrated in relatively concurrent research by the Winnipeg-based research group, Probe Research, which found that 23% of Manitobans favored amalgamation and 79% of Manitobans wanted to retain locally elected school governance (Probe Research, 2018).

In 2020, the Manitoba Progressive Conservative government tabled three concurrent bills to change education legislation: [Bill 45: The Public Schools Amendment and Manitoba Teachers’ Society Amendment Act](#), [Bill 71: The Education Property Tax Reduction Act](#), and the repealed [Bill 64: The Education Modernization Act](#). Although Bill 45 passed successfully and took effect in [January 2022](#), it was not brought up in interviews as influential to school system-level decision-making, and therefore is not discussed further in this report.

Bill 71: The Education Property Tax Reduction Act proposed to eliminate local education property taxation authority from school boards and replace the locally generated revenue funding with funding from the Provincial Treasury. At the time of writing this report, Bill 71 is partially enacted. School divisions and districts have retained authority for collecting education revenue through education property taxes even while the 2023 provincial budget has effectively halved the total amount collected as of 2020 and the Minister of Education encourages all school boards to cap revenue increases at 2% per annum. Manitoba residents have received proportional rebates for property taxes paid in 2021 and 2022, with up to 50% in

2023. Commencing in 2022, an education funding review team has been established to develop a new education funding model.

Due to the timing of this review, our report does not address the impact of these changes in detail. However, a few participants did discuss the overall funding reformation in interviews. Many participants agreed with the changes in taxation authority in light of the funding model review, viewing it as a positive shift toward more equitable education funding. These participants shared that, under the previous model, divisions with wealthier tax assessment bases raised a greater share of revenue from education property tax, meaning that schools in these divisions had access to more funding, leading to inequitable education. As well, farming communities that had high and increasing property values but low or status quo yields/profits were taxed according to property value, meaning that they were paying higher taxes but often were earning less money off their land, leading to inequitable taxation for agricultural residents. Conversely, some participants felt that the changes to taxation authority undermined the power of school divisions and surmised that the change could lead to further public disinterest in the work of boards of trustees, if it were perceived in any way by the public that losing taxation authority was equivalent to losing local voice in public education.

Bill 64: The Education Modernization Act was by far the most discussed change in Manitoba interviews and focus groups, as it proposed to replace Anglophone school boards with a central provincial education authority. Bill 64 was initiated following a K–12 education review conducted by the K–12 Commission and co-chaired by Clayton Manness, the former Manitoba Conservative Minister of Education, and Janice MacKinnon, the former Saskatchewan NDP Minister of Finance. Dr. Avis Glaze, author of Nova Scotia’s 2018 [*Raise the Bar*](#) report, was also consulted on the review. The review began in January 2019 and the resulting report, [*Our Children’s Success: Manitoba’s Future*](#), and the Manitoba government’s response to the report, [*Better Education Starts Today \(BEST\)*](#), were released in March 2021.

Bill 64 was met with significant opposition following strong demonstrations by the Manitoba School Boards Association and other education-related organizations and grassroots initiatives (i.e., [*Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties*](#), [*Protect Ed MB*](#), [*RedforEd*](#), [*The Canadian Union of Public Employees*](#), and [*The Manitoba Teachers’ Society*](#)). A summer-long campaign following the Opposition New Democratic Party of Manitoba’s decision to delay the Bill to the fall legislative session in 2021 led to widespread public support for withdrawal of the Bill. This was also Manitoba’s second largest public registration count for constituents wishing to

speak to a bill before the legislature. As a result of this widespread public participation and opposition to Bill 64, the Bill was withdrawn from legislation in October 2021. Participants frequently discussed the impact of Bill 64 in relation to a resulting increase in public interest around school system governance and starting the discussion about what other forms of school system governance could look like. Accordingly, we suspect that the widespread advocacy and demonstration around Bill 64 is part of the reason that there were significantly more respondents to our public questionnaire from Manitoba than in any of the other jurisdictions.

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for Manitoba. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction section of this report. In addition, further information regarding Manitoba's system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 18 participants. Seventeen of these interviews were conducted in English and one was conducted in French. Our team also conducted four focus groups. Two individuals, in total, participated across all focus groups, with some focus groups having no attendees. Due to limited focus group participation, we have combined our focus group data with the interview data. Interview and focus group participants were made up of 14 trustees, four educational professionals, and two participants not directly associated with the education system.

We identified potential interview participants by reviewing school division websites and the Manitoba School Boards Association website, through referrals by the Canadian School Boards Association, and by snowball sampling in which existing participants recommended other potential participants. We recruited participants by sending them up to three email invitations, each one week apart, to publicly available email addresses. In some cases, existing participants forwarded the interview invitation to potential participants to create an online introduction between our research team and potential participants.

Focus group participants were recruited through an emailed invitation. Our research team emailed 24 organizations with an invitation to participate in a focus

group relevant to their community. Separate focus groups were scheduled for parents, educators, community-specific organizations (i.e., newcomers to Canada), and Indigenous groups. Recruitment emails also requested that organizations forward the invitation to their members and networks. Some organizations chose to post focus group invitations to their social media accounts. Organizations were sent one follow-up email and a reminder notice on the day of the scheduled focus group. Organizations were selected through online searches for keywords such as “community group,” “education group,” and various equity-deserving group associations.

Public Consultation

In total 369 participants participated in the public consultation questionnaire. A more descriptive breakdown of participants’ demographic data is provided in the Findings section. Some demographic data were not included as their inclusion would potentially compromise participant confidentiality.

Findings: Manitoba

In this findings section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Manitoba population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we consider the structural matters that interviewees and focus group participants commented on, specifically Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. Following the structural matters, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described around (a) community engagement, (b) the distinction between governance and operations, and (c) Bill 64. Finally, we describe some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants shared about how they have been involved and how they would like to be involved.

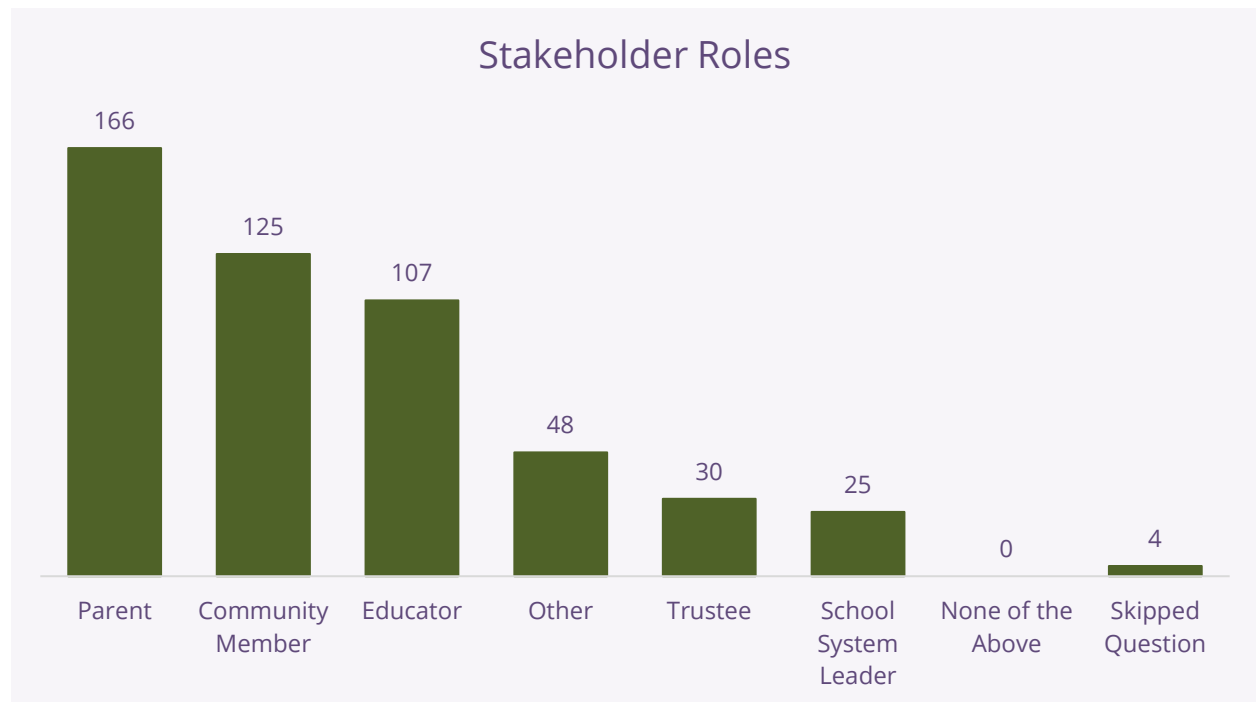
Snapshot from Manitoba Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants’ voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 369 individuals who participated. Given that this number is too small to represent the Manitoba

population, we make no claim to share representative results; we report only the responses for the sample included in the study.

Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As demonstrated in Figure 4.1, the roles Manitoban participants mainly identified with were *parent* (45%, $n = 166$), *community member* (34%, $n = 125$) and *educator* (29%, $n = 107$). A smaller number of participants identified with the roles of *trustee* (8%, $n = 30$) and *school system leader* (7%, $n = 25$).

Figure 4.1. Stakeholder Roles: Manitoba



In Manitoba, 37% ($n = 136$) chose not to respond to the question about sex and gender (Figure 4.2). For those who did, 44% ($n = 162$) described themselves as female while 12% ($n = 45$) described themselves as male.

Figure 4.2. Sex and Gender: Manitoba



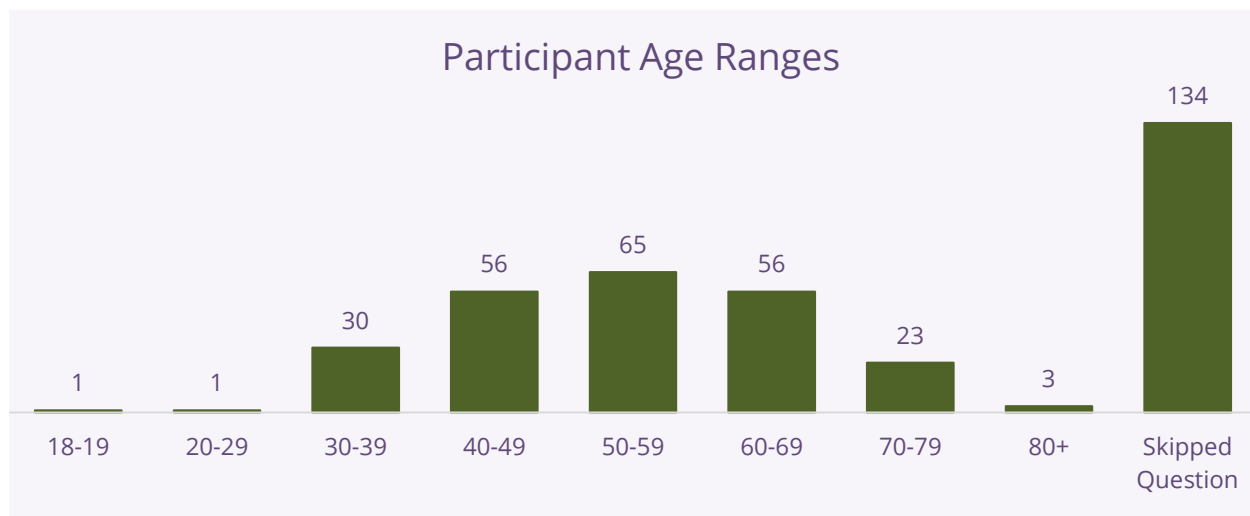
In terms of ethnoracial identity (Table 4.1), a large number of participants from Manitoba preferred not to answer (8%, $n = 29$) while another 38% ($n = 139$) chose to not answer the question at all. Of those who did, 40% ($n = 147$) self-identified as White with another 8% ($n = 28$) self-identifying as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI). Each of the following categories had anywhere from one to five participants: Black, South Asian, West Asian, Filipino, Latin American, Japanese, and Chinese.

Table 4.1. *Ethnoracial Identity: Manitoba*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	147
Prefer Not to Answer	29
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	28
Other	19
Black	3
Filipino	3
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	3
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	1
Japanese	1
Chinese	1
Latin American	0
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Korean	0
Skipped Question	139

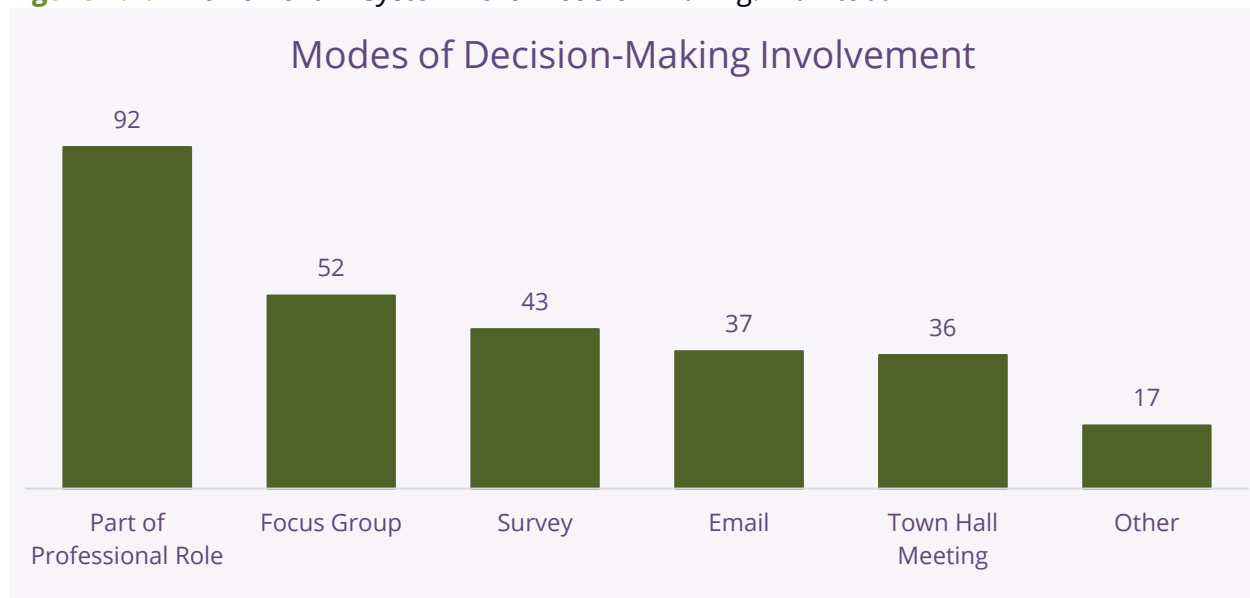
In terms of age (Figure 4.3), 18% ($n = 65$) of the Manitoba participants were between the ages of 50 and 59, with 15% ($n = 56$) on either side of this age range. Less than 10% ($n = 32$) of participants were between 18 and 39 years of age.

Figure 4.3. Age Ranges: Manitoba



Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 4.4), 39% ($n = 142$) of the 366 responses indicated yes. When asked how they have been involved in system-level decision-making, 137 Manitoban participants responded: 67% ($n = 92$) indicated that it was part of their professional role, 38% ($n = 52$) indicated that they participated in focus groups (online and in person), 31% ($n = 43$) indicated being involved via surveys, and 27% ($n = 37$) indicated being involved via emails. A common theme among those who selected “Other” included involvement through parent groups.

Figure 4.4. Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: Manitoba



When the 224 Manitobans who said they had not been involved in school system-level decision-making were asked if they would like to be involved (Table 4.2), 220 responded; almost two thirds ($n = 156$) wanted to be involved in system-level decision-making. Those who indicated they did not want to be involved ($n = 64$) were asked why, but only 54 chose to respond. Those who responded indicated that they did not feel their involvement would make a difference in the decision-making ($n = 18$); they did not have enough time to be involved ($n = 15$); they did not know enough about the topic ($n = 12$); and/or they were simply not interested in being involved ($n = 11$). Ten participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; we observed two themes in these responses: (a) I feel my age/stage in life are not conducive to contributing and (b) I think people with a particular job, role, or expertise should be involved.

Table 4.2. *Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved in School System-Level Decision-Making: Manitoba*

Reasons Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved	# of Respondents
I don't feel my involvement will make a difference in decision-making.	18
I don't have time to be involved.	15
I don't know enough about the topic.	12
I am simply not interested in being involved.	11
I don't feel my voice will be heard.	10
Other.	10

All participants were given the opportunity to add additional information about how they wanted to be involved in system-level decision-making. Of those who responded, many parents indicated wanting to be involved in decision-making about school activities and curriculum planning, while many educators said they wanted to be consulted when decisions are made about the school. Both themes represent potential misunderstandings about the work of boards of trustees. Boards of trustees do not make school-level decisions about school activities; to participate in these school-level decisions, parents or educators would have to be consulted through organizations such as parent advisory councils. Likewise, boards of trustees do not have authority over curricula. Curriculum development occurs at

the provincial level, so any consultation would be with the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Learning. However, programming decisions are relevant to boards of trustees' decision-making. While curriculum pertains to formal course content and subject matter, programming includes the organized activities and experiences schools use to supplement the formal curriculum.

Community Representation in Decision-Making. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community (Table 4.3), 321 Manitobans responded. The responses were almost evenly split between *yes* (52%, $n = 166$) and *no* (48%, $n = 155$). For those who responded *no*, almost half ($n = 72$) stated that their community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made at the system level, 40% ($n = 62$) felt there are no clear systems for how to be involved, 33% ($n = 52$) said their community has no relationship with the governing body, and 21% ($n = 32$) indicated that there are no people who look like them in decision-making positions. Twenty participants selected "Other," and some included a written response; we observed two themes in these responses: (a) not all voices are heard in decision-making, and (b) they do not feel their community is represented on boards of trustees.

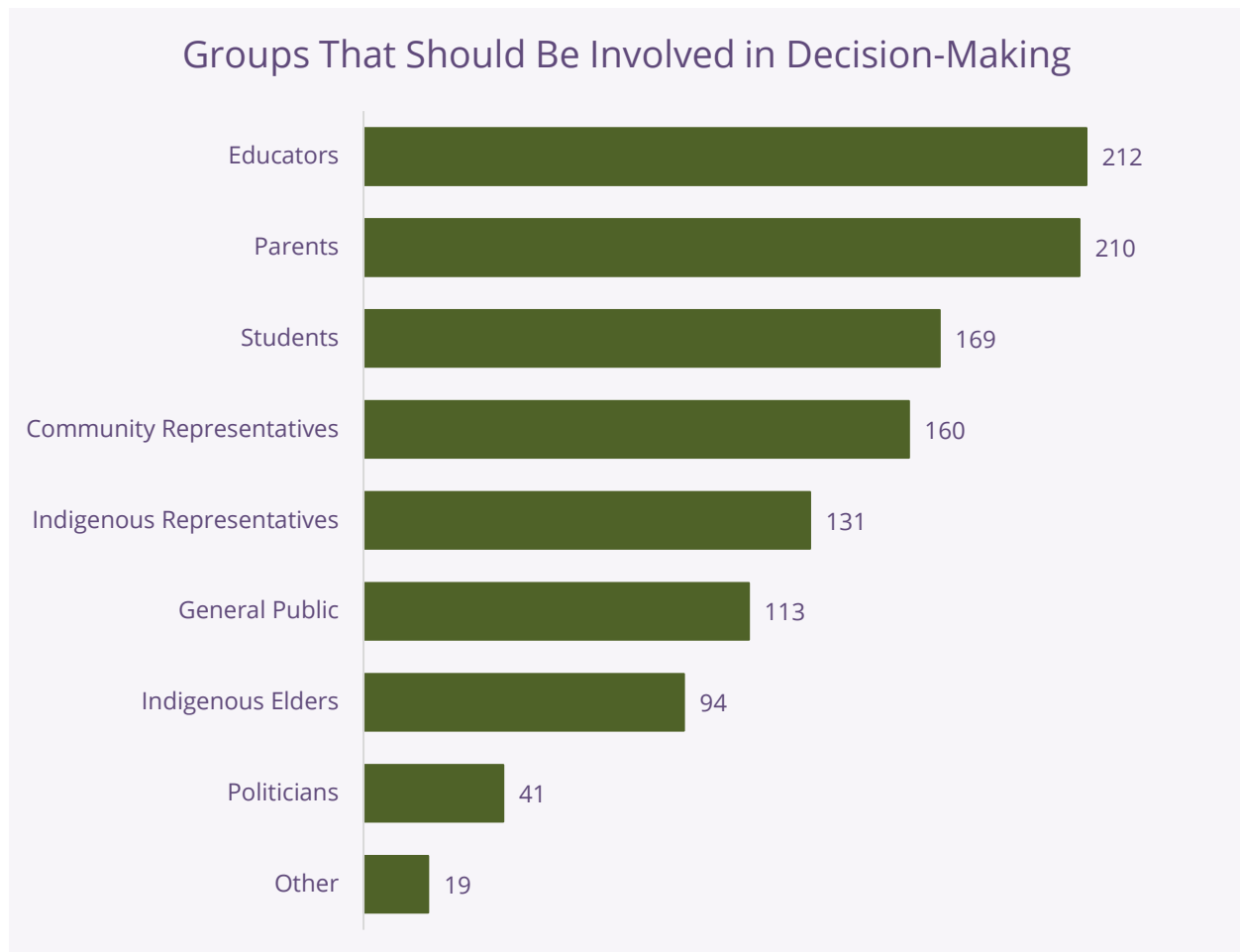
For those participants who responded that the system does represent their community, almost 95% ($n = 143$) indicated that this representation comes from the fact that the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community. In addition, 38% ($n = 57$) indicated that they know their community has a voice in decision-making, 36% ($n = 55$) felt there are clear systems for how their community can be involved, 34% ($n = 51$) indicated that there are people who look like them in decision-making positions, and 31% ($n = 47$) felt their community has a relationship with the governing body. When asked how their school governance system could better represent their community, parents in particular responded that they wanted to have the opportunity to (a) have a voice in decision-making and (b) run for a school board trustee position.

Table 4.3. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: Manitoba

School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	72	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	143
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	62	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	57
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	52	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	55
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	32	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	51
Other.	20	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	47
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	6	Other.	10

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked about who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making (Figure 4.5), 246 Manitobans responded. Of these responses, 86% ($n = 212$) indicated that educators should be included, followed by parents (85%, $n = 210$), students (69%, $n = 169$), community representatives (65%, $n = 160$), Indigenous representatives (53%, $n = 131$), and Indigenous Elders (38%, $n = 94$).

Figure 4.5. *Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Manitoba*



When asked how these groups should be involved (Table 4.4), participants indicated that they should be involved through a consultation process (84%, $n = 207$), invited to attend decision-making meetings ($n = 192$; 78%), invited to provide advisory services (69%, $n = 169$), and/or that they should be able to vote on decisions (48%, $n = 119$).

Table 4.4. *How Selected Groups in Figure 4.5 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Manitoba*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	207
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	192
They should provide advisory services.	169
They should vote on decisions.	119
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	97
Other.	13

The survey also asked an open-ended question about the individuals and groups that participants thought should not be involved in school system-level decision-making. Of those Manitobans who did respond ($n = 175$), 167 people named groups or communities of people who should be excluded, and 156 people explained why those groups or communities should be excluded. Overwhelmingly, as in other jurisdictions, the most frequently named group was politicians ($n = 77$). Eight people also indicated no one should be excluded.

Parents who elaborated on their responses explained that the government, politicians, special interest groups (e.g., religious, political), and business organizations should not be involved in school system-level decision-making because these groups were perceived as being more concerned about their agenda than students' interests. In some cases, parent respondents were concerned that some of these groups (i.e., government, politicians, business organizations and religious groups) may lack the knowledge required to make informed education-related decisions and thus should not be involved in decision-making. Some, including trustees and educators, were concerned about inconsistency in the public education system when there is a change in the ruling political party.

Many participants from across stakeholder groups felt that anyone not directly connected to the education system as either a parent or an educator should not be involved in decision-making because they were perceived as not having the relevant knowledge base required to make informed decisions. At times, participant

responses were conflicted; some educators responded that parents should not be involved in system-level decision-making because they are more concerned about their children rather than the whole community, while some parents responded that people who do not have children in the school system should not be involved because they are more concerned about their own gains.

Would Anything Be Lost Without Elected Boards of Trustees. The survey asked, “Do you think anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners in your area?” (Table 4.5) This question received 200 responses. Of these responses, 76% ($n = 151$) indicated that there would be a loss. When asked what would be lost, 93% ($n = 136$) indicated that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school system decision-making would be lost, while 92% ($n = 135$) indicated that recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost. Another 61% ($n = 89$) indicated that their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost. Twenty-three participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; we observed three themes in these responses: (a) there would be a loss of understanding, (b) there would be a loss of democratic process, and (c) there would be concerns associated with accountability and oversight.

Table 4.5. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Manitoba*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	136
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	135
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	89
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	52
Other.	23

Of the 49 Manitoban participants who indicated there would be nothing lost if there were no board of trustees (Table 4.6), 46 specified why. Thirty-eight (83%) believed that trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain and not for the

community, 35 (76%) believed that the board of trustees does not work effectively and/or efficiently, 29 (63%) did not believe the board of trustees is responsible for making meaningful decision-making, and 15 (33%) felt the provincial government is better suited to run public education. Eight participants selected “Other,” and some included a written response; the main theme we identified in these responses was the belief that the present board of trustees/commissioners did not represent the interests of current parents and communities.

Table 4.6. *Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Manitoba*

Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without Elected Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I believe trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community.	38
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.	35
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making.	29
I believe the provincial/territorial government is better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education.	15
Other.	8

Voting Experience. Manitoban participants were asked if they had voted in the last school board election (Figure 4.6). Of the 194 responses to this question, 88% ($n = 171$) indicated *yes* and the remaining 12% ($n = 23$) answered *no*. When asked if there was a specific reason why they voted in the last school board election, 95% ($n = 163$) respondents indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, 56% ($n = 96$) were interested in school boards, 50% ($n = 86$) indicated that they knew where and how to vote, 31% ($n = 53$) indicated that they knew the candidates, and 18% ($n = 31$) liked the candidates. Common themes written in for the “Other” answers included feeling that it was their democratic responsibility/civic duty, voting as a prevention strategy (i.e., voting for a candidate to prevent another candidate from becoming elected), running in the election, and/or wanting change. We asked participants who did not vote why they chose not to vote (Table 4.7). Twenty-three participants responded: six did not know the candidates, five did not

know when the election was held or how to vote, and fewer than five in each category indicated either they did not like the candidates or were not interested in school boards. Some common themes among the 10 who answered “Other” included the candidate being acclaimed, accessibility issues, or being ineligible to vote.

Figure 4.6. *Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: Manitoba*

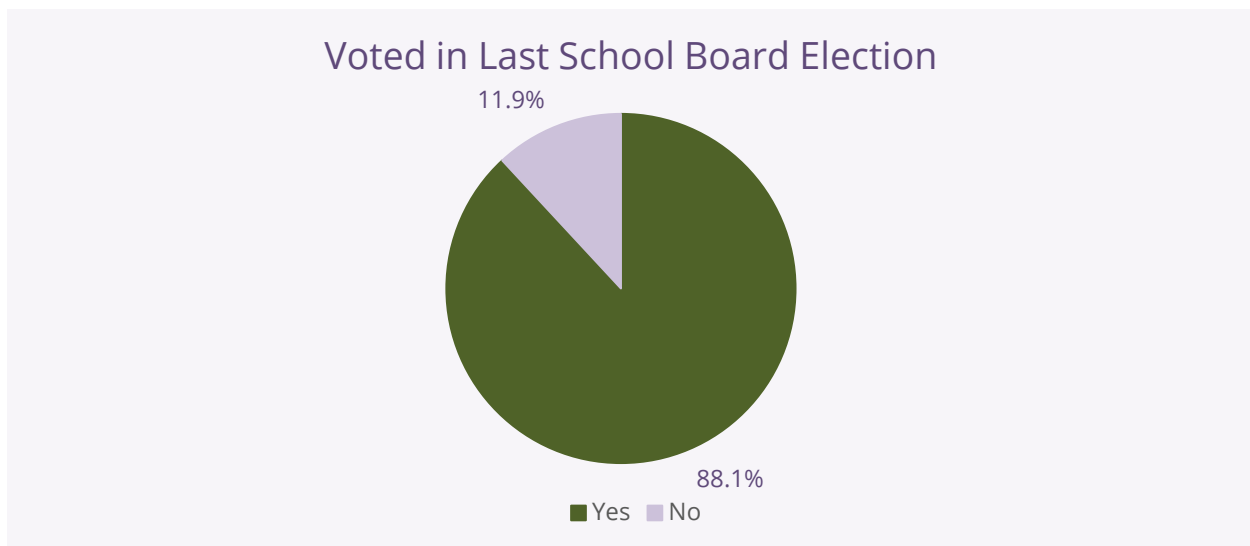


Table 4.7. *Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: Manitoba*

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	163	Other.	10
I am interested in school boards.	96	I didn't know the candidates.	6
I knew where and how to vote.	86	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	5
I knew the candidates.	53	I am not interested in school boards.	3
I liked the candidates.	31	I didn't like the candidates.	2
Other.	25	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	1

Meaning of Democratic Voice. All participants in this study were asked the short-answer question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” In Manitoba, 160 chose to respond. We categorized these responses into four equally represented themes: (a) democratic voice is a right and a responsibility, (b) democratic voice is an opportunity, (c) democratic voice means that the public is heard, and (d) democratic voice means that the people are represented. Notably, a small minority of respondents ($n = 10$), indicated that they felt that democratic voice—and by extension, democracy—was either being threatened or has already been eliminated in Canada; however, the data failed to provide any clear answers as to why these respondents felt this way.

Democratic Voice is a Right and a Responsibility. Many Manitoban respondents understood democratic voice as a right and a responsibility. As a right, participants understood democratic voice as their right to vote in elections, as their right to express their viewpoint on decisions that are made, and as their right to participate in decision-making processes. Some respondents felt that “democratic voice” was synonymous with the notion of equal rights, where all people are considered equal without discrimination. As a responsibility, Manitoban respondents understood democratic voice to mean that decision-makers who are voted in have a responsibility to inform the general public about their perspectives on the decisions that are being made, and also about how and why decisions are made. A few respondents also felt that the public has a responsibility to vote in elections, and without fulfilling that responsibility, a person did not have the right to express their viewpoint on decisions.

Democratic Voice is an Opportunity to Share Viewpoints. For others, democratic voice reflects the notion that everyone has the opportunity to voice their viewpoints on governance decisions and decision-making. For these respondents, “democratic voice” meant that everyone has the opportunity to share their views, complaints, and suggestions, both to the broader public and to elected representatives. Many of these responses specified that “democratic voice” meant that this opportunity extends to people being able to have and share viewpoints that differ from each other and from the majority populace.

In this understanding, “democratic voice” is akin to the Canadian [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), where everyone has the right of “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” (*Constitution Act*, 1982, s. 2.b). For these respondents, “democratic voice” is the freedom to have a voice and viewpoint. This understanding of democratic voice is different from the one described next, which is that democratic voice means that the public can impact change.

Democratic Voice Means that the Public is Heard and Influences Change.

Some respondents felt that “democratic voice” refers to the concept that everyone can participate equally in decision-making by sharing their voice—their viewpoints, ideas, beliefs, and perspectives—in a manner that has actionable influence on the decisions that are made. For these respondents, democratic voice meant that the public could participate in decision-making by influencing who is selected to represent their community in decision-making processes. Some participants specified that this representation should reflect the community demographics in equitable ways, that parents should be represented in school system-level decision-making, or that decisions should represent community perspectives. In these understandings, the common thread is that respondents understood decision-making as something that should be the responsibility of a small group of people who represent the populace, and that the role of the populace was to determine who is selected as a representative.

Participants’ Final Thoughts. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and information they felt was relevant to the questionnaire that was not necessarily captured within the questions asked. One hundred and ten participants chose to provide this extra feedback. Some remarks suggested that political bias should not influence system-level decision-making. Others observed that the absence of a limit on how many terms a trustee can serve could result in less significant policy change, a disconnect with the local context, and less opportunity for others to participate.

Participants from Manitoba also commented on the lack of representation on school boards and suggested greater representation of equity-deserving groups, Indigenous people, and students, but also greater involvement of parents. A small group of educators also wanted educators (e.g., classroom teachers, EAs, and principals) to be more central to decision-making as they considered themselves critical frontline professionals who know what works and what is needed.

Structural Matters

In Manitoba, the school system structure is also impacted by Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. In the following section, we provide a brief overview of this matter as discussed by study participants.

Indigenous Participation in System-Level Decision-Making. Manitoba’s efforts to Indigenize and decolonize its public education system are complex. In 1968, Manitoba’s First Peoples organized national resistance to the federal White

Paper by issuing the original call for “First Nations control of First Nations Education” (Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1968). Three decades later, in 1998, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs established the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) to provide education, administration, technology, and language and culture services to First Nations schools across the province. The MFNERC provides system-level support to First Nations schools (MFNERC, 2023). First Nations schools in Manitoba are operated by and for First Nations communities. The MFNERC supplies services and supports to 58 First Nations schools from 49 Manitoba First Nations (MFNERC, 2023). In total, there are 63 First Nations in Manitoba (Government of Canada, 2022a); 14 First Nations do not use MFNERC’s supports and services.

In 2017, MFNERC established the [Manitoba First Nations School System \(MFNSS\)](#). The Manitoba First Nations School System is designed and led by First Nations and is separate from the public school system and individual First Nations’ school systems that have not joined MFNSS. As of 2019, MFNSS had 11 First Nations schools. This means that although all MFNSS schools are supported by MFNERC, not all First Nations schools that are supported by MFNERC are part of the MFNSS. Those schools that are not part of the MFNSS may operate their own school system or may collaborate with the public school system.

There are currently also four public school divisions (Frontier School Division, Park West School Division, Rolling River School Division, and Fort La Bosse School Division) that have agreements with local First Nations to administer approximately 30 schools in First Nations communities. These school divisions operate differently than other public divisions, and from each other, with each matching their system to the needs of the local communities they serve. This study includes only public school divisions across Manitoba.

Finally, in addition to these formal Indigenous systems, Manitoba hosts a large urban Indigenous population. As of 2021, there were 96,730 people who identified as Métis (Statistics Canada, 2022a) and 74,055 people who identified as First Nations people living off reserve (Statistics Canada, 2023c) in the province. These communities may be served by the school systems listed above or by the public school system.

Inclusion in System-Level Decision-Making. In interviews and focus groups, Manitoba participants were asked about how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities were involved in public education, if at all. Our team identified three

main trends: (a) Manitoban participants offered school-level examples of Indigenous inclusion more readily than system-level examples; (b) many Manitoba school divisions, along with the Manitoba School Boards Association, have implemented roles and/or committees to support Indigenous inclusion; and (c) most Manitoban participants felt that increased representation of Indigenous communities in system-level decision-making is an important goal.

Many Manitobans discussed Indigenous participation at the school level. However, because our study focuses on system-level decision-making, we do not report these school-level examples. Rather, in the remainder of this section we share what Indigenous representation means to Manitoban participants, the challenges of and strategies for increasing Indigenous representation, and examples participants provided to show strategies that were already in place.

Representation on Boards of Trustees. Nearly all Manitoban participants shared that Indigenous nominees were consistently missing from, or poorly represented on, trustee election nominations and that consequently Indigenous voices were often missing from decision-making processes. Many participants indicated that their board had discussed why this gap in nominees existed and what strategies could be used to increase Indigenous representation. Participants frequently pointed out that the Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) had been doing significant work to advocate for greater Indigenous inclusion in the work of Manitoba school boards. Some participants shared that they felt it was important to increase representation to ensure the decisions that affected Indigenous students and communities were made in collaboration with people who had Indigenous knowledge. Moreover, some participants felt that if there were Indigenous trustees, boards of trustees may be better able to develop meaningful relationships with the First Nations and Métis communities in their districts.

Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) Advocacy for Representation. Manitoban participants described the system-level strategies that were already in place (a) in the MSBA, (b) in the boards of trustees that they represented, and (c) in the boards of trustees with which they were familiar. Participants described the MSBA as having strong, well-established relationships with Indigenous partners and leadership groups. These participants indicated that these relationships helped the MSBA (a) create their Aboriginal and Indigenous Education Action Planning Committee, (b) co-create their organizational land acknowledgement with their Indigenous partners, and (c) facilitate the MSBA's first decision-making process where Indigenous community-based stakeholders were invited to actively

participate in decision-making in the Aboriginal and Indigenous Education Action Planning Committee.

Challenges Stakeholders Experience When Participating in Decision-Making

Participants in this study reported multiple challenges when it came to school system-level decision-making. Specifically, themes from the interview and focus group data show that participants were concerned about challenges relating to (a) community engagement in the work of boards of trustees, (b) the distinction between operations and governance, and (c) hypothetical challenges relating to Bill 64—both in terms of what would have happened if Bill 64 passed and in looking to consider what changes may be proposed in the future.

Community Engagement. Participants highlighted a lack of community engagement, especially in rural communities, as a challenge to engaging local voices in system-level decision-making. These participants felt that, despite board efforts to communicate with and engage community stakeholders in discussions about matters impacting local children, attendance at public board of trustees meetings remained low in rural communities. They also shared concerns that lack of transportation might have contributed to declining community engagement in some areas, especially among Indigenous communities living outside of the school division boundaries. Further exacerbating the decline in communication between school boards and community stakeholders is the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants shared that the stress of the pandemic combined with the cancellation of in-person meetings created an environment in which many people lost interest or the ability to engage in the decision-making work of boards of trustees, despite boards of trustees' efforts to establish virtual access to board meetings.

Participants pointed out who is excluded from community engagement—namely, non-Canadian citizens due to the requirement for all trustees (*The Public Schools Act*, Section 22[1]) and eligible voters (*The Public Schools Act*, Section 21.37[2]) to be Canadian citizens. Participants explained that the voices of new immigrants or permanent residents (including parents, students, community members, etc.) with interest in public education are restricted because they are ineligible to run for the trusteeship or vote in school board elections. However, non-citizens can have their voices heard in other ways, such as attending town halls.

Distinction Between Governance and Operations. As in other jurisdictions, participants brought up challenges related to the distinction between

governance responsibilities and operations responsibilities. To be clear, boards of trustees are responsible for governance-related decisions, including setting policies and the school board's direction (Manitoba School Boards Association, 2023). Operational decisions are made to align with the governance-set direction, and made by the superintendent, who is an employee of the board of trustees and serves as the school district's chief educational officer (Manitoba School Boards Association, 2023).

Some participants felt this distinction was too rigid, while others felt it was not adhered to rigidly enough. Participants who considered the distinction as too rigid felt that boards of trustees should have the authority to make decisions relating to both operations and governance. These participants felt that, by not being included in operational decisions, trustees were limited in their ability to address concerns from community members because these concerns often relate to operational decisions. Conversely, those participants who felt that the distinction between operations and governance was not adhered to rigidly enough, believed that elected trustees did not have the educational expertise required to engage in operational decisions.

Bill 64. Most participants believed that if Bill 64, which proposed that democratically elected school boards be replaced with a centralized model of governance, was implemented it would have created challenges for expressing democratic voice in decision-making. Respondents also felt that some community partners did not understand the implications Bill 64 had for democratic voice in school governance.

Participants described the Manitoba School Boards Association's shared role with individual school boards in advocating for and creating awareness about Bill 64 and its impact on stakeholders. A few participants also mentioned the role of parents, and women in particular, in the communities who demonstrated a sense of urgency in rallying other parents/guardians against Bill 64. Protests against Bill 64 were many and wide-ranging including, but not limited to: a grassroots protest in Winnipeg under the slogan "Kill-the-Bill" (Liewicki, 2021); a T-shirt campaign organized through social media group "RED for Ed" that sold Manitobans T-shirts labelled "Fight Bill 64" to raise funds to campaign against Bill 64 (Halmarson, 2021); a rally by the Waskada School Parent Advisory Council, part of the rural Southwest Horizon School Division (Darbyson, 2021); an open letter sent by four municipalities within the rural Park West School Division to former Progressive Conservative Party Premier Brian Pallister (Empire-Advance, 2021); and an open letter signed by 30

retired Manitoban superintendents (Macintosh, 2021). In relating their concerns, some participants shared that, despite the withdrawal of Bill 64, tensions remain around proposed implementation and policies under the Department of Education's K–12 Action Plan and what this means for future school system governance.

Participant Strategies for Participating in System-Level Decision-Making

Participants proposed multiple strategies to help increase community engagement but had few suggestions when it came to the challenges associated with governance versus operations, or with the hypothetical challenges related to Bill 64. Participants suggested three ways that boards of trustees could increase community engagement: (a) use more media communication, (b) increase public awareness of the work of boards of trustees, and (c) create targeted advisory councils and outreach committees.

Using Media Communication. Many participants referred to the communication strategies that boards of trustees use to engage community partners about programs and policy changes. For the most part, participants described boards of trustees using social media and newspapers to disseminate timely information to the public. Participants also described their reliance on online meeting platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to inform and engage parents and stakeholders. Participants also explained that some boards of trustees developed committees specifically for increasing community engagement, and that these committees would often reach out to local community groups to target specific communities, such as newcomers to Canada. Specifically, a few participants mentioned some boards of trustees partnering with the Manitoba Newcomer Education Coalition to help inform newcomer families of the work of boards of trustees and hopefully foster a sense of inclusivity for newcomer youth and families.

Increase Public Awareness About Boards of Trustees. There was recognition among many participants that boards of trustees ought to increase public awareness about their roles and responsibilities to help the public make informed decisions when expressing their democratic voice. According to some participants, the public's knowledge about the work of boards of trustees is limited and this knowledge limitation contributes to stakeholders' lack of interest in becoming board trustees, voting in board elections, and participating in or attending board events and meetings. Participants shared that they thought the

public should be better informed about the work of boards of trustees, including how and why boards of trustees are publicly elected, what roles boards of trustees fill, what responsibilities boards of trustees have, and the extent (or limit, depending on perception) of control that boards of trustees have over financial matters.

Create Advisory Councils and Community Outreach Committees.

Participants suggested that boards of trustees could create diverse advisory councils, such as the Indigenous councils or Mennonite parent councils, to advise boards of trustees on how to engage communities that are often not represented in system-level decision-making. Participants felt that these advisory councils could also increase public engagement in the work of boards of trustees, because diverse communities may feel better represented in the decisions that are made. Participants who elaborated on this strategy proposed that advisory council members ought to be voting members in both the board decision-making and in the trustee election process. Several participants also noted that some school divisions have established community outreach committees to increase public participation in school board decision-making. Participants also noted that establishing similar committees in all jurisdictions may help to increase public understanding of the work of boards of trustees.

Québec

Québec, the second most populous province in Canada, is bordered by Ontario to the west, New Brunswick to the east, and Newfoundland and Labrador to the northeast. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada indicated that the Québec population was 8,831,257 (Statistics Canada, 2023a) and that in the 2020–2021 school year there were 972,369 students enrolled in the province (Statistics Canada, 2022d).

For information about the organizing bodies, legislation, representatives, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan (Pollock et al., 2022). As mentioned in the report introduction, we recognize that some students in Québec and across Canada also attend schools that are supported federally through the *Indian Act* (1985), which is a significantly different education governance structure from that of the provinces and territories and is outside the scope of this study.

Structure of School System Governance

In Québec, publicly funded education includes public French schools and public English schools. The Québec school system is governed by the provincial [Ministère de l'Éducation / Ministry of Education](#), through the [Education Act, 2020](#). The province is divided into 17 territories (Les Cégeps du Québec, 2023), which are served by French school service centres and English school boards. Excluded in this division are the territory of the Cree School Board, the Kativik School Board, and the Centre de services scolaire du Littoral, which all have special status (*Education Act*, Section 111). French school territories are served by school service centres, while English school territories are served by English school boards (*Education Act*, Section 111).

In the Francophone school territories, there are 60 school service centres and two special status centres, the Cree School Board and Kativik Ilisarniliriniq. Each school service centre is administered by a board of directors. Boards of directors are composed of 15 members: five parent representatives, five school service centre staff, and five community representatives (*Education Act*, Section 143). Parent representatives must have children attending schools in the jurisdiction, be members of the local parents' committee—each of whom represents a district as established by the school service centre director general (*Education Act*, Section 143.8)—live within the school service centre territory, and not be staff of the school service centre (*Education Act*, Section 143.1). School service centre staff must include one teacher, one nonteaching professional, one support staff, one principal, and

one executive staff member (*Education Act*, Section 143.2). Community representatives must live in the school service centre territory, not be school service centre staff, and include one person with expertise in governance, ethics, risk management, or human resources; one person with expertise in finance, accounting, or resource management; one person from the community, sport, or cultural sector; and one person aged 18–35 (*Education Act*, Section 143.3).

Boards of directors are not publicly voted in. They are designated by specific groups that, in some cases (e.g., parent committees), may choose to use an internal voting process to select their representative. Parent representatives are designated by the parents' committee (*Education Act*, Section 143.6), staff representatives are designated by their professional colleagues (*Education Act*, Section 143.10), and community representatives are designated by the parent and staff representatives (*Education Act*, Section 143.13). Directors are designated for 3-year terms, on a staggered schedule, and take office on July 1, following their designation (*Education Act*, Section 143.3). At the first meeting, the school service centre's board of directors must appoint a chair and vice-chair from the parent representatives (*Education Act*, Section 155). Board of director deliberations are not open to the public and may only include board members, executive staff, and the director general; however, the public can present oral questions to the board of directors during a question period in each public meeting (*Education Act*, Section 168). Procedures for submitting questions are established by each board of directors (*Education Act*, Section 168).

In the Anglophone school territories, there are nine English school boards. English school boards are administered by boards of trustees (councils of commissioners) (*Education Act*, Section 143). Boards of trustees are composed of locally elected trustees and two trustees who are elected by the parents' committee (one from elementary and one from secondary) (*Education Act*, Section 143, 145). Legislature specific to boards of trustees' elections is unavailable at the time of this writing due to ongoing legal challenges.

Decisions made by boards of trustees are based on a majority vote (*Education Act*, Section 161). Boards of trustees' deliberations are not open to the public and may only include trustees and the director general; however, the public can present oral questions during a question period in each public meeting (*Education Act*, Section 168).

Recent and Ongoing Legislative Changes

In addition to the change from elected school boards to school service centres, Québec has other important recent and ongoing legislative changes that are pertinent to democratic voice in school system decision-making. Two main points of contention brought up frequently by Québec participants were [Bill 40: An Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act](#) and [Bill 96, An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec](#).

Bill 40: An Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act

Bill 40 abolished majority-language, publicly elected school boards in Québec and replaced them with school service centres. However, English school boards are currently legally challenging Bill 40 as unconstitutional to their protected minority language rights under [Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). Accordingly, the Superior Court ordered a stay of the application to amend the *Education Act*, with respect to Anglophone school boards, until a judgment is rendered ([Education Act, Note](#)).

Québec participants frequently brought up Bill 40 as a key piece of ongoing legislative change that affects system-level decision-making, especially as it related to abolishing publicly elected boards of trustees. Although some of these participants felt that the change to school service centres removed the opportunity for Francophone Québécois to exercise their democratic voice, others felt that the change had resulted in more effective and efficient functioning of system-level decision-making. Further discussion of participants' perceptions of school service centres is described in later sections.

Participants discussed Bill 40 as it related to the protection of minority language rights under Section 23 of [the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). These participants felt that by proposing to abolish Anglophone publicly elected school boards, Bill 40 threatened Anglophone Quebecers' rights to administer and control Anglophone education in Quebec. As previously mentioned, the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) is currently engaged in a lengthy legal battle to retain publicly elected school boards, thereby supporting the Anglophone community's authority over the Anglophone education system.

Bill 96, An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec

Bill 96 has reformed many pieces of Québec legislation with the intention of strengthening French as the official language of Québec. Some of the measures associated with Bill 96 include expanding French-language requirements, requiring the use of French in more workplaces, prioritizing French in education, protecting the use of French language in government institutions, prioritizing French use on digital platforms, and protecting French-language place names (Charter of the French Language, Section 22.4).

In many interviews, participants mentioned concerns about the influence that Bill 96 would have on allophones (i.e., newcomers to Canada who do not speak English or French as a home language). The Bill has provisions to provide “services to welcome immigrants within Québec society during the first 6 months following their arrival in Québec; (a) providing services and maintaining relations outside Québec; (b) providing tourist services; or (c) any other purpose determined by regulation of the Minister ... Where the agency of the civil administration uses a language other than French under section 22.3 to provide services to welcome immigrants within Québec society, it shall implement measures that will ensure that, at the end of a six-month period, communications with immigrants are exclusively in French” (Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2021, p. 14–15). Participants involved in the education system (e.g., teachers, educational consultants, etc.) who had worked with newcomers to Canada described the challenges for the newcomers in learning enough French to survive in the educational system and receiving the support and assistance they needed while adapting to a new country. Some participants felt that Bill 96 may create further barriers to newcomers’ participation in system-level decision-making because of these strict stipulations for French language use within 6 months of immigration.

In addition to the challenges some participants felt Bill 96 would create for newcomers to Canada, some participants also highlighted the strict restriction that Bill 96 creates for children who are foreign nationals. A child who is a foreign national and who temporarily stays in Québec may be exempted from part of the changes and continue to receive instruction in English only if the child holds a permit under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, is the dependent child of a foreign national, or is exempted from the requirement to gain consent of the Minister of Immigration, Francisation and Integration to stay in Québec (Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2021). This means that newcomer students who were receiving education in English before relocating to Québec can only continue

receiving education in English if they are permit holders or exempted from the requirement; with this policy, many newcomer students who previously learned in English may not be able to continue learning in English when they relocate to Québec. Participants in this study felt that these strict requirements may make the work of boards of trustees and directors more challenging, because students who may otherwise be more successful in the Anglophone school system are required to participate in the Francophone system. When students learn in a language that is not optimal for them, it may be more difficult for school boards of trustees and or directors to support their success.

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for Québec. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction section of this report. In addition, further information regarding Québec's system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 13 Québec participants. Ten of these interviews were conducted in English and three were conducted in French. Interview participants included six individuals directly connected to either Anglophone school boards or French school service centres and seven individuals connected to other education-affiliated organizations. Our team also conducted focus groups: four focus groups were scheduled to be conducted in English and four in French in January and February of 2023. Three educational professionals participated in Francophone focus groups and two educational professionals participated in Anglophone focus groups. Due to limited focus group participation, we have combined our focus group data with the interview data.

We identified potential interview participants by reviewing school system websites, through referrals by the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), and by snowball sampling in which existing participants recommended other potential participants through their insider knowledge. We recruited participants by sending them up to three email invitations, each one week apart, to publicly available email addresses. In some cases, existing participants forwarded the interview invitation

to potential participants to create an online introduction between our research team and potential participants.

Focus group participants were recruited through an emailed invitation. Our research team emailed 23 organizations with an invitation to participate in a focus group relevant to their community. Separate focus groups were scheduled for parents, educators, community-specific organizations (e.g., newcomers to Canada), and Indigenous community groups; each focus group was offered in both French and English, separately. Recruitment emails also requested that organizations forward the invitation to their members and networks. Some organizations chose to post focus group invitations to their social media accounts. Organizations were sent one follow-up email and a reminder notice on the day of the scheduled focus group. Organizations were selected through online searches for keywords such as “community group,” “education group,” and various equity-deserving group associations.

Public Consultation

In total, 59 people participated in the public consultation questionnaire. A more descriptive breakdown of participants’ demographic data is provided in the Findings section. Some demographic data were not included as their inclusion would potentially compromise participant confidentiality.

Findings: Québec

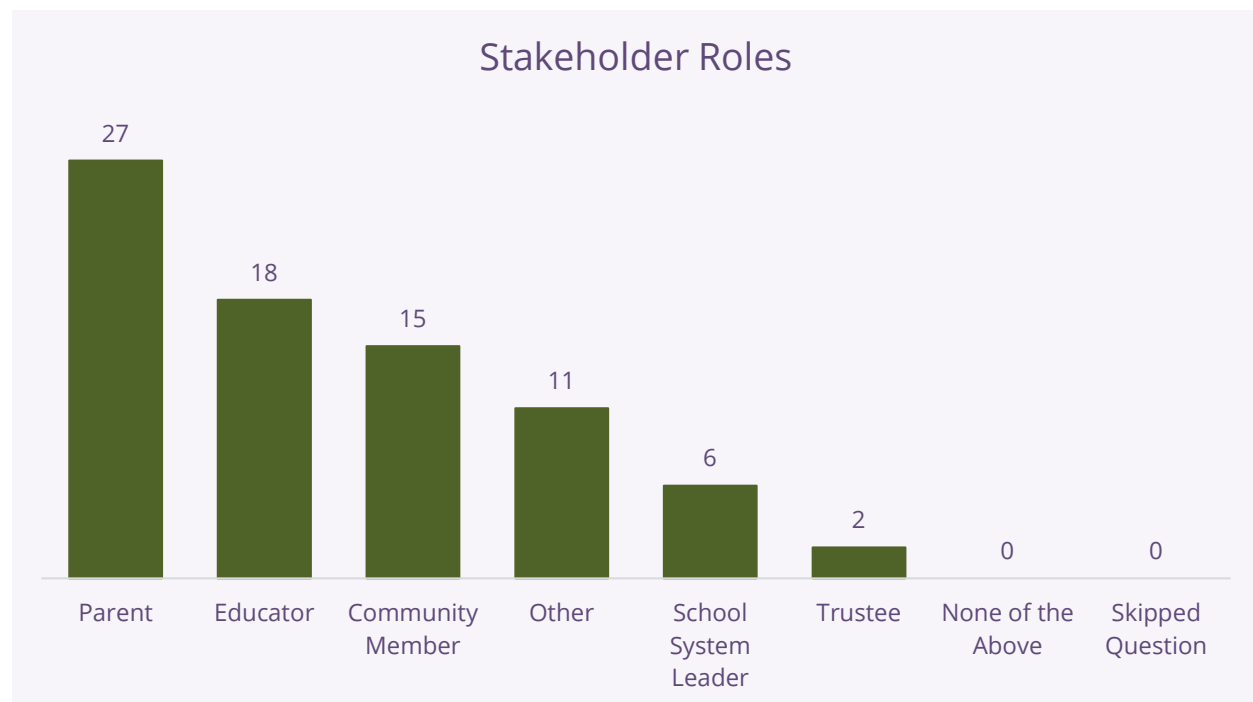
In this section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Québec population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we consider the structural matters that interviewees and focus group participants commented on, specifically (a) Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making and (b) Bill 23. Following the structural matters, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described around (a) a decline in support for parents, (b) Bill 96, and (c) systemic racism. Finally, we provide readers with some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants shared about how they have been involved and how they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making.

Snapshot from Québec Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants' voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts the respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 59 individuals who participated. Given that this number is too small to represent the Québec population, we make no claim to share representative results; we report only the responses for the sample included in the study. Also because of the small numbers we are not reporting which school system—French or English—the participants were involved in.

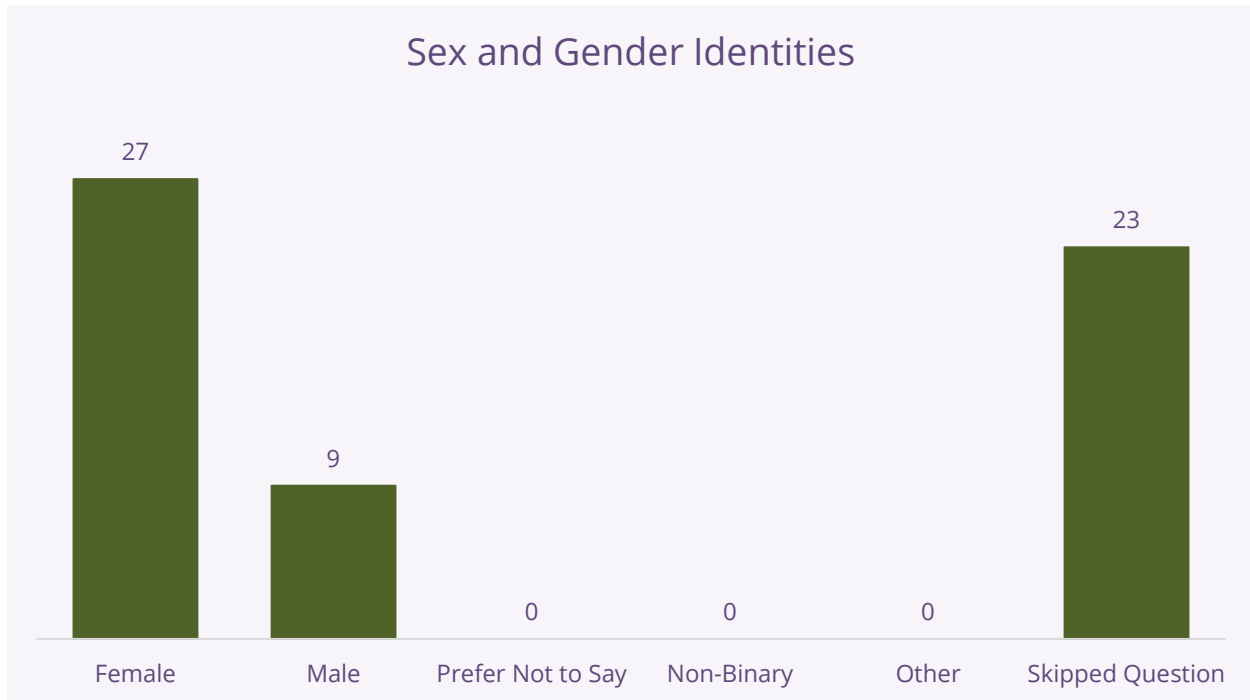
Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, the roles Québec participants mainly identified with were *parent* (46%, $n = 27$), *educator* (31%, $n = 18$), and *community member* (25%, $n = 15$). Smaller numbers of participants identified with the roles of *school system leader* or *trustee* at 10% ($n = 6$) and 3% ($n = 2$), respectively.

Figure 5.1. Stakeholder Roles: Québec



In terms of sex and gender (Figure 5.2), 39% ($n = 23$) of Québec participants chose not to respond. Of those who did respond, substantially more participants identified as female ($n = 27$, 46%) than male ($n = 9$, 15%).

Figure 5.2. Sex and Gender: Québec



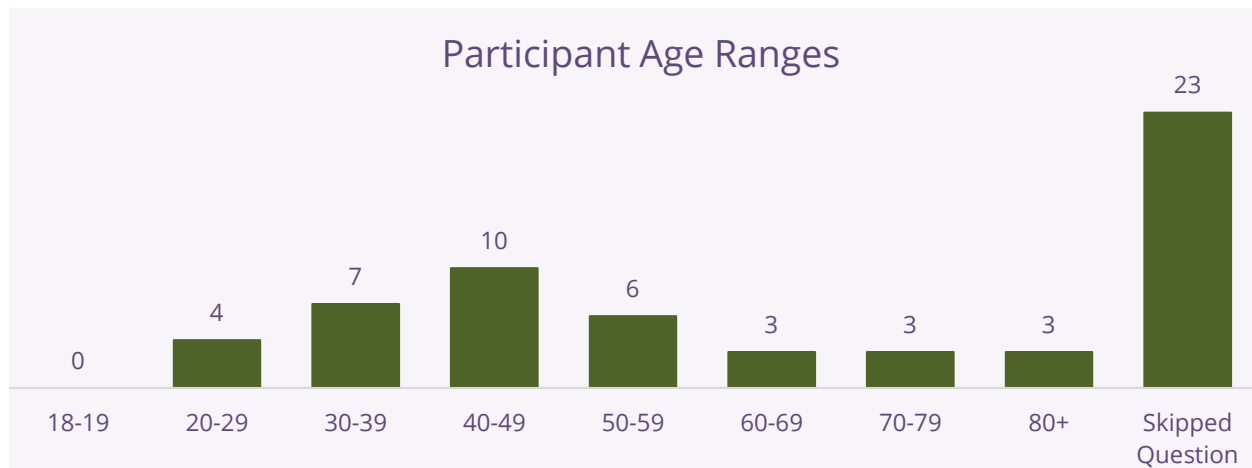
In terms of ethnoracial identity (Table 5.1), a large number of participants from Québec chose to not answer the question (39%, $n = 23$). Of those who did respond, the majority of individuals self-identified as White (54%, $n = 32$). Two participants (3%) self-identified as Latin American, and one selected "prefer not to answer."

Table 5.1. *Ethnoracial Identity: Québec*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	32
Latin American	2
Prefer Not to Answer	1
Other	1
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	0
Black	0
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	0
Filipino	0
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	0
Japanese	0
Chinese	0
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Korean	0
Skipped Question	23

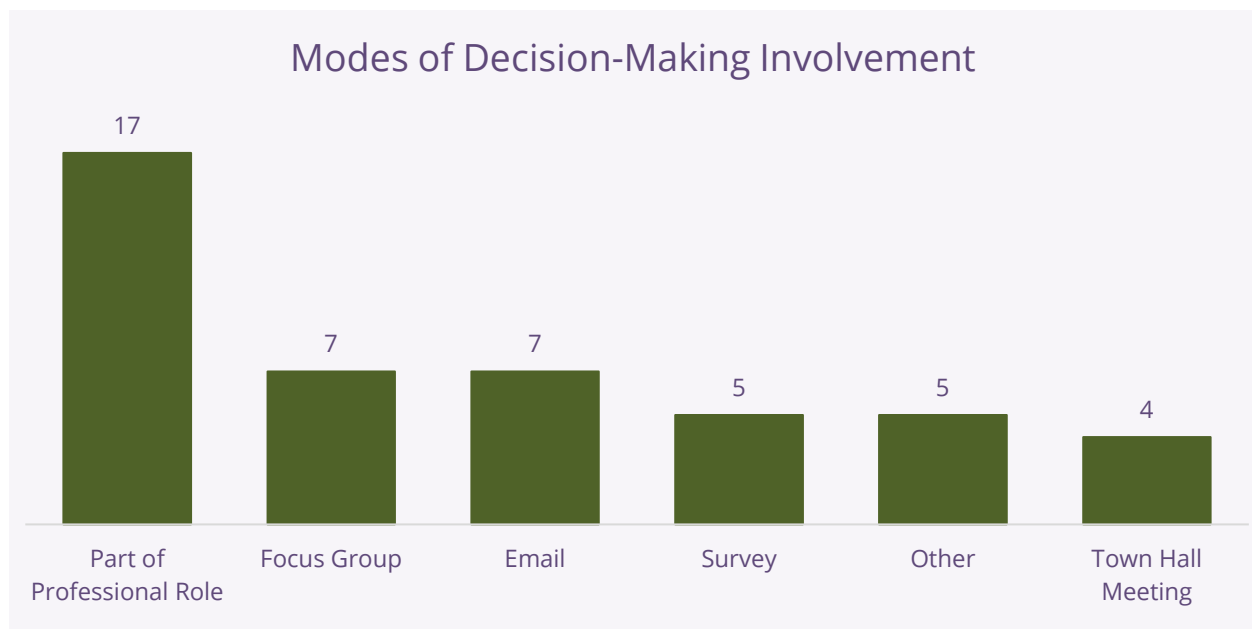
In terms of age (Figure 5.3), 17% ($n = 10$) of Québec respondents were between the ages of 40 and 49, 12% ($n = 7$) were between the ages of 30 and 39, and 10% ($n = 6$) were between the ages of 50 and 59. Less than 22% ($n = 13$) of those who answered the question were outside the 30–59 age range. Twenty-three (39%) participants chose to skip this question altogether. Due to the large percentage of participants who chose to skip this question, we cannot make any claims about the representative age range of participants.

Figure 5.3. Age Ranges: Québec



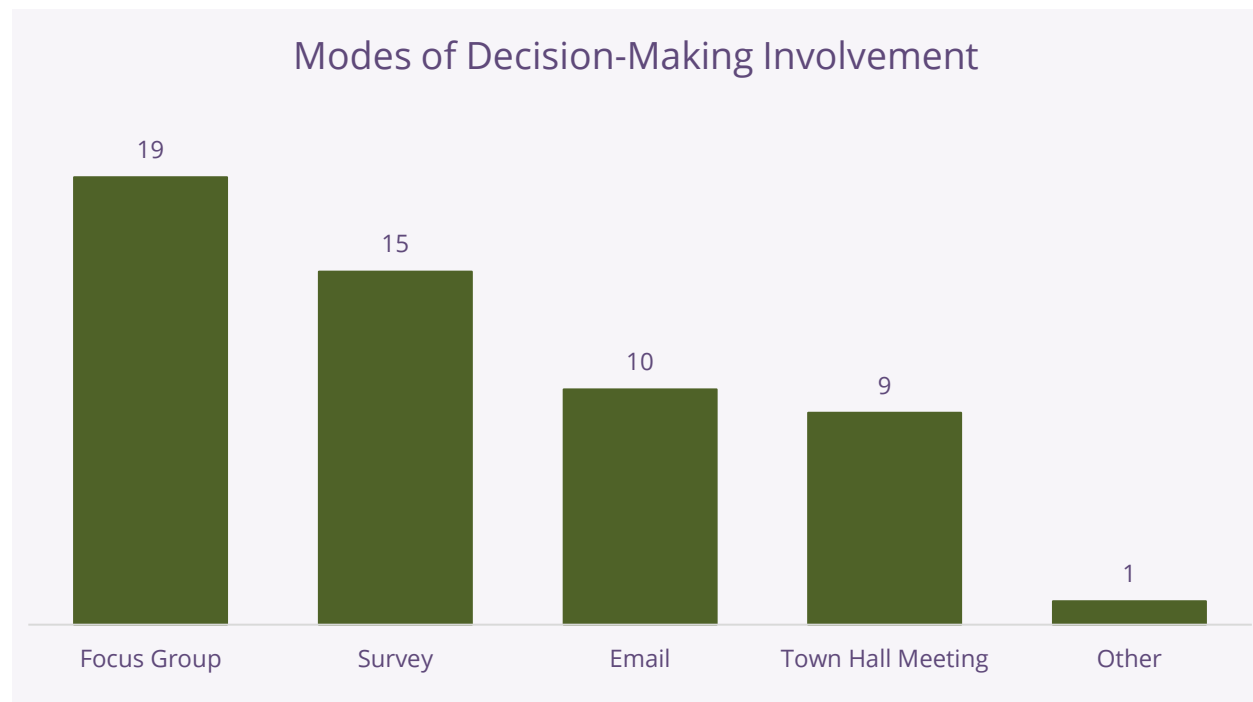
Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 5.4), 59 participants responded: Of these, more responded *no* (53%, $n = 31$) than *yes* (47%, $n = 28$). Once participants indicated that they had been involved, they were asked how they were involved, with the option to select all that applied to them. Twenty-four people responded to this follow-up question, with 17 indicating that it was part of their professional role, and less than 10 indicated focus groups (online and in person), emails, and surveys, respectively.

Figure 5.4. Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: Québec



Those who responded *no* were then asked if they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 5.5). Of these, 80% ($n = 24$) responded *yes* and wanted to be involved via focus group ($n = 19$, 79%), survey ($n = 15$, 63%), and/or email ($n = 10$, 42%).

Figure 5.5. *How Participants Who Have Not Been Involved in System-Level Decision-Making Would Like to Be: Québec*



Community Representation in Decision-Making. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community (Table 5.2), 50 Québecers responded. Of these, marginally fewer ($n = 24$, 48%) indicated *yes* than *no* ($n = 26$, 52%). For the 26 respondents who indicated *no*, the overwhelming majority indicated that their community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made at the system level ($n = 19$, 76%). For the 24 participants who responded *yes*, 60% ($n = 12$) indicated that this representation comes from the fact that the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community. From here, we see that participants are divided in terms of how represented they feel by their school governance system; while some feel their community is represented, many do not. Because our data do not distinguish between the Francophone boards of directors and the Anglophone boards of trustees, we cannot say which systems participants feel do not represent their community.

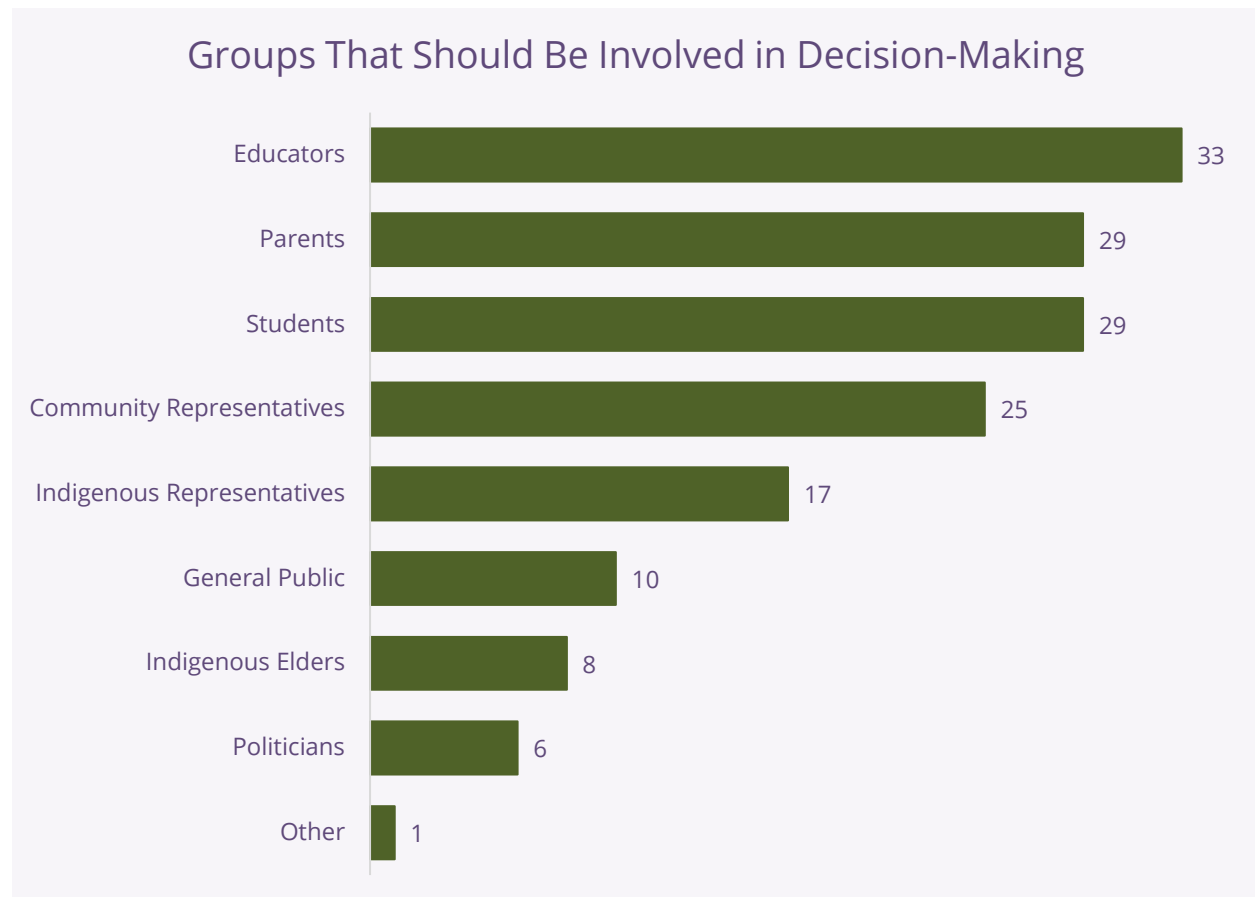
Table 5.2. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: Québec

School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	19	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	12
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	14	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	9
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	12	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	7
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	9	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	6
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	8	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	6
Other.	1	Other.	0

The survey asked an optional open-ended question, “How can your school governance system better represent your community?” Twenty-three participants responded. Of these respondents, most mentioned that different social communities were unequally represented as members who govern or those who are involved in decision-making. Most feel the decisions are politically driven and diverse members of the community are not represented (e.g., culturally and linguistically diverse). Some participants thought a democratic election process was needed to ensure diverse representatives were designated to Francophone boards of directors. A few participants wanted community involvement in the form of surveys and public hearings so underrepresented members of the community could have their voices heard.

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making, 36 Québecers responded (Figure 5.6). Of these, 33 (92%) indicated that *educators* should be involved, followed by *parents* ($n = 29$, 81%), *students* ($n = 29$, 81%), *community representatives* ($n = 25$, 70%), and *Indigenous representatives* ($n = 17$, 47%).

Figure 5.6. Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Québec



Participants were then asked how they felt these people or groups should be involved in decision-making (Table 5.3): 92% ($n = 33$) felt that they should be involved through a consultation process, 83% ($n = 30$) felt they should be invited to attend decision-making meetings, 67% ($n = 24$) felt they should provide advisory services, and 69% ($n = 25$) felt they should vote on decisions.

Table 5.3. *How Selected Groups in Figure 5.6 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Québec*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	33
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	30
They should vote on decisions.	25
They should provide advisory services.	24
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	19
Other.	1

The survey also asked who should not be involved in school system-level decision-making, and why. Of the 25 people who responded, 14 stated that politicians or other government representatives should not be involved in system-level decision-making. The reasons given included that politicians or government representatives only make decisions that benefit them, that they have different agenda/goals (i.e., are biased), that they are not educational professionals or in touch with what is necessary in schools, and that they do not make decisions based on student needs. Eleven of the respondents also thought that people who do not have children in the system or those that do not have a direct stake in the day-to-day operations of or interactions with schools should not be involved in the decision-making.

Would Anything Be Lost Without Elected Boards of Trustees. When asked if their jurisdiction or community has a locally elected school/education board of trustees, 30 Québecers responded: 67% ($n = 20$) of the participants said *yes* and 33% ($n = 10$) said *no*. As a reminder, the current English system in Quebec has a publicly elected board. The current French system in Québec uses a system of boards of directors who are designated from their specific groups. This designation may be based on an organizational election process or through an appointed process, depending on the representative group and the associated organization. Our data does not distinguish if participants were reporting on the French or English system.

Of the 20 participants who indicated that their jurisdiction does have a locally elected board of trustees, 15 people responded to the follow-up question, “Do you think anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of

trustees/commissioners in your area?" Of those who responded, 12 (80%) indicated that there would be a loss. When asked what would be lost (Table 5.4), 12 participants responded. Of these, 11 (92%) indicated both that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school system decision-making would be lost, and that recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.

Table 5.4. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Québec*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	11
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	11
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	7
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	6
Other.	1

Of those who responded that nothing would be lost if there were no elected boards of trustees, less than five participants answered the follow-up question asking why. Due to this small number, we do not report on these findings.

Voting Experience. Participants were asked if they had voted in the last school board election (Figure 5.7). Of the 19 responses to this question, 12 (63%) answered *yes* and the remaining seven answered *no*. When asked if there was a specific reason why they voted in the last school board election (Table 5.5), 11 respondents indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, nine were interested in school boards, nine indicated that they knew where and how to vote, three indicated that they knew the candidates, and one indicated that they liked the candidates.

We asked those who answered *no* why they had not voted in the last school board election: five indicated they did not know when the election was or how to vote, two indicated they did not know the candidates, and a few people indicated that they had accessibility issues, were ineligible to vote, or they were not sure what the

election was for. As a reminder, Anglophone boards continue to have public elections and Francophone school service centres do not.

Figure 5.7. *Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: Québec*

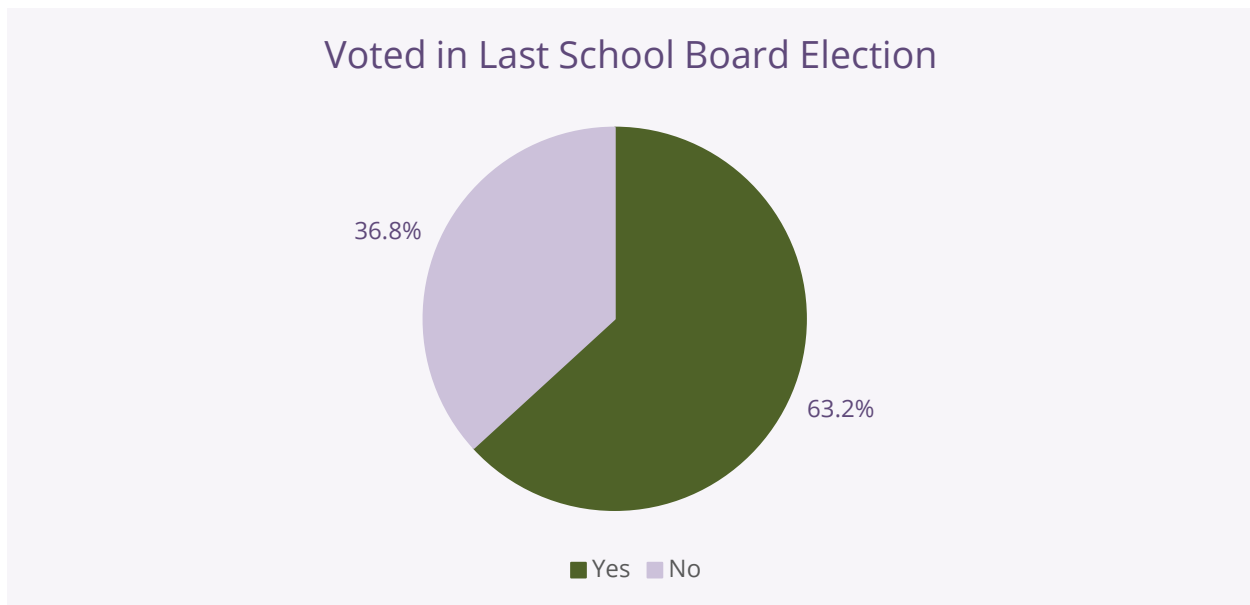


Table 5.5. *Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: Québec*

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	11	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	4
I am interested in school boards.	9	I didn't know the candidates.	2
I knew where and how to vote.	9	Other.	2
I knew the candidates.	3	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	1
Other.	2	I am not interested in school boards.	0
I liked the candidates.	1	I didn't like the candidates.	0

Meaning of Democratic Voice. The survey asked the open-ended question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” In Québec, only 11 participants chose to respond. According to these participants, the concept of “democratic voice” reflects the active and responsible participation of community members in decision-making processes. Many of these participants indicated that, for them, “democratic voice” involves having the ability to elect representatives who share their perception of what is good for students in public education. With this understanding, they perceived voting as essential to ensuring democratic voice, and that without everyone being able to vote, there is no democracy.

Some Québec respondents also emphasized the importance of full representation, meaning that those who are in decision-making positions should reflect the local community, and that all members of the local community have the opportunity to take on decision-making roles. Overall, the responses indicate that participants in Québec understand democratic voice as a fundamental component of a functioning democracy, which requires active engagement, representation, transparency, and the ability to elect representatives who share similar values and interests.

Participants’ Final Thoughts. Participants were given a final opportunity to share anything that may not have been captured in the questionnaire; nine participants chose to add additional comments. Those who did, argued that the decision to abolish the school boards was due to the technological and economic changes to G7, G8 and G20 countries. A handful of participants advocated for complete transparency (e.g., publishing information in local newspapers) and the need to have representatives who know the needs of the schools.

Structural Matters

In Québec, two structural matters came up repeatedly in the data: (a) how Indigenous communities participate in system-level decision-making, and (b) the potential impact of the new [Bill 23: An Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act and to Enact the Act Respecting the Institut national d’excellence en éducation](#).

Indigenous Participation in System-Level Decision-Making. Indigenous school system decision-making in Québec is primarily supported by the [First Nations Education Council](#) (FNEC). The FNEC is an association of eight First Nations of Québec: Abenakis, Anishinabeg, Atikamekw, Wendat, Innuatsh, Wolastoqiyik, Mi’gmaq, and Kanien’kehá:ka spread over a large territory. Their 22 member communities represent 24 elementary and secondary schools as well as Kiuna Institution. They encompass approximately 5,900 students and have their own language, culture, demographic and socioeconomic profile, and traditions. In

addition to their Indigenous languages, 12 of the member communities are French-speaking, and 10 are English-speaking. In this study, however, there was little mention of FNEC in the interviews other than participants indicating they were unsure of the relationship between school service centres and the First Nations Council.

In the interviews, there was limited discussion of Indigenous participation in system-level decision-making. Participants who offered insights about Indigenous involvement felt that it would likely be difficult or nearly impossible for members of an Indigenous community to be selected to sit on a school service centre board of directors. Because the resumes are sent to the Ministry and a committee decides who would be the most appropriate to sit on that council, these participants felt Indigenous candidates may not be selected. However, participants did not clarify exactly why they felt ministry committees may not select Indigenous candidates.

Several participants found that communication between Indigenous organizations and either French or English school governance systems was minimal; other participants indicated that they were unaware of communication channels under the new system of school service centres. Some participants also proposed that, due to the mistreatment of Indigenous citizens in Québec, Indigenous community members remain skeptical about the prioritization of equity and diversity in school systems due to the systemic racism in the healthcare system.

Bill 23. At the time this report was written, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government tabled a new bill that allows the government to appoint an additional director for each school service centre board of directors. This director would have the power to veto some decisions. Bill 23 is perceived by some to give the provincial government increased power over the province's education system (Authier, 2023; Canadian Press & News Staff, 2023; Henriquez, 2023). For these concerned parties, Bill 23 raises concerns about the provincial government's intention to centralize power in the education system.

Challenges Participants Identified Regarding Participating in System-Level Decision-Making

Interviewees identified several challenges associated with the governmental changes in decision-making at the school system level, including (a) a decline in parental support, (b) Bill 96, and (c) systemic racism.

Decline in Support for Parents. Almost all of the participants discussed a decline in support for parents. Parents asserted that they do not have a clear

representative to approach if they have questions or concerns, and that representation for parents does not exist at the local level. This contrasts with the policy set out by the *Education Act*, which stipulates that boards of directors in school service centres shall include five parent representatives; English school boards do not have a commensurate policy.

Some of the participants from the interviews also discussed [Regroupement des comités de parents autonomes du Québec](#) (RCPAQ), the self-proclaimed voice of more than 1,500 parents involved in the governance of the public school system in their regions. The RCPAQ was created in 2020 as a result of the global pandemic and the closure of all schools in Québec. According to their website, the RCPAQ (2020) represents the families of approximately 200,000 students, or 20% of all students in Québec. Participants discussed their involvement with this group and the assistance it provided; those in the French system felt they had lost their voices and direct contact with the school service centres when they had concerns about their children's education.

Finally, a few participants were concerned that the voices of parents of children with special needs had been lost in the French system of school service centres because there is no designated seat for parents of students with special needs on the board of directors. Although there is no designated seat, there are formal avenues for these parents to participate in system-level decision-making in an advisory role. According to Section 185 of the *Education Act*, every school service centre is required to have an advisory committee for students with special needs ("an advisory committee on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities"). This committee is composed of the parents of the students concerned as designated by the parents committee, as well as teaching and staff representatives, representatives who provide services to the students, and the school principal. Participants' concerns around the perceived loss of voice for parents of students with special needs may indicate that transparency is missing from the work of these advisory committees because parents may not recognize this committee as an avenue for having a voice in system-level decision-making.

Bill 96. Many participants mentioned the passing of Bill 96, primarily to express concerns about the caveat that immigrants have 6 months to learn French and the protection of historic Anglophones. A few participants commented that allophones and Anglophones were targeted by the measures put in place as a result of Bill 96. With nearly one million Anglophone Quebecers, participants were

concerned about the future of public education for their children, and about their role within system-level decision-making. These participants felt as though they were not consulted on this Bill and therefore were not involved in the decision-making process. Participants felt that English-speaking community members who were involved in education ought to have been consulted because the Bill has serious repercussions for the future of students. Finally, a few participants felt that Bill 96 was punitive in nature.

Systemic Racism. A few of the participants in the study expressed concerns over the centralization of education, drawing comparisons to health care centralization and connecting these concerns to systemic racism. These participants referred to the public denial of systemic racism in Québec made by Premier Legault when questioned about this in an interview after the death of Joyce Echaquan (Bruemmer, 2021). In September of 2020, Joyce Echaquan filmed herself being insulted and mocked by staff members not long before she died at a hospital northeast of Montreal (Kamel, 2020). The video and in-depth investigative details were released publicly on social media. Participants related this to the centralization of education via the removal of local representatives, as they felt the appointed officials did not represent diversity in Québec. Rather, participants felt that most representatives designated to school service centre boards of directors and those elected to English school boards of trustees were from a privileged background and far removed from the education system, and that many did not have children in the school system.

Participant Strategies for Participating in System-Level Decision-Making

According to Québec participants, there appear to be few strategies for public involvement in decision-making in education. This trend corresponds with Anglophone Nova Scotia, which also no longer has democratically elected school boards. Despite this limitation, a few themes in the interviews were associated with strategies that may assist in supporting stakeholders' expression of democratic voice including: attending boards of directors meetings and using [Bill 9: An Act respecting the National Student Ombudsman](#).

Public Meetings. When asked about ways they felt they have a voice in the decision-making process in Francophone school service centres, interviewees mentioned public board of directors meetings as a way of being heard. According to Sections 167 and 168 of the *Education Act*, board of directors meetings in school service centres are open to the public; however, deliberation in the decision-making

process is not. Each public meeting must include a question period in which those who are present may put oral questions to the board of directors. In this question period, the board retains the authority to decide to meet privately to discuss topics that could otherwise be detrimental to an individual. Minutes of board deliberations are taken and stored in a register by the administration or designate of the administration. The register is open to the public (Éducation Québec, n.d.).

It was also mentioned in the interviews that, in English school boards, board of trustees meetings are also open to the public (*Education Act*, Section 166). In addition, many English school boards choose to livestream their meetings to reach a broader audience and make attendance more accessible to the public. Further, as in the French school service centres, English boards of trustees' meetings host public question periods during each meeting where the public may put oral questions to the trustees (*Education Act*, Section 168). Participants felt these public meetings offered opportunities for the public to engage in exercising democratic voice at the school system level.

Bill 9 Student Ombudsman. According to the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) (2022), Bill 9 was created as a means to ensure respect for students and parents; the Bill “establishes a uniform process for dealing with complaints from the students and parents in our school system” (p. 3). In this Bill, the roles of National Student Ombudsman and Regional Student Ombudsman were created. Participants in this study had both positive views of and concerns about this Bill. French participants referred to the Bill as “Le Protecteur national de l’élève [national protector/guardian of students].” Some participants found the role may not be necessary because there were few student complaints and the complaints that were received were considered to be adequately addressed using the existing procedures.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia, the most populous maritime province of Canada, is located on the Atlantic Ocean and shares a border with New Brunswick to the northwest. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada indicated that the Nova Scotia population was 1,047,232 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). According to the provincial government, student enrolment for the 2022–2023 year was 129,121 (Province of Nova Scotia, 2022).

For information about the organizing bodies, legislation, representatives, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan (Pollock et al., 2022). As mentioned in the report introduction, we recognize that some students in Nova Scotia and across Canada also attend schools that are supported federally through the *Indian Act* (1985). Delivered by the Department of Indigenous Services, these schools are outside the scope of this study.

Current Structure of School System Governance in Nova Scotia

The Nova Scotia school system is governed by the provincial [Department of Education and Early Childhood Development](#) through the [Education Act, 2018](#) and the [Education \(CSAP\) Act, 1998](#). The province is divided into seven regional centres for education that oversee English schools in the region and one [Conseil scolaire acadien provincial \(CSAP\)](#). Regional centres for education replaced democratically elected boards of trustees in 2018 with the passing of [Bill 72: The Education Reform Act](#).

Although regional centres for education follow the same geographic delineation as the previously publicly elected school boards, regional centres for education are not publicly elected: they are now an extension of the provincial government. Each regional centre for education is administered by provincial government staff, led by the regional executive director (RED). Regional executive directors are appointed by the Minister of Education and are employees of the provincial government (*Education Act*, Section 65[1]). As the leaders of regional centres for education, REDs oversee all operations, employees, and student performance within their regional centre for education (*Education Act*, Section 66[1]). As well, REDs administer and evaluate programs offered by the centre, ensure provincial policies are carried out, and maintain overall safe and effective functioning of schools and regional centres

for education (*Education Act*, Section 66[2]). With these responsibilities, REDs serve a similar role to both superintendents and board of trustees chairpersons; however, rather than being accountable to the public electorate, they are directly accountable to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Nova Scotia also uses the [Provincial Advisory Council on Education \(PACE\)](#). The PACE is composed of people appointed by the Governor in Council, including the CSAP chairperson or designate, the Council on Mi'kmaq Education chairperson or designate, the Council on African-Canadian Education chairperson or designate, and up to 12 individuals chosen based on their regional, cultural, gender, or disability representation, their knowledge and expertise, and/or their function in achieving equitable representation of diversity (*Education Act*, Section 11[2]). According to the *Education Act*, PACE is intended to advise the Minister of Education on regional and local educational matters referred by PACE or by the Minister (*Education Act*, Section 15). However, for many interview participants, there appeared to be a misalignment between how PACE was reported to operate in legislation compared to how PACE was actually operating. More specifically, some participants reported that PACE rarely, if ever, met for group meetings and that the ability of PACE to truly advise on decision-making was, at the time of the study, overstated.

As provincial authorities, the proceedings of regional centres for education are not open to public participation in the same way as publicly elected school boards. Rather, Nova Scotia uses a system for community participation in decision-making through school advisory councils (SACs). According to the *Education Act*, SACs may be established at the school level or as a regional council. Under this legislation, SACs are intended to bridge communication between regional centres for education and the local community (*Education Act*, Section 22[a]). These councils are intended to have five to 18 members with representation from parents/guardians, school staff, community members, and students, as well as principals as non-voting members (Province of Nova Scotia, 2019). Despite this legislation, however, participants in this study repeatedly stated that SACs do not function as described in legislation. Participants felt that the SACs have not been made a key component of educational governance as intended. Further, participants reported that not all schools have SACs, and those that do operate differently from school to school. Overall, participants did not feel that SACs provided opportunities for democratic participation in the way that elected school boards previously did.

French schools in Nova Scotia are administered by the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). It has governed French first language schools since 1996, as part

of the province's duty to uphold the Charter rights of the French first language community, which includes having a degree of control and management over French first language education (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, Section 23). The CSAP is governed by a board of trustees (board of councillors). The board of trustees is composed of 18 publicly elected trustees that represent 10 regions across the province. Trustees are elected every 4 years at the same time as the municipal elections (CSAP, n.d.). Eligibility to vote and run in the CSAP election follows the *Municipal Elections Act* and all candidates must be members of the Conseil acadien (*Education [CSAP] Act*, Section 13). As explained further in the section below, changes to CSAP were expected to commence shortly after Bill 72; however, it is unclear to what extent changes have been implemented or what further changes will be made in the future.

Recent and Ongoing Legislative Changes

From 1996 to 2018, the Nova Scotia school system was designed with eight school boards and a legislative framework that outlined the governance and decision-making processes for the education system. There were three levels of governance supporting public education: the provincial Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, regional school boards, and local school advisory councils (SACs). The *Education Act* outlined the roles and responsibilities for decision-makers as well as the roles of elected officials, school board staff, students, parents, and community members. The system had five main stakeholder groups in the system-level governance and administration of public education:

- ♦ The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) supervised public schools and education in the province.
- ♦ Governing school boards, which consisted of seven regional boards and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). Governing boards were made up of elected members and had to include one elected African Nova Scotian member and a Mi'kmaw member, appointed by the minister in consultation with the Mi'kmaw community and the school board.
- ♦ School board administration, who were the central office and support system for each governing school board.
- ♦ Superintendents, who were hired by school boards to manage daily decision-making and the operational priorities of the education system.

- ♦ School advisory councils (SACs), which were made up of volunteer representatives, such as parents, community members, students, and staff, who met regularly to discuss priority issues.

In 2012, the NDP provincial government introduced the *School Board Members' Duties Clarification Act* through [Nova Scotia Bill 131](#). Bill 131 gave power to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association (NSSBA) to assist regional school boards and advocate to the government. In 2015, the NSSBA Board of Directors decided that school board governance should be more effective; as a result, they formed a committee to develop a self-assessment tool for Nova Scotia governing school boards. The Nova Scotia Auditor General then released a report with recommendations to governing school boards on how to improve their accountability and governance roles (Office of the Auditor General, 2015). In 2016, after completing the review process, the NSSBA formulated a Governance Action Plan Steering Committee (Governance Committee) to further the work of supporting boards with their governance role. The Governance Committee consisted of a representative from each of the eight school boards in Nova Scotia; the Committee was responsible for improving school board governance across the province. The NDP government was in power from 2009–2013 but was replaced by the Liberal government in 2013 (Nova Scotia Legislature, n.d.).

The Minister of Education under the Liberal government contracted an external consultant to conduct an evaluation of the current model and give recommendations to improve the education system in Nova Scotia. The resulting document, *Raise the Bar: A Coherent and Responsive Education Administrative System for Nova Scotia* (Glaze, 2018), and is commonly referred to as the Glaze Report. The Glaze Report called for the realignment of the school board system to reflect a unified, coordinated, province-wide focus on students. The Glaze Report also stated that the new system should save money spent on unnecessary administration and put it toward classroom priorities instead. As well, the Glaze Report asserted that the aligned system would help Nova Scotian students reach their potential. The Report made a few key recommendations, one of which was the elimination of the seven governing (elected) English regional school boards.

Nova Scotians experienced a significant change in 2018 with the introduction of Nova Scotia Bill 72: The Education Reform Act. The bill was passed by a vote of 25–21 and dissolved all locally elected Anglophone school boards. The current school system structure instituted through this Act is described in detail in the previous section. Along with these changes to the English school system, changes to the CSAP

were also introduced. Although the powers of CSAP were temporarily reduced in 2018, participants indicated that there was public expectation that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development would introduce a new and separate French-specific Act later that same year to implement recommendations from the Glaze Report and better reflect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 23: Minority Language Rights. Despite being expected in 2018, the *Acadian and Francophone Education Act* was not introduced until 2022, under a Private Member's Bill (Nova Scotia Legislature, 2017).

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for Nova Scotia. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction section of this report. In addition, further information regarding Nova Scotia's system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Our team conducted individual semistructured interviews with 16 Nova Scotian participants. Fifteen of these interviews were conducted in English and one was conducted in French. Our team also conducted focus groups: A total of 28 organizations were invited to one of four focus groups scheduled from November 2022–February 2023. Three individuals, in total, participated across all focus groups. Due to limited focus group participation, we have combined our focus group data with the interview data. Eleven interview and focus group participants were either directly affiliated with regional centres for education or the CSAP or had been directly affiliated with school boards prior to the system change in 2018. The other eight participants were educational professionals associated with other education-affiliated organizations.

We identified potential participants by reviewing school system websites, through referrals by the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), and by snowball sampling in which existing participants recommended other potential participants through their insider knowledge. We recruited participants by sending up to three email invitations, each one week apart, to publicly available email addresses. In some cases, existing participants forwarded the interview invitation to potential

participants to create an online introduction between our research team and potential participants.

Focus group participants were recruited through an emailed invitation. Our research team emailed 30 organizations with an invitation to participate in a focus group relevant to their community. Separate focus groups were scheduled for parents, educators, community-specific organizations (i.e., newcomers to Canada), Indigenous groups, and African Nova Scotian groups. Recruitment emails also requested that organizations forward the invitation to their members and networks. Some organizations chose to post focus group invitations to their social media accounts. Organizations were sent one follow-up email and a reminder notice on the day of the scheduled focus group. Organizations were selected through online searches for keywords such as “community group,” “education group,” and various equity-deserving group associations.

Public Consultation

In total, 48 people participated in the public consultation questionnaire. A more descriptive breakdown of participants’ demographic data is provided in the Findings section. Some demographic data were not included as their inclusion would potentially compromise participant confidentiality.

Findings: Nova Scotia

In this section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Nova Scotia population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we consider the structural matter that interviewees and focus group participants commented on, specifically Indigenous and African Nova Scotian participation in system-level decision-making. Following the structural matter, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described related to (a) the Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE) and school advisory committees (SACs), (b) a lack of parental involvement, and (c) a lack of community involvement. Finally, we provide readers with some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants shared about how they have been involved and how they would like to be involved.

Snapshot from Nova Scotia Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants' voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts the respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 48 individuals who participated. Given that this number is too small to represent the Nova Scotia population, we make no claim to share representative results; we report only the responses for the sample included in the study.

Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As demonstrated in Figure 6.1, the roles Nova Scotia participants mainly identified with were *parent* (42%, $n = 20$), *educator* (33%, $n = 16$), and *community members* (33%, $n = 16$).

Figure 6.1. Stakeholder Roles: Nova Scotia



In terms of sex and gender, Nova Scotian respondents mostly described themselves as female (67%, $n = 32$). Only six respondents described themselves as male and eight preferred not to say or did not respond to the question (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Sex and Gender: Nova Scotia



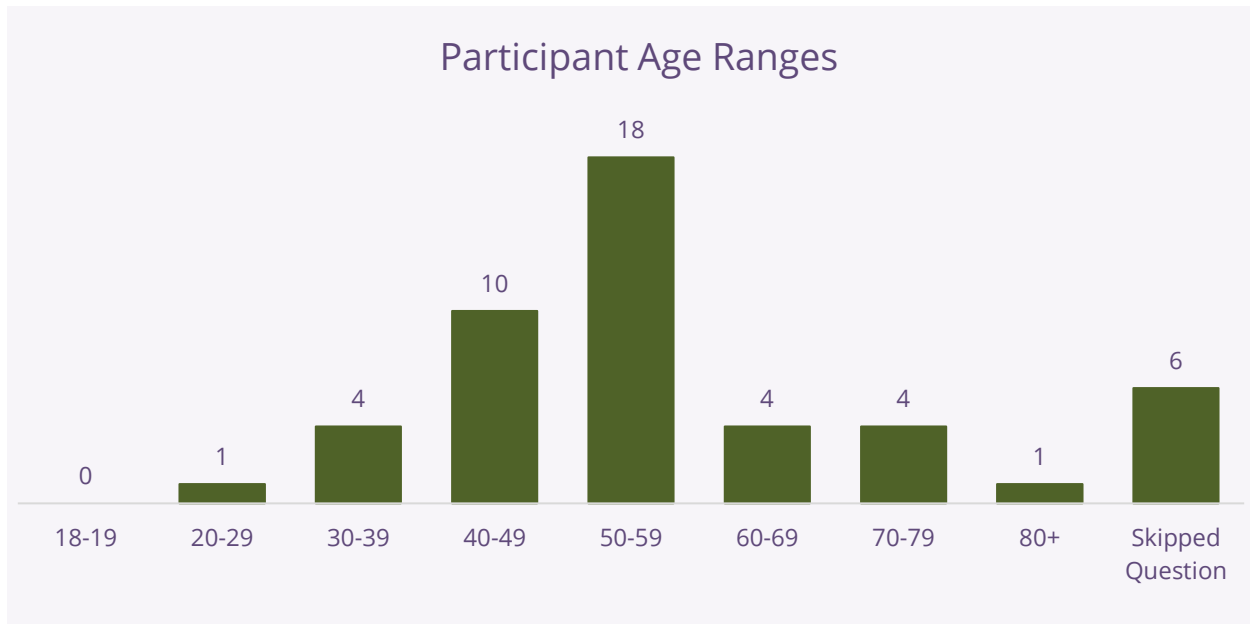
In terms of ethnoracial identity, six participants from Nova Scotia preferred not to say and another six skipped the question. Of those who did answer this question, just over two thirds (67%, $n = 32$) self-identified as White. The second largest group of self-identified participants were Black (4%, $n = 2$). One participant self-identified as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI).

Table 6.1. *Ethnoracial Identity: Nova Scotia*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	32
Prefer Not to Answer	6
Black	2
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	1
Other	1
Latin American	0
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	0
Filipino	0
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	0
Japanese	0
Chinese	0
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Korean	0
Skipped Question	6

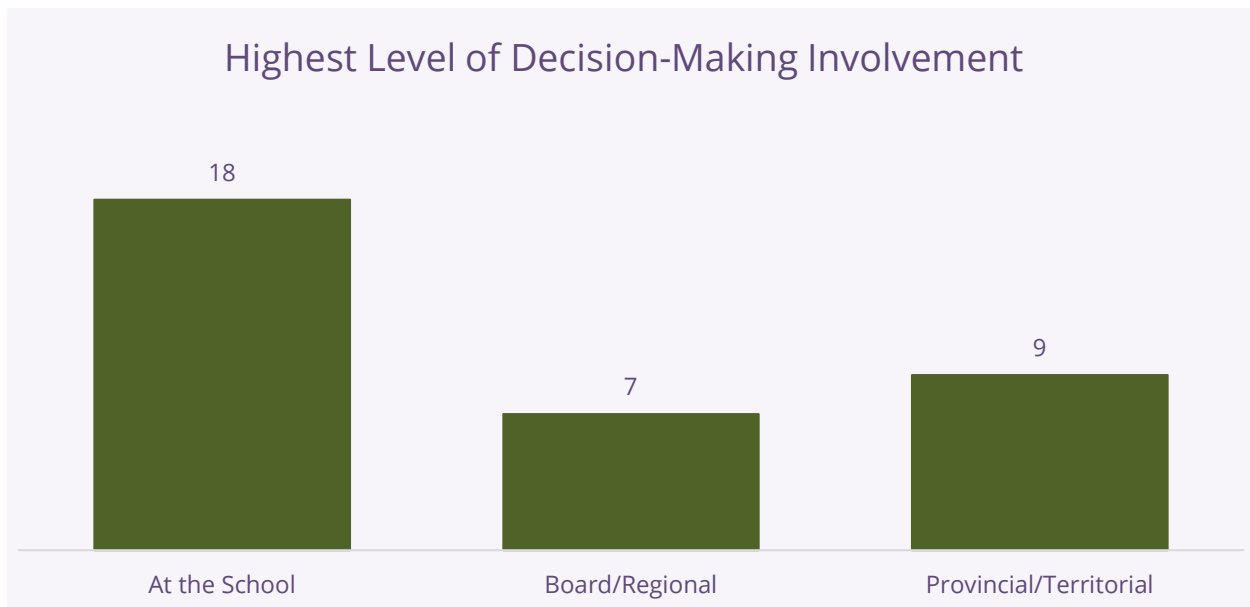
In terms of age (Figure 6.3), 38% ($n = 18$) respondents were between the ages of 50 and 59, with 21% ($n = 10$) within the ages of 40 and 49; 19% ($n = 9$) of participants were 60 years of age or older, and less than five participants were between the ages of 20 and 39.

Figure 6.3. Age Ranges: Nova Scotia



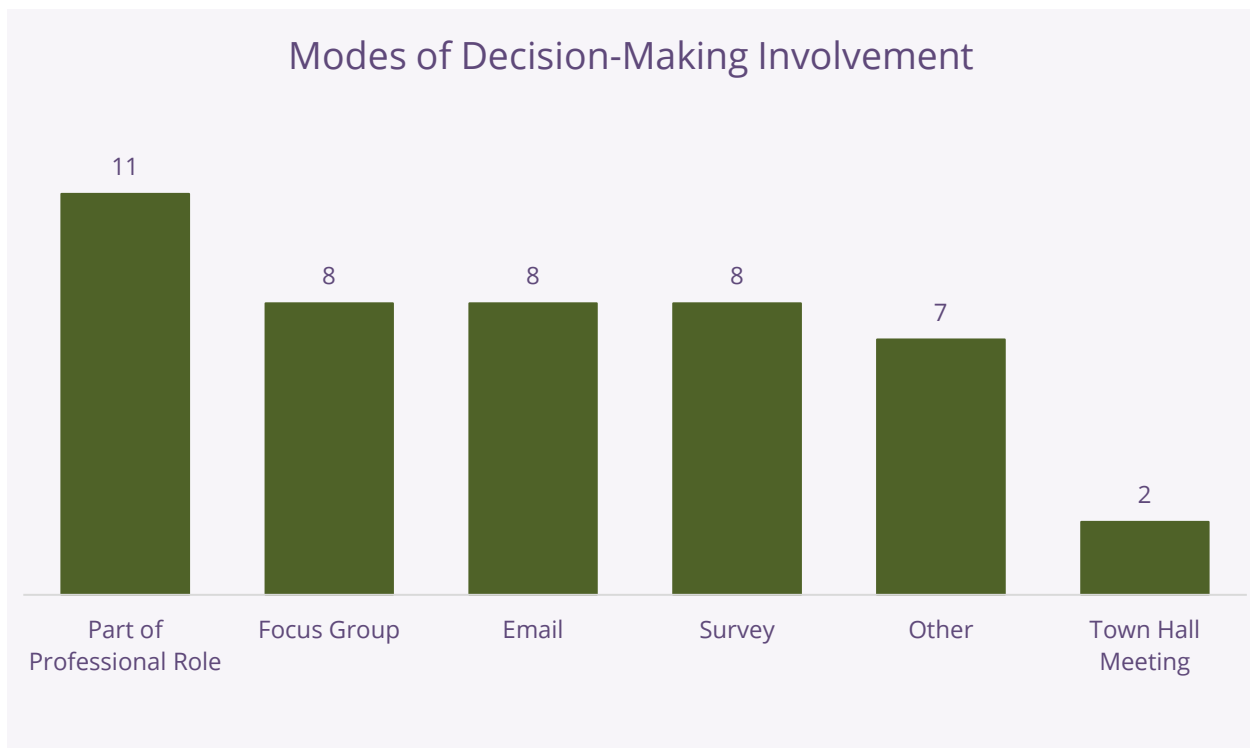
Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. In the context of Nova Scotia, this question is more complicated than other jurisdictions because of the dissolution of Anglophone school boards in 2018. When asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 6.4), 52% ($n = 24$) of the 46 participants who responded to this question answered *yes*. When asked what the highest level of decision-making they were involved in was, 75% ($n = 18$) indicated being involved at the school level, 37% ($n = 9$) indicated being involved at the provincial level, and 29% ($n = 7$) indicated being involved at the board or regional centre level. This indicates that some respondents may have participated in system-level decision-making before the 2018 changes, or some may have participated in the 2020 Francophone school board election.

Figure 6.4. *Highest Level of Decision-Making Involvement: Nova Scotia*



The survey asked participants how they were involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 6.5), but the response rates were negligible. The only information we could gather from this question was that 11 participants indicated that they engaged in system-level decision-making as part of their professional role.

Figure 6.5. *Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: Nova Scotia*



For the 22 respondents who indicated that they were not involved in system-level decision-making, we followed up and asked if they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making. Thirteen (59%) of the 22 individuals indicated that they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making with only nine indicating that they did not want to be involved. In Figure 6.6, we see that eleven (85%) indicated they would like to be involved through surveys, nine want to be involved in focus groups, five (39%) through email, and three (23%) through town hall meetings. In Table 6.2, we show the responses from those who indicated they did not want to be involved: Four (11%) people indicated they do not have time to be involved and/or do not feel their voice will be heard, three (33%) felt that they did not know enough about the topic, two (22%) did not feel their involvement would make a difference in decision-making, and one (11%) said they simply were not interested in being involved.

Figure 6.6. *How Participants Who Have Not Been Involved in System-Level Decision-Making Would Like to Be: Nova Scotia*

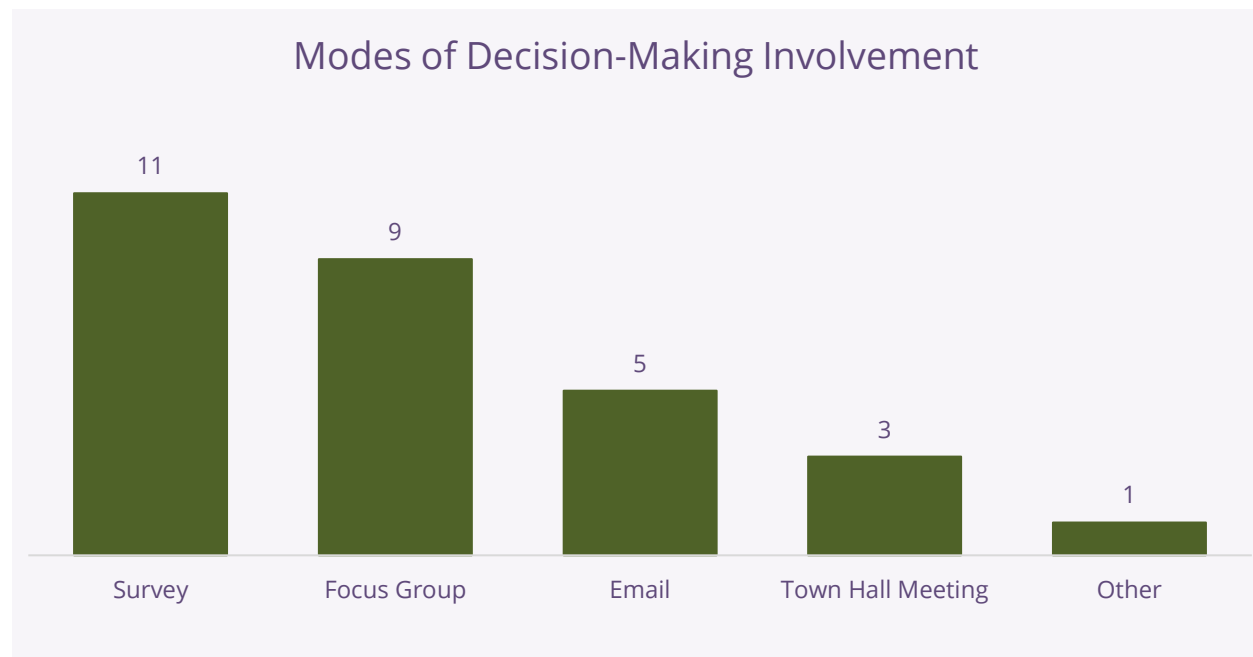


Table 6.2. *Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved in School System-Level Decision-Making: Nova Scotia*

Reasons Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved	# of Respondents
I don't have time to be involved.	4
I don't feel my voice will be heard.	4
I don't know enough about the topic.	3
I don't feel my involvement will make a difference in decision-making.	2
I am simply not interested in being involved.	1
Other.	1
I don't see the importance of being involved.	0

Community Representation. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community (Table 6.3), 45 (94%) Nova Scotians responded. Of these, only 29% ($n = 13$) responded *yes* with the remaining 71% ($n = 32$) responding *no*. Of the 32 participants who responded *no*, 67% ($n = 20$) stated that their community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made at the system level, 63% ($n = 19$) indicated that the school governance system is not locally elected or appointed by their community, and 47% ($n = 14$) indicated that there are no clear systems for how their community can be involved.

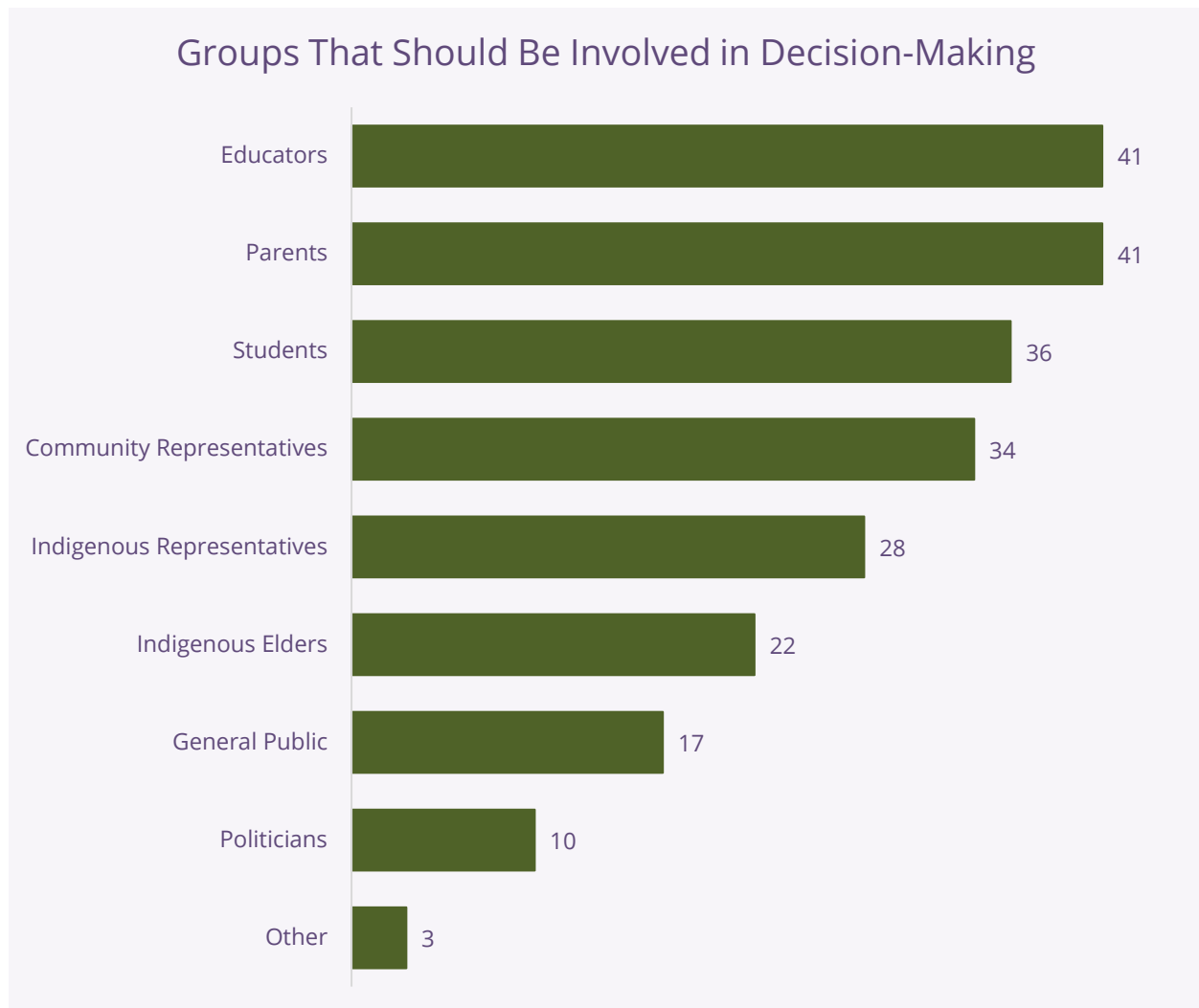
For the 13 Nova Scotia participants who did respond that the system represents their community, five indicated the following: the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community, that they know that their community has a voice in the decisions that are made, and there are clear systems for how their community can be involved. Two indicated their community has a relationship with the governing body, and four indicated that there are people who look like them in decision-making positions.

Table 6.3. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: Nova Scotia

School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	20	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	5
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	19	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	5
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	14	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	5
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	11	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	4
Other.	4	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	2
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	3	Other.	1

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked about who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making (Figure 6.7), 43 Nova Scotians responded. Of these, the same number of respondents (95%, $n = 41$) felt that *educators* and *parents* should be involved, with smaller numbers indicating that *students* (85%, $n = 36$), *community representatives* (79%, $n = 34$), *Indigenous representatives* (65% $n = 28$), and *Indigenous Elders* (51%, $n = 22$) should be involved. A small number of participants (23%, $n = 10$) indicated that politicians should be involved in system-level decision-making.

Figure 6.7. *Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Nova Scotia*



Regarding how these groups should be involved (Table 6.8), the participants indicated that these groups should be invited to attend decision-making meetings (82%, $n = 35$), consulted on decisions (77%, $n = 33$), asked to provide advisory services (70%, $n = 30$), and vote on decisions (49%, $n = 21$).

Table 6.4. *How Selected Groups in Figure 6.7 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Nova Scotia*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	35
They should be consulted on decisions.	33
They should provide advisory services.	30
They should vote on decisions.	21
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	18
Other.	1

The survey also asked an open-ended question about the individuals and groups that participants thought should not be involved in school system-level decision-making. Out of 23 responses, the two most frequent groups named were politicians and the general public. Some of these responses grouped the general public and politicians together. Many of these respondents believed politicians and/or the general public should not be involved in system-level decision-making because they lack knowledge about school systems, school operations, or schools' increasingly complex needs and challenges; they lack understanding due to their limited involvement in schools; or they lack direct experience with the consequences/implementation of decisions. Some respondents in this sample argued that education has become too political and is not focused on students and communities.

Would Anything Be Lost Without Elected Boards of Trustees. The survey asked, "Do you think anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners in your area?" (Table 6.9). For Nova Scotia respondents, this question had a slightly different frame—whether anything *had been* lost since the replacement of elected boards with regional centres in 2018. Only nine people responded, but of the nine, eight indicated that there would be a loss. When asked what would be lost, eight participants indicated that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school systems decision-making would be lost, the recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost, and their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.

Table 6.5. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Nova Scotia*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	7
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	6
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	3
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	1
Other.	1

Voting Experience. Nova Scotian participants who indicated that their jurisdiction had an elected school system were asked if they had voted in the last school board election (Figure 6.8). This question received a very poor response rate because the question would be difficult for potential Nova Scotian participants who are associated with the English public school system to answer because there are no English public school trustee elections.

The last Nova Scotia school board trustee election for the English education system was in 2016. In our public consultation, eight respondents indicated that they had voted in the last election (Table 6.10). These respondents indicated that they voted because they wanted to have a say in who was elected. Because we did not require participants to identify which system they were referring to, we cannot determine if these eight responses were individuals who voted in the last English school system elections in 2016 or the French public education system.

Figure 6.8. Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: Nova Scotia

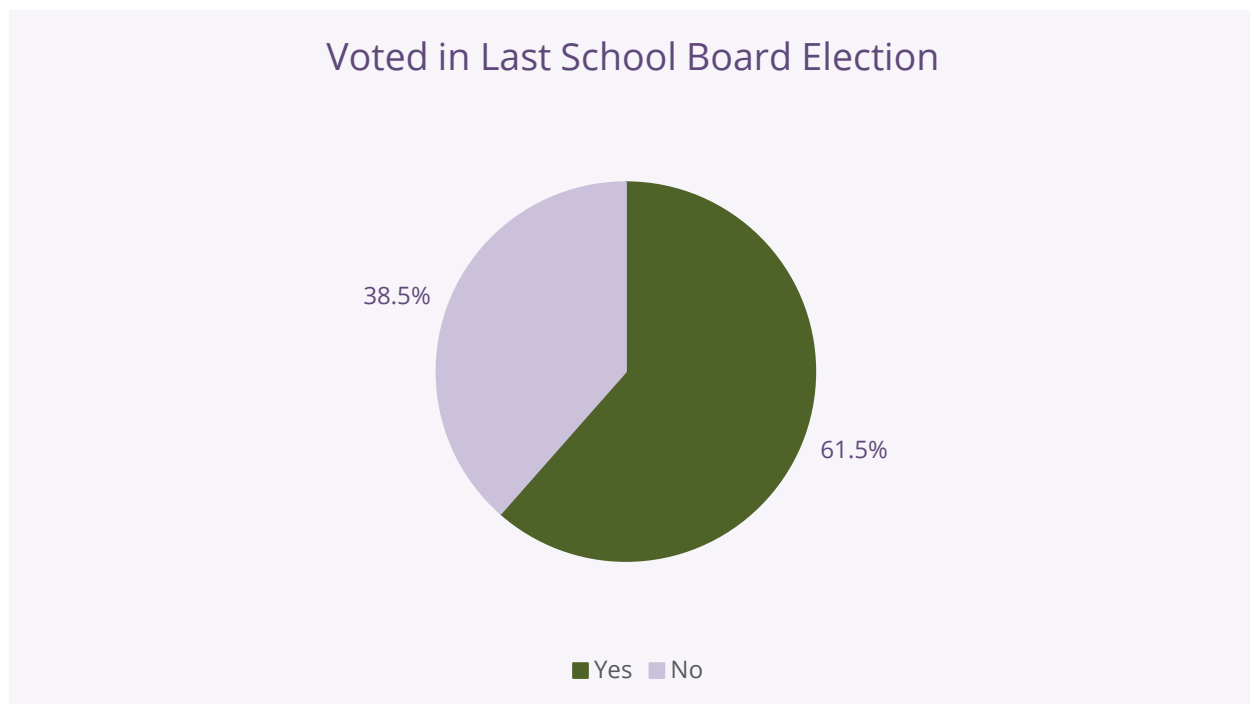


Table 6.6. Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: Nova Scotia

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	8	Other.	3
I am interested in school boards.	2	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	2
I knew where and how to vote.	1	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	0
I knew the candidates.	1	I didn't know the candidates.	0
I liked the candidates.	1	I didn't like the candidates.	0
Other.	0	I am not interested in school boards.	0

Meaning of Democratic Voice. All participants in this study were asked the short-answer question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” In Nova Scotia, seven participants chose to respond. According to these participants, “democratic voice” refers to having their voice heard and being able to contribute ideas or concerns to the decision-making process. One participant felt that having a voice alone is not enough and that democratic voice needs to include policy and processes that support meaningful inclusion of community members. Some also described democratic voice as trying to make a difference in decision-making and understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Participants’ Final Thoughts. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and information they felt was relevant to the questionnaire that was not necessarily captured within the questions asked. Several Nova Scotia participants ($n = 11$) called for the reinstatement of school boards. Participants from the survey were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the dissolution of the Anglophone school boards in Nova Scotia. Some believed that the return to a governance structure similar to the previous school boards would increase parent involvement and provide them with an opportunity to attend meetings. They emphasized the need for elected school boards, elected communities, and for school boards to have the power to make changes. They expressed desire for a system, like school boards, that listens and acts on concerns from and the needs of the community. However, some participants shared that motivating parental involvement in system-level decision-making was a challenge that also existed under the previous system of publicly elected boards of trustees.

Structural Matters

In Nova Scotia, the school system structure is also impacted by Indigenous and African Nova Scotian participation in system-level decision-making. In the following section, we provide a brief overview of this structural matter as it was discussed by study participants.

Indigenous and African Nova Scotian Participation in System-Level Decision-Making. In Nova Scotia, Indigenous education is supported by [Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey](#) and the [Council on Mi’kmaq Education](#). Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey is a team of Mi’kmaw chiefs, staff, parents, and educators who work together on educational matters that pertain to First Nations schools in Mi’kmaw communities (Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, 2021). Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey serves 12 out of the 13 Mi’kmaw communities found within the Nova Scotian Mi’kma’ki territory (Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, 2021). The Council on Mi’kmaq Education represents the voices of

the Mi'kmaw communities in the public school system through their appointed seat on the Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE) (*Education Act*, Section 2). This role is intended to ensure the Chair (or designate) of the Council on Mi'kmaq Education can provide advice and guidance to the Minister of Education on educational matters pursuant to supporting Mi'kmaw students (*Education Act*, Section 17[2][a]). In this study on system-level decision-making in public education systems, we asked interview and focus group participants how they felt Indigenous communities were involved with system-level decision-making, through PACE or otherwise. Although many participants took this opportunity to discuss the work of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey or Indigenous student achievement, our study is focused on system-level decision-making in the public systems, so we do not report on this data.

Nova Scotia has a significant African Nova Scotian community that is often discussed concurrently with the Indigenous community, with some participants describing African Nova Scotians as an Indigenous community. Like the Council on Mi'kmaq Education, the [Council on African-Canadian Education](#) (CACE), has a seat on PACE as the representative voice of African Nova Scotians. The CACE is a designated council, under the *Education Act*, intended to promote the rights and interests of African Nova Scotians on all educational matters (Section 19.2). In 2018, CACE recommended the creation of the *African Nova Scotian Education Framework* to support African Nova Scotian/Black Learners through the provincial education system (Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, 2021). This recommendation was accepted by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2019, and the framework was published in 2021 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, 2021). Within this framework, equitable involvement in system-level decision-making is a key pillar for supporting African Nova Scotian/Black Learners, and this sentiment was also shared by participants in this study.

While recognizing that African Nova Scotians and Indigenous communities in Nova Scotia are separate communities with unique cultures, histories, and needs, we also see that these communities share formalized policies for inclusion in the Nova Scotia school system. Accordingly, we analyzed participant discussion of Indigenous and African Nova Scotian community involvement in system-level decision-making together. Participant discussion centred on issues of (a) representation, (b) PACE, and (c) decision-making power.

Representation. Participants reported that Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities seem to be less represented in regional centres for education compared to the previously elected system. Participants with experience working on or with elected boards of trustees in the past described often or always having Indigenous and African Nova Scotian representation on the board of trustees, with these representatives either being elected as trustees or having more consultative roles with the board of trustees. Participants described the importance of having this representation on each elected board of trustees (as opposed to having singular representatives on PACE, which we discuss in the next section), to ensure that African Nova Scotian and Indigenous voices are heard across the different Nova Scotian communities. Further, participants who did not belong to African Nova Scotian or Indigenous communities described having this representation as providing significant opportunities for them to learn the needs and perspectives of these communities from community members themselves.

Nearly all participants emphasized that having Indigenous and African Nova Scotian representation in system-level decision-making was necessary not only for students who belong to these communities but also for all Nova Scotians. Participants felt that greater representation led to greater understanding of Nova Scotian diversity, which ultimately expanded understandings and experiences of social equity. Overall, participants described the loss of African Nova Scotian and Indigenous representation within the current system of regional centres for education as significant. Under this system, these communities have representative seats on the PACE, but participants had doubts about the effectiveness of these roles.

Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE). Participants frequently discussed PACE as the primary means by which Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities were represented in system-level decision-making. Although a small number of participants described this representation as a positive form of inclusion in decision-making, most other participants felt that PACE underrepresented these communities. Some participants felt that, because PACE only designated one Indigenous representative (Chair or designate of the Council on Mi'kmaq Education) and one African Nova Scotian representative (Chair or designate of the Council on African-Canadian Education), undue pressure was put on these individuals to represent diverse communities. In other words, these two individuals were expected to represent all 13 Mi'kmaq communities (Mi'kmaw

Kina'matnewey, n.d.) and all 13 African Nova Scotian communities² across the province with a singular voice.

Participants felt that because each community faces different needs in terms of geography, economic structures, services, and local culture, having one designated voice on PACE is not effective representation. When discussing PACE, participants often compared this system of representation to the previous system wherein local boards each had representation and local community members could voice the needs of Indigenous and African Nova Scotians within that specific community. Further, participants questioned the extent to which PACE gave representatives real decision-making power.

Decision-Making Power. A few participants described how they felt decision-making power had changed for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities in the transition to the new system of PACE and regional centres for education. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that these communities previously had more actualized influence over decision-making in the locally elected system. For some, this decision-making power came from participating in local governance through boards of trustees, and for others it came from having strong relationships with those in decision-making positions, such as trustees and superintendents, where decisions were made in consultation with Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities.

In contrast, participants felt that the decision-making power of Indigenous and African Nova Scotian community representatives had been severely diminished to the point of being lost entirely in the new system. Participants described the change in role from having governance positions to being on an advisory board (PACE) as the difference between having a governance voice and an advisory voice. As a governance voice, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities had decision-making power. As an advisory voice, representatives are able to provide advice but those in decision-making positions can decide whether to heed that advice. As one participant shared: "I always say it's too bad we lost our voice in governance because people think that we still have it, and we don't." Overall, participants—especially those from African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities—felt that African Nova Scotian and Indigenous voices in system-level decision-making had all but been removed under the current system of PACE and regional centres for education.

² This number was provided by participants.

Challenges that Participants Perceived in System-Level Decision-Making

Nova Scotian interview and focus group participants were asked if they saw any challenges that existed in the previous system of publicly elected boards of trustees. Participants primarily reflected on challenges relating to boards of trustees operating in ways that were viewed as ineffective and or inefficient. Some participants felt that publicly elected school boards were too costly and critical of the provincial government. Likewise, some participants felt that the justification for dissolving school boards was based on saving money, but that this had not been realized under the current provincial system.

When asked about the challenges they perceived in the current system, participants discussed various ways they felt challenged in having their voices heard in decision-making, primarily compared to the previously elected system. These challenges centred on (a) the perceived ineffectiveness of the PACE and the SACs, (b) lack of parental involvement, and (c) lack of community involvement.

Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE) and School Advisory Committees (SACs). As mentioned earlier, many participants shared a sense of uncertainty about the extent to which PACE and SACs were being used to truly advise regional centres for education on the decisions that are being made. Many participants felt that PACE and SACs do not effectively influence regional decision-making. Rather, many participants described PACE and SACs as a control system put in place to ensure compliance with the government. Although most of these participants attributed the ineffectiveness to the provincial government not listening to the advice provided, a few participants attributed the ineffectiveness to those who are included in PACE and SACs. For example, some felt that PACE representatives were not adequately accessible to the public, and if they were accessed, the PACE members would be unable or unwilling to make recommendations based on the public input they receive. Others felt that the overly political language used in PACE and SACs was inaccessible to the general public, therefore making their inclusion more difficult. Finally, a few participants felt that PACE and SACs lacked effective leadership and transparency, making their role as a bridge between the public and the province inconsequential. In particular, participants felt that PACE did not represent the voices of parents. Overall, participants saw PACE as an extension to the government allowing for a more centralized education system that provides the provincial government with greater control over educational decision-making. This system was frequently described by

participants as lacking accountability, transparency, and community involvement in decision-making.

Lack of Parental Involvement. As in other jurisdictions, many Nova Scotian participants felt that having parents' voices included in decision-making was vital to effective system-level governance. Although there are no designated parental seats on PACE, there are 12 open seats that parents can hold. As well, parents can sit on SACs if their school has one in place. Despite these formal systems for inclusion, many Nova Scotian participants felt that parents were inadequately involved in decision-making under the provincial system. Many participants felt that parents may be disengaged from educational matters altogether because they may feel they have lost their voice by no longer having opportunities to participate in public consultation or to vote for their representatives in system-level decision-making. Participants felt that part of this perceived lack of voice came from a lack of clarity about how to voice concerns to decision-makers in regional systems. Contrary to these sentiments, however, some participants shared that in the previous system of elected school boards, trustees had a difficult time motivating parents to participate in various degrees of system-level decision-making.

Lack of Community Involvement. In addition to parents, many Nova Scotian participants discussed an overall sense that there is a lack of community involvement in decision-making in regional centres for education. For these participants, this lack of involvement stemmed from their inability to vote for system-level representatives and from a perceived failure of regional centres to consult with the public on educational decisions.

Most participants shared that they missed having the power to vote for school system-level representatives. Without this power, participants felt that they were unable to ensure their community would be represented in decision-making. Our team heard this from participants located in rural areas who felt that regional centres for education favoured the needs of urban communities. Furthermore, some participants surmised that those in decision-making positions in regional centres, namely regional executive directors, did not want to return to an elected system because of the increased public accountability they could face. As well, some participants shared that, under the locally elected system, running as a school trustee often acted as an entry point to a political career for those who are often not represented in politics, namely women and minoritized people. Without the opportunity to become a trustee, participants felt that these members from these communities would have fewer opportunities to enter the political sphere.

Beyond voting, some participants felt that there was a lack of community involvement under the provincial system because there were no observed efforts to consult the community on decisions. As with parents, participants felt that this lack of effort on the part of regional centres for education had the effect of disengaging community members from educational matters altogether.

Strategies that Participants Suggested for Engaging in System-Level Decision-Making

Participants in Nova Scotia made a few suggestions as to how system-level decision-making could be improved. Rather than focusing on how the public could be better involved in the current system, the participants focused on three main tactics: (a) to reinstate the previous system, (b) to keep the current system as is, or (c) to revise the current system.

Reinstate Publicly Elected Boards of Trustees. Many participants from Nova Scotia, whether through interviews or surveys, acknowledged the value they felt elected school boards of trustees offered in terms of representing communities and supporting the role of democratic voice in decision-making. These participants valued the perceived accountability and involvement that was provided to them through elected boards and trustees. Accordingly, some participants suggested that elected school boards of trustees be reinstated.

At the time of data collection, some participants noted that the Progressive Conservatives (PC) included a promise to return to elected school boards in their election campaign. Although this was part of the campaign, on April 21, 2022, Premier Tim Houston told reporters that this was unlikely to happen, but that the PC government would look into ways to include local voices in governance (NS Legislature, 2022, p. 2715). That being said, some participants in this study believed it was a mistake for the new government to back away from its promise. These participants suggested that reinstating a school board system with elected boards of trustees would be an effective way to improve democratic voice in decision-making.

Many participants acknowledged the challenges boards of trustees faced prior to their dissolution. Some of these participants recommended that elected boards be reinstated with recommendations made prior to 2018—for example, that boards of trustees clarify and strengthen the governance model they employ and that they collaborate with other government officials to increase understanding of the work of boards of trustees. Participants suggested that prior to reinstating elected

boards of trustees, there should be some community consultation to (a) review the wants and needs of the community, (b) inform the community about what elected school boards do, and (c) orient potential trustee candidates to what their work as a trustee would look like. However, participants were unclear as to who they felt should be conducting this community consultation.

Keep the Current System. A small number of participants felt that the current system of regional centres for education was an improvement on the previously elected system, and therefore suggested keeping the current system as is. These participants felt that, under the previous system, locally elected boards of trustees were ineffective, costly, and created an adversarial dynamic between the provincial government and the boards of trustees. Accordingly, these participants felt that, under the provincial system, decision-making was more streamlined and more effective; that costs were reduced making for more financial investment into changes that directly affect student learning; and that the public was more trusting of the system overall. For these participants, whether decisions were made by an elected board of trustees or by regional centres for education made little difference to the general public, but the overall perceived improvements under the new system made for a better functioning education system.

Revising PACE. Some participants felt that there was no sense in reinstating locally elected boards of trustees as they felt it was a step backwards. These participants suggested that the current system could be augmented to better support democratic voice. Specifically, some participants suggested a review and revision of PACE, as they felt PACE is ineffective at making change and does not represent all Nova Scotian communities. These participants suggested ways to improve its effectiveness and representation. In terms of effectiveness, some participants suggested that PACE ought to be a consultative service rather than an advisory one. As an advisory system, regional executive directors were under no obligation to listen to or act on the advice provided. If revised to be a consultative service, participants felt regional executive directors would be more obliged to consider community feedback in a meaningful way.

To make PACE more representative of Nova Scotian communities, participants named two strategies: (a) make PACE open to the public with publicly elected representatives; and (b) make sure both rural and urban communities were equitably represented. Those participants who suggested PACE be made open to the public with publicly elected representatives felt that people who put their name forward for these positions show an interest and passion for education, supporting

students, and listening to community members' needs. Accordingly, these participants felt that any Nova Scotian with these passions ought to be eligible to provide input on system-level decisions. Other participants felt that the needs of rural communities were not currently heard on PACE or in regional centre decision-making. These individuals felt that PACE should have seats for both rural and urban representatives, to ensure that rural voices were equitably heard in decision-making.

Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories (NWT) is located in the centre of northern Canada. It is a geographically vast and sparsely populated territory covering 1.1 million square kilometres ([Government of Canada, 2017](#)). At the time of publication, Statistics Canada indicated that the NWT population was 45,668 (Statistics Canada, 2023a), and there were 8,700 students enrolled in the 2020–2021 year (Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Approximately 50% of the population is Indigenous ([Statistics Canada, 2017](#)). The NWT hosts multiple educational authorities, divided among English, French, Catholic, and Indigenous systems. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, data is not delineated by region or authority. For information about the organizing bodies, legislation, representatives, and responsibilities, please refer to the interjurisdictional scan (Pollock et al., 2022).

Structure of School System Governance in the Northwest Territories

In the NWT, publicly funded education includes English schools, French schools, Catholic schools, and Indigenous community schools. Most public schools are governed by the [Department of Education, Culture and Employment \(ECE\)](#), under the [Education Act](#).³ However, the [Tłıchǵ Nation](#) (Tłıchǵ Ndek'àowo/Government, 2017b) exercises its right to self-government; accordingly, education for Tłıchǵ communities is governed by the [Tłıchǵ Community Services Agency \(TCSA\)](#) (Tłıchǵ Ndek'àowo/Government, 2017b). Presently, the TCSA has chosen to continue to be associated with the public education system under the *Education Act* and as such is included in our study of publicly funded school systems. Under its *Education Act*, NWT is organized into education divisions that are served by District Education Authorities (DEAs), including the [Commission scolaire Francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest](#), Divisional Education Councils (DECs), and the Tłıchǵ Community Services Agency (*Education Act*, Section 102). The latter oversees both health and education in the Tłıchǵ communities of Behchokǵ, Whatì, Gamètì, and Wekweètì (Tłıchǵ Ndek'àowo/Government, 2017b).

Education in the NWT is funded via local taxation and a funding formula (Government of Northwest Territories, 2022a). The Yellowknife Education District

³ The *NWT Education Act* is currently undergoing significant [reform](#) (Government of Northwest Territories, 2022b). The information contained herein is up to date as of Spring 2023.

No. 1 (YK1) and the Yellowknife Public Denomination District (Yellowknife Catholic Schools) have the ability to raise operating funds through taxation. Outside of this taxation, all schools are funded through a funding formula, established by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), that is based on a combination of student enrolment and the community location. With this funding, education bodies are responsible for developing annual budgets based on the educational needs of their students (Government of Northwest Territories [GNWT], 2017).

Every school district is served by a District Education Authority (DEA) (*Education Act*, Section 81). District Education Authorities are governed by a board of trustees made up of locally elected and/or appointed members (*Education Act*, Section 89.2). Boards of trustees are made up of five, six, or seven members, as determined by the Minister of Education (Section 81.8). Boards of trustees may serve terms of 2, 3, or 4 years, depending on the regulations of the respective DEA (*Education Act*, Section 89.3). District Education Authority meetings are open to the public unless the DEA determines, by 2/3 vote, that it is in the best interest of the public to have the meeting closed (*Education Act*, Section 95.4). District Education Authorities can petition—and have successfully petitioned—to establish or operate a DEA in a way that differs from what is set out in the Act (*Education Act*, Section 86.1). Accordingly, DEAs can operate differently from each other.

The preceding and following explanation of how DEAs operate is a broad explanation and may differ from how specific DEAs have chosen to operate. Unless otherwise determined, DEA elections are governed by the [*Local Authorities Elections Act, 1988*](#). The DEA elections are held at the same time as municipal elections (*Local Authorities Elections Act*, Section 10.2). Board of trustees must be Canadian citizens, over 18 years of age, have been residents of the district for at least 12 consecutive months preceding voting day, and not otherwise disqualified (*Local Authorities Elections Act*, Section 18.1). People are not eligible for nomination if they are a member of the school staff, hired to deliver adult education programs, or an employee of the DEA (*Local Authorities Elections Act*, Section 19). To be eligible to vote in DEA elections, people must be Canadian citizens, over 18 years of age, and have been residents of the district for at least 12 consecutive months preceding voting day (*Local Authorities Elections Act*, Section 17). Under Section 23 of the *Education Act* (1996), students can select a student representative to attend and participate without voting authority in DEA meetings as a representative of the student body. However, participants in this study indicated that this role often goes unfilled.

The largest DEAs operate as independent education bodies (i.e., the Yellowknife Catholic Schools serving Catholic schools, and Yellowknife Education District No. 1 [YK1] serving nondenominational English schools within Yellowknife). Some other DEAs operate as independent education bodies (i.e., the Dettah District Education Authority and Ndilq District Education Authority) but contract their superintendency through YK1, meaning the superintendent for YK1 is also the superintendent for these DEAs. Collectively, these five education bodies are called the Yellowknife DEAs (GNWT, 2017). The remaining DEAs coalesce into regional education bodies called Divisional Education Councils (DECs), allocating some responsibilities to the DEC and others to the DEA.

Divisional Education Councils (DECs) are divisional education bodies composed of representatives from each of the DEAs in the education division (*Education Act*, Section 104.1), as selected by the DEAs. Like DEA meetings, DEC meetings are open to the public unless the DEC determines, by 2/3 vote, that it is in the best interest of the public to have the meeting closed (*Education Act*, Section 111.4). The Tłı̨chq Community Services Agency operates as a DEC under the *Education Act*; participants in this study explained that representatives are appointed by Chiefs from Behchokq, Whati, Gameti, and Wekweeti, and that how each appointment takes place—whether through community volunteers, recommendation, or otherwise—is determined by each community chief.

District Education Authorities and DECs have different responsibilities. District Education Authorities are responsible for establishing DEA policies, goals, and objectives, making funding decisions based on the received funding allocations, advising the superintendent on staff hiring decisions, and acting as the liaison between the school and community (GNWT, 2017). District Education Councils and the Yellowknife DEAs are responsible for establishing DEC policies, goals, and objectives, allocating funding to the DEAs and supporting budgetary decisions, and hiring the superintendent (GNWT, 2017). As well, the DEC Chairpersons are responsible for communicating with the Minister of ECE (GNWT, 2017).

The Commission scolaire Francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest, the independent educational body serving French schools across the territory, operates similarly to the Yellowknife DEAs; however, the board of commissioners (board of trustees) is made up of elected representatives from two regions: Yellowknife (three commissioners) and Hay River (three commissioners). The board of commissioners meets 10 times per year and meetings are open to the public. Like YK1 and YCS, all commissioners were acclaimed in the last election (Commission scolaire Francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest, 2022).

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an online public consultation questionnaire. In the following paragraphs, we detail the recruitment processes and final participant sample sizes for the NWT. More information about the data collection process can be found in the introduction section of this report. In addition, further information regarding the Northwest Territories' system-level policies and structures is included in the interjurisdictional scan, which can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 14 participants; 10 interviews were conducted in English and four in French. As well, three focus groups were scheduled in January–February 2023, and 13 organizations were invited to participate. Two individuals, in total, participated across all focus groups. Due to limited focus group participation, we have combined our focus group data with the interview data. Interview and focus group participants included 10 past or present trustees, five educational professionals, and one participant not directly connected with the education system.

We identified potential participants by reviewing school system websites, through referrals by the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), and by snowball sampling in which existing participants recommended other potential participants through their insider knowledge. We recruited participants by sending up to three email invitations, each one week apart, to publicly available email addresses. In some cases, existing participants forwarded the interview invitation to potential participants to create an online introduction between our research team and potential participants.

Focus group participants were recruited through an emailed invitation. Our research team emailed 13 organizations with an invitation to participate in a focus group relevant to their community. Separate focus groups were scheduled for parents, educators and community-specific organizations (i.e., newcomers to Canada), and Indigenous community groups. Recruitment emails also requested that organizations forward the invitation to their members and networks. Some organizations chose to post focus group invitations to their social media accounts. Organizations were sent one follow-up email and a reminder notice on the day of the scheduled focus group. Organizations were selected through online searches

for keywords such as “community group,” “education group,” and various equity-deserving group associations.

Public Consultation

In total 51 participants completed the public consultation questionnaire. A more descriptive breakdown of participants’ demographic data is provided in the Findings section. Some demographic data were not included as their inclusion would potentially compromise participant confidentiality.

Findings: Northwest Territories

In this findings section, we first provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Because this is a small sample size, we do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Northwest Territories population; rather, we present what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making. Next, we present the challenges that interview and focus group participants described related to (a) electing representatives, (b) public participation, (c) governance and administration, (d) broadening perspectives on responsibility, and (e) protecting confidentiality. Finally, we provide readers with some of the strategies interviewees and focus group participants shared about how they have been involved and how they would like to be involved, including (a) deformatizing processes, (b) Indigenizing governance, and (c) increasing public awareness.

Snapshot from Northwest Territories Public Consultation

In this snapshot of the public questionnaire data, we describe (a) who participated in the questionnaire, (b) how respondents were involved in system-level decision-making, (c) participants’ voting experiences, (d) how respondents understood democratic voice, and (e) any final thoughts the respondents shared. The findings reflect the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the 51 individuals who participated.

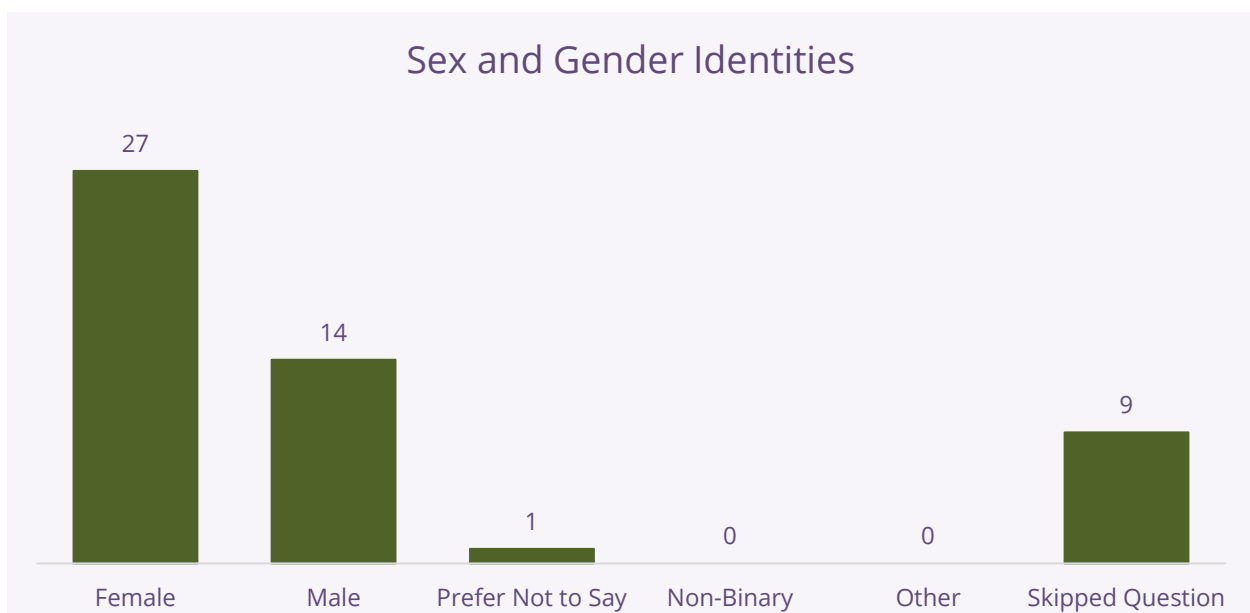
Who Participated in the Questionnaire. As shown in Figure 7.1, all NWT participants chose to indicate the roles that best described them. Of these, 39% ($n = 24$) described themselves as *educators*, almost a third (31%, $n = 16$) indicated they were *parents* and 25% ($n = 13$) *community members*, and 18% ($n = 9$) indicated that they were *school system leaders*. A few also indicated they were *trustees*.

Figure 7.1. Stakeholder Roles: Northwest Territories



In terms of sex and gender (Figure 7.2), just over half (53%, $n = 27$) described themselves as female and 28% ($n = 14$) described themselves as male. Nine participants (18%) skipped this question, and one chose “prefer not to say.” Due to the large percentage of participants who chose to skip this question, we do not claim any representation by sex and gender.

Figure 7.2. Sex and Gender: Northwest Territories



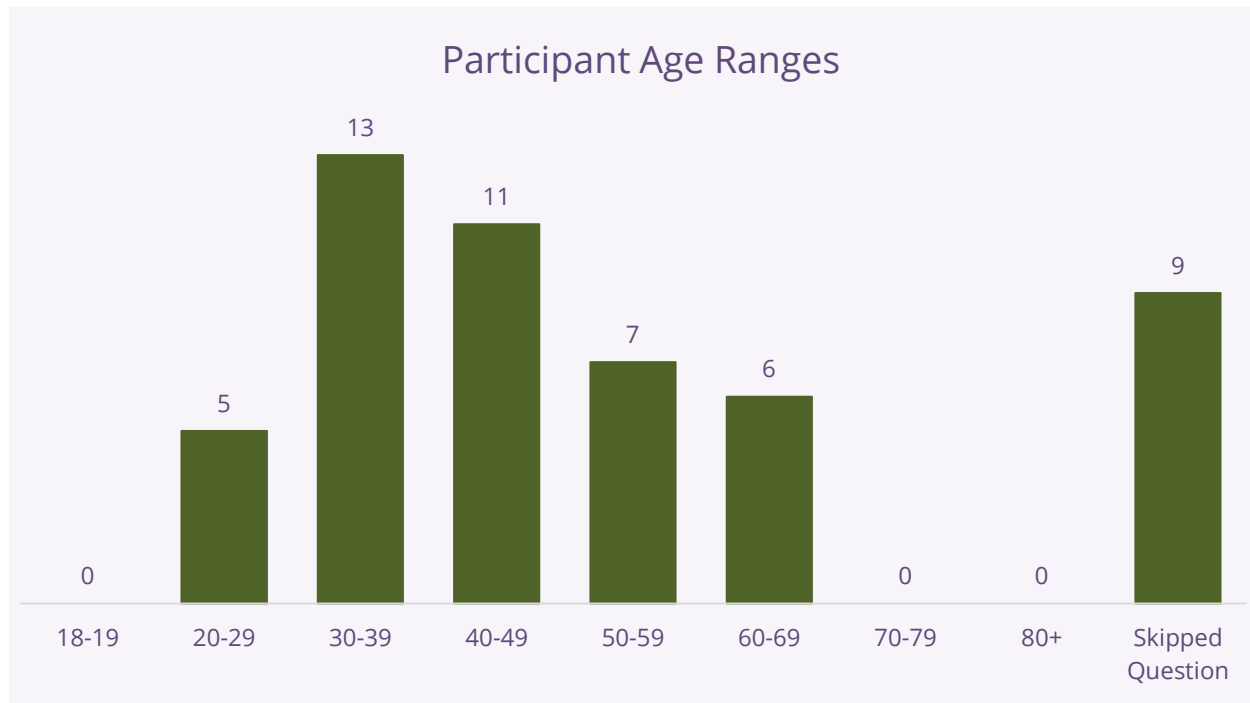
When asked which ethnoracial identity best described them (Table 7.1), 42 participants from the NWT responded. Of these 42 participants, just over half (55%, $n = 28$), indicated they were White, and 14% ($n = 7$) identified as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI). Four (8%) participants chose “prefer not to answer” and nine (18%) participants skipped the question entirely. One person identified as Black.

Table 7.1. *Ethnoracial Identity: Northwest Territories*

Ethnoracial Identity	# of Respondents
White	28
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)	7
Prefer Not to Answer	4
Other	2
Black	1
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	0
Filipino	0
Latin American	0
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	0
Japanese	0
Chinese	0
Arab	0
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)	0
Korean	0
Skipped Question	9

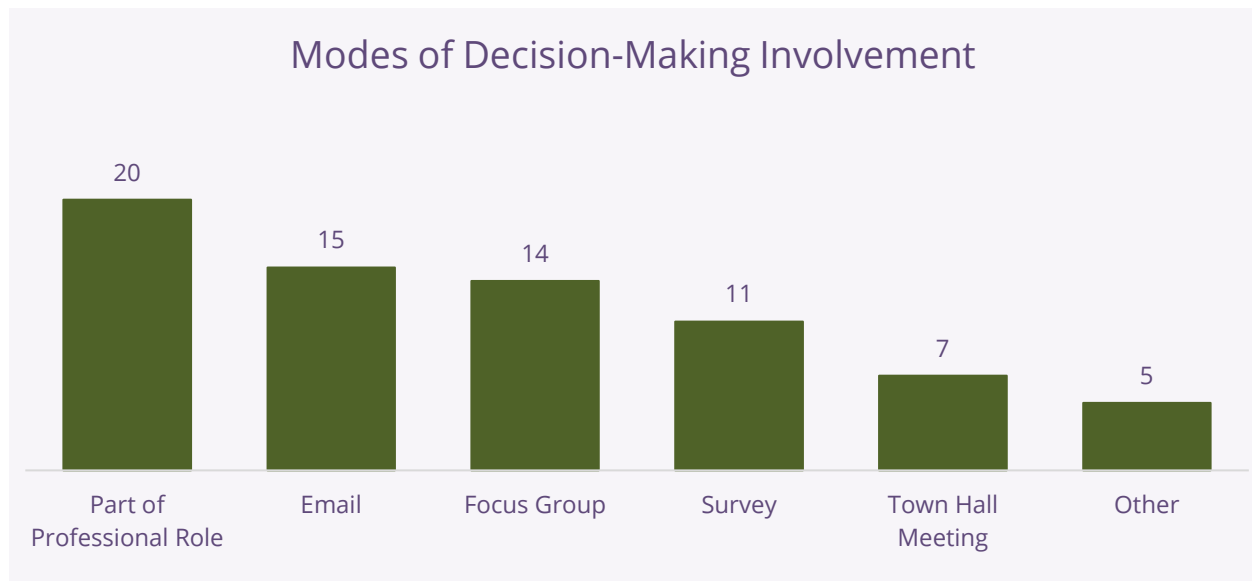
Just over a quarter (26%, $n = 13$) of NWT participants indicated they were between the ages of 30 and 39 (Figure 7.3); just under a quarter (22%, $n = 11$) indicated they were between the ages of 40 and 49, and 14% ($n = 7$) indicated they were between the ages of 50 and 59. This was the youngest range of participants across all six jurisdictions. This reflects national data showing that the NWT has the second lowest median age, next to Nunavut (Statista Research Department, 2022).

Figure 7.3. Age Ranges: Northwest Territories



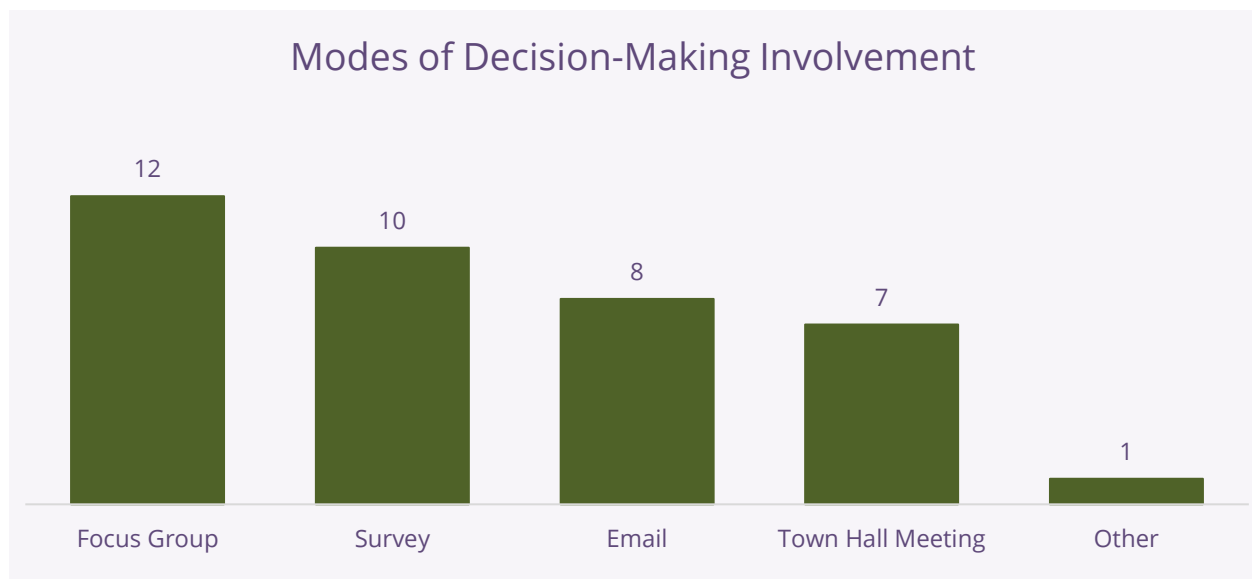
Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making. The majority of the NWT participants ($n = 50$) responded to the question asking if they were involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 7.4). Of these respondents, a little more than half (54%, $n = 27$) responded *yes*, while a little less than half (46%, $n = 23$) responded *no*. Participants were given the option to “choose all that apply” regarding what their involvement looked like. These same participants were also asked how they were involved in the decision-making process: 20 individuals indicated that decision-making was a part of their professional role, 15 indicated being involved via email, 14 indicated being involved via focus groups, 11 indicated being involved via surveys, and seven indicated being involved by attending a town hall meeting.

Figure 7.4. *Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making: Northwest Territories*



The participants who indicated that they have not been involved in system-level decision-making were asked if they would like to be involved. Out of the 23 responses, 70% ($n = 16$) indicated that they would like to be involved in system-level decision-making. When asked how they would like to be involved (Figure 7.5), 15 responded: 80% ($n = 12$) suggested by focus group, 67% ($n = 10$) by survey, 53% ($n = 8$) by email, and 47% ($n = 7$) by town hall meeting.

Figure 7.5. *How Participants Who Have Not Been Involved in System-Level Decision-Making Would Like to Be: Northwest Territories*



Of the remaining 10 who were asked why they did not want to be involved, only seven responded. The response rate was too low to record and using that data could compromise participant confidentiality.

Community Representation in Decision-Making. When asked if they felt their school governance system represented their community, 61% ($n = 30$) of the 49 respondents said *yes*, while the remaining 39% ($n = 19$) said *no*. For those who did feel their school governance system represented their community (Table 7.2), 87% ($n = 26$) indicated that the school governance system is locally elected/appointed by their community, 43% ($n = 13$) indicated that their community has a relationship with the governing body, 33% ($n = 10$) indicated that they know their community has a voice in the decisions that are made, and 23% ($n = 7$) indicated there are clear systems for how their community can be involved.

Of the 18 participants who indicated that they did not feel their school governance system represented their community, 44% ($n = 8$) felt that their community does not have a voice in decision-making, 44% ($n = 8$) felt that their community has no relationship with the governing body, and 39% ($n = 7$) indicated that there are no clear systems for how their community can be involved. A smaller number of respondents indicated that they did not feel represented because there are no people that look like them in decision-making positions (22%, $n = 4$), and that the school governance system is not locally elected or appointed by their community (11%, $n = 2$). A common theme among those who wrote in answers was that not all voices were heard. Although the NWT primarily uses locally elected systems, due to low nominations for trustees, there were no elections for the two biggest school boards in the last election cycle.

Table 7.2. Responses on Community Representation in Decision-Making: Northwest Territories

School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents	School Governance System Does Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	8	The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	26
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	8	My community has a relationship with the governing body.	13
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	7	I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	10
Other.	6	There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	7
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	4	There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	4
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	2	Other.	2

The survey followed up with an open-ended question asking how they felt their school governance system could better represent their community. Twenty-five people chose to provide additional information. Although “community” was not defined in the survey question as either geographic or social, responses indicated that people understood the term both in relation to their geographic area and in relation to social community (i.e., the parent community). Participants felt that the boards of trustees should better reflect the cultural makeup of NWT schools, namely in terms of increased Indigenous representation, and that more ethnically and socioeconomically minoritized groups should be represented on boards of trustees.

Participants also felt that if boards of trustees increased consultation work around decision-making, that the system could better represent the community. Primarily, respondents felt that the communities they identified with should be more adequately consulted; for example, those who identified themselves as educators felt that educators should be consulted, and those who identified themselves as parents felt that parents should be consulted.

Lastly, respondents felt that the school governance system could better represent their community if there was greater public education on the work of the school governance system. More specifically, participants felt that there needed to be more public education on how public community members could have their concerns heard at governance meetings, more information made available about the roles and structures of the school system, and more two-way information to support the alignment of community and school system educational values.

For the 18 NWT participants who indicated that they do not feel that their governance system represents their community, they indicated that this is because of a lack of community members being interested in being part of the governance system. Participants shared that there was low interest in public involvement and that running as a trustee was inaccessible for many people due to other commitments. When there are fewer people running for trustee positions than there are seats on the board of trustees, there is no board election because all seats are acclaimed or left unfilled. Without an election, there is no opportunity for other members of the public to vote on who represents the community in system-level decision-making.

Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making. When asked about who they thought should be involved in school system-level decision-making (Figure 7.6), participants were provided a set of options and could choose all that applied or fill in options that were not listed. All 44 (100%) NWT participants who responded to this question said that *parents* should be involved, with *educators* closely following at 98% ($n = 43$). A large number of participants also indicated that there should be *Indigenous representatives* (86%, $n = 38$) and *Indigenous Elders* (77%, $n = 34$) involved in decision-making. Another 84% ($n = 37$) believed that *students* should be involved in the decision-making process. Approximately half of the participants (55%, $n = 24$) believed that the general public should be involved, and less than a third (32%, $n = 14$) indicated that *politicians* should be involved.

Figure 7.6. *Who Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Northwest Territories*



When asked how they think these groups should be involved (Table 7.3), 43 participants from NWT responded: 84% ($n = 36$) indicated that they would like to be consulted in decision-making, 80% ($n = 34$) stated they should be invited to attend decision-making meetings, 72% ($n = 31$) reported they should provide advisory services, a little over half 56% ($n = 24$) indicated that they should provide professional development to decision-makers, and 47% ($n = 20$) indicated that they should vote on decisions. Fourteen participants also indicated that they felt that politicians should be involved in decision-making. This contradicts the majority of participants in NWT and elsewhere who felt that politicians should not be involved in decision-making. Such a contradiction may indicate that participants have different understandings of who is included under the title “politician” and the role of politicians in governance.

Table 7.3. *How Selected Groups in Figure 7.7 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making: Northwest Territories*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	36
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	34
They should provide advisory services.	31
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	24
They should vote on decisions.	20
Other.	2

The survey also asked an open-ended question about the individuals and groups that participants thought should not be involved in school system-level decision-making. Thirty people indicated who they felt should not be involved, including one person who said no one should be excluded, and 28 people chose to explain why they felt certain individuals and groups should not be involved.

By a very large margin, the most frequently listed group that participants felt should not be included in decision-making was politicians. Participants felt politicians should not be involved because they are too far removed from the education system to be equipped to make informed decisions, and because they have personal agendas that do not benefit public education—namely, their desire to be reelected for political office. In addition to politicians, respondents felt people should not be included in decision-making if they are not directly connected to the public school system and/or if they are not members of the local community, and if they are not familiar with local Indigenous values and culture.

Special interest groups, including religious and faith-based groups, were also among those listed as who should not be included in decision-making. Participants saw these parties as not prioritizing the public good in their decision-making because of their specific special interest goals. Finally, three respondents—all connected to school systems—indicated that they felt only those elected as trustees should be included in decision-making and that all others should be excluded to maintain efficient and effective decision-making processes.

Would Anything Be Lost Without an Elected Board of Trustees. The survey asked, “Does your jurisdiction/community have a locally elected school/education board of trustees?” This question received 41 responses. Of these responses, 39 (95%) indicated *yes* and two (5%) indicated *no*. As described in the “Structure of School System Governance in the Northwest Territories” section, the NWT uses a combination of elected and appointed systems depending on the community. Further complicating this question is the fact that the two largest elected boards have not had public elections in recent years because all seats have been acclaimed. In these areas, participants may not consider the board of trustees to be locally elected.

Participants who indicated that their community does have a locally elected board of trustees were then asked if they thought anything would be lost if there were no elected board in their area (Table 7.4). Of the 36 responses to this question, 64% ($n = 23$) indicated *yes* while 36% ($n = 13$) responded *no*. All 23 participants who indicated that something would be lost also indicated what they thought would be lost. The majority (91%, $n = 21$) indicated that the avenue for local voice or local participation in system-level decision-making would be lost; another 74% ($n = 17$) indicated that recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost. Another 35% ($n = 8$) participants indicated that their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.

Table 7.4. *What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Northwest Territories*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	21
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	17
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	8
Other.	6
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	2

For the 13 who indicated that nothing would be lost if there were no elected board of trustees (Table 7.5), 12 provided a reason why they felt this way: that the trustees were on the board for their own personal interest/gain and not for the community (50%, $n = 6$), they do not believe the board of trustees works effectively or efficiently (58%, $n = 7$), and that the board of trustees is not responsible for meaningful decision-making (50%, $n = 6$).

Table 7.5. *Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners: Northwest Territories*

Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without Elected Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.	7
I believe trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community.	6
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making.	6
I believe the provincial/territorial government is better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education.	3
Other.	1

The participants who indicated that their community did not have a locally elected board of trustees were then asked if they would like to have a locally elected school board, and why or why not. However, due to the very low response rate, we do not report these findings as doing so could compromise participant confidentiality.

Voting Experience. Participants were asked if they had voted in the last school board election. Of the 36 responses to this question, 69% ($n = 25$) indicated *yes* and the remaining 31% ($n = 11$) answered *no* (Figure 7.7). When asked if there was a specific reason why they voted in the last school board election (Table 7.6), 92% ($n = 22$) respondents indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, 58% ($n = 14$) indicated that they knew where and how to vote, 50% ($n = 12$) were interested in school boards, and 42% ($n = 10$) indicated that they knew the candidates. We asked participants who did not vote why that was so; the common

themes under “Other” included being ineligible to vote, the candidate being acclaimed, or there was no election.

Figure 7.7. *Whether Participants Voted in Last School Board Election: Northwest Territories*

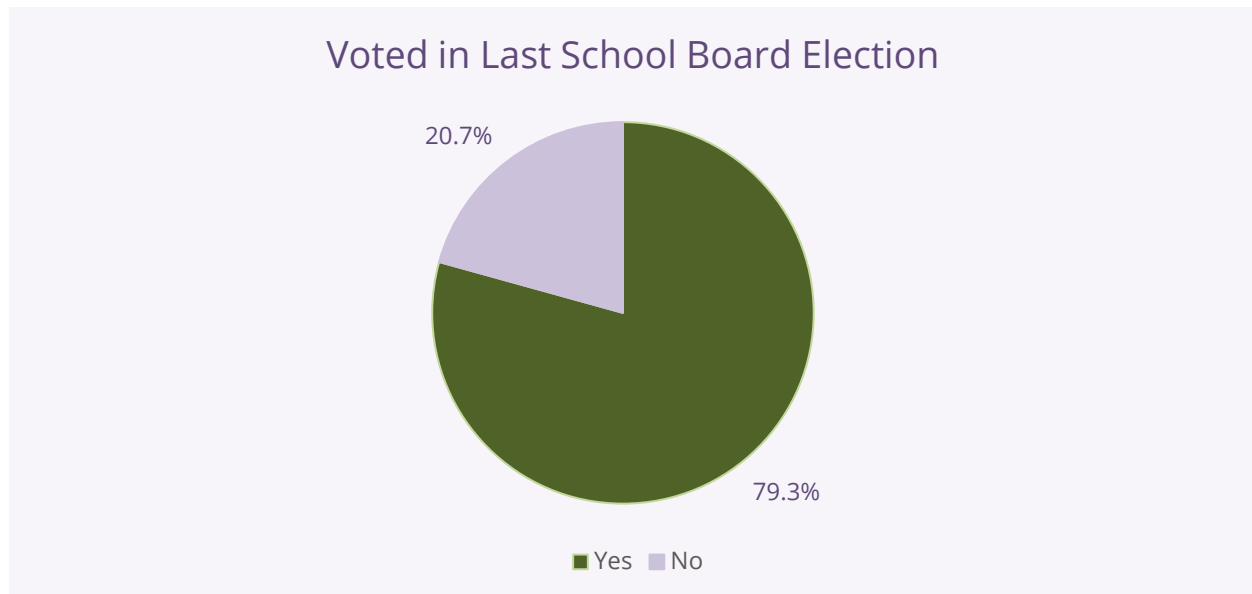


Table 7.6. *Why Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election: Northwest Territories*

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	22	Other.	10
I knew where and how to vote.	14	I didn't know the candidates.	1
I am interested in school boards.	12	I am not interested in school boards.	0
I knew the candidates.	10	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	0
Other.	5	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	0
I liked the candidates.	2	I didn't like the candidates.	0

Meaning of Democratic Voice. All participants in this study were asked the short-answer question, “What does ‘democratic voice’ mean to you?” Twenty NWT participants chose to respond to this question. They understood “democratic voice” as both a right and a responsibility. Those who viewed it as a right believed that community members have a fundamental right to have their voices heard in public decisions, whether it be through voting in elections or being consulted in decision-making. They also extended this understanding to include the right for the public to share their viewpoints on public matters with publicly elected officials in a respectful and informed manner.

On the other hand, those who viewed democratic voice as a responsibility believed that it involved both the responsibility of the public and the responsibility of those in governance decision-making positions. Some participants understood democratic voice to mean that the public has a responsibility to be informed about and participate in public decision-making, while others believed that those in governance systems have a responsibility to listen to the public and serve the community for the public good. They also believed that those involved in governance systems should initiate public participation in decision-making by offering clear avenues for participation.

Overall, NWT respondents viewed democratic voice as a complex concept that involves the rights and responsibilities of elected representatives and community members in ensuring that public input in decision-making is inclusive and informed.

Participants’ Final Thoughts. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and information they felt was relevant to the questionnaire that was not necessarily captured within the questions asked. Only 12 NWT respondents had additional information to share, and four of these responses were related to operations-specific issues rather than system-level decision-making. For example, participants shared their concerns about a lack of substitute teachers and support assistants (Grunwald, 2022) and concerns around the efficacy of the Northern education system for preparing students for post-secondary education or meaningful employment (Task Force on Northern Post-Secondary Education, 2022).

When it came to school system-level decision-making, participants who shared additional information reiterated two themes that were brought up in previous questions, including representation and misunderstandings of the role and structure of school system governance. In terms of representation, participants reiterated that Indigenous voices and teachers’ voices must be meaningfully included in decision-making. In terms of misunderstandings, participants felt that

the public misunderstands the role of boards of trustees as pertaining to operations rather than governance and misunderstands the limitations of what boards of trustees can actually do in comparison to what is the duty of the territorial government.

Finally, a few respondents chose to reiterate their frustration when it comes to the tension between the board of trustees (governance) and the administration (operations). One participant felt that administrators did not adequately respect contributions and oversight from trustees; one participant felt superintendents had too much power but that trustees were too poorly informed on educational matters to be able to effectively disrupt this power; and a third participant felt that when boards of trustees failed to challenge the administration with appropriate questions and critiques, the board became a pointless entity to “rubberstamp” the administration’s decisions.

Challenges to Democratic Participation

Participants reported challenges when participating or attempting to participate in decision-making. These challenges included (a) electing representatives amid the difficulty of finding nominees, (b) gaining public participation outside of voting, (c) disagreements about the roles of governance and administration, (d) broadening trustees’ perspectives on responsibility, and (e) challenges pertaining to confidentiality.

Electing Representatives. In the territory’s two largest school boards, Yellowknife District No. 1 and the Yellowknife Catholic Schools, school board elections had not been held because there were as many trustee nominations as there were seats to be filled (Williams, 2022). This meant that, although trustees were technically democratically elected, the public had no opportunity to participate in the election process outside of being a nominee. Participants repeatedly discussed the difficulty of encouraging people to run for the trusteeship. When asking participants with experience as a trustee why they wanted to run, at least two people said that they ran because they heard the school boards “needed people.” This means that some nominees may become trustees not because of a particular interest in education or governance, but rather because they wanted to help fill a need in the community. When asked why people may not be interested in running for the trusteeship, participants thought people may (a) not understand the role of the school board and the trustees, (b) not have the time to commit to the role, (c) not feel comfortable and/or safe on the school board, or (d) simply not be interested in volunteering their time to the school board.

Public Participation. The difficulty with the lack of public engagement extended beyond public participation as trustee nominees; it also included garnering participation in policy reviews or public meetings. Participants with significant experience (5+ years as a trustee) reported only seeing the public participate in a policy review or public meetings less than 10 times. When asked which communities are repeatedly missing from public discussions or events related to school system decision-making, participants named the following groups: Indigenous parents; parents experiencing addictions, poverty, or other trauma; and students. Participants felt that these parents may not feel comfortable engaging in public consultation because of the ongoing legacy of residential schools, negative experiences with schooling, not feeling comfortable or welcome in more formal spaces, and/or a lack of interest or time to participate.

Regarding the lack of student participation, many participants referenced the *Education Act* provision that allows student representation on the DEA (*Education Act*, Section 23), but explained that it was difficult to fill that role because students were not interested in participating. When asked why students may not be interested, participants surmised that students may not feel their participation is valued because they do not have voting authority and that students may be more interested in day-to-day operations decisions rather than higher level governance decisions.

Roles of Governance and Administration. Participants also reported significant disagreement on the role of trustees, especially in relation to the role of the superintendent. According to the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) *2017–2018 DEA and DEC Member Handbook*, trustees (called DEA/DEC members) are responsible for governance, while the superintendent, along with school principals, is responsible for administration. According to the *Handbook* (GNWT, 2017), governance includes setting the mission, visions, goals, and objectives; developing and reviewing policies and procedures; developing strategic plans; allocating resources; providing guidance and direction to the administration; and hiring, supervising, and evaluating the superintendent, among other things (p. 11). In contrast, administration includes implementing and carrying out the mission, vision, goals, and objectives, implementing the policies and procedures, implementing the strategic plan, and managing resources, among other things (p. 11). Despite this description, participants in this study showed disagreement on which responsibilities should involve administration, which should involve governance, and which should involve both administration and governance. Although some participants said that having very clear boundaries on each role with

very little overlap is integral to a good system of governance, others felt that some degree of overlap, where governance included a more hands-on approach to administrative tasks, would allow for more informed governance decision-making. Participants also described the difficulty in communicating the distinct roles to the public.

Broadening Perspectives on Responsibility. Participants described going through a process of needing to broaden their perspective on responsibility from the family or the school level to a system-level perspective. Participants often shared that in the early stages of their trusteeship (i.e., considering running for nomination and in the first meetings of their first term), they viewed their responsibility as specific to a narrow population (e.g., their child, their child's school, or their community interest group). Participants quickly learned that, as a trustee, they were responsible for the whole board and thus had to change their perspective. In other words, participants described the challenges that trustees faced in learning the needs of the whole school district for which they were now responsible, in contrast to having previously been only aware of the needs of a narrower population. As a fictionalized example (to protect confidentiality), a trustee may come into the trustee role with the intention to allocate increased funding to extracurricular programming in one school, but upon learning the trustee role and the challenges facing the whole board, they may see that other schools in the board could use those funds to update poorly functioning bathroom facilities. Many trustee participants reported this change in conceptualizing responsibility as a significant learning curve. As well, participants shared that explaining this change in perspective was difficult to make clear to the public. Explaining decision-making processes to the public is further complicated by the fact that board members are responsible for "speaking with one voice" (GNWT, 2017, p. 12), meaning that members are expected to openly support and respect the majority decision, even if it contrasts with their individual decision.

Protecting Confidentiality. There were also discrepancies in participants' perceptions of the importance of confidentiality. Although some participants felt that the nature of working in a small community meant that all meetings ought to be fully open to the public so that the school board was operating with full transparency, other participants felt that the school board ought to practice more strict privacy with more closed meetings to protect the confidentiality of their members as well as other community members. According to the *Handbook* (GNWT, 2017) and the *Education Act* (Section 111.4), "Meetings, or parts of meetings, may be closed to the public only if sensitive issues, such as personnel, legal,

financial/budgetary, are being discussed. (These meetings are called in-camera meetings)” (p. 20). Although the policy does indicate that the decision to close the meeting must be supported by two thirds of the members at the meeting, participants reported that the differing understandings of what information is considered sensitive within the local context led to disagreements and a failure to collaborate between administration and governance. This failure to collaborate sometimes resulted in a temporary impasse in decision-making, leading to procedural inefficiency.

Participant Strategies for Participating in System-Level Decision-Making

Participants also described multiple strategies they used to support democratic participation in decision-making, and ideas for ways to improve democratic participation in decision-making. Overall, participants were supportive of continuing school system governance using the existing systems of democratically elected and appointed representatives serving on DEAs, DEC's, and the TCSA. When asked about what would be lost if the elected systems were dissolved and replaced with regional systems akin to the provincial school system governance in other provinces, participants shared that they felt the school system's ability to respond to the needs of the local community would be lost. At the same time, participants recognized that ensuring the voices of the community are heard will require systemic changes to increase public participation in decision-making. In this regard, participants reported many real and proposed strategies for supporting public participation in decision-making, including (a) deformatizing opportunities for public participation, (b) embracing more Indigenous ways of governing, and (c) increasing public understanding of school boards' responsibility. No solutions were offered to the challenges around differing understandings of the levels of confidentiality required by the DEA/DEC's.

Deformatizing Processes. Multiple participants described the formality of meetings and events as a barrier to participation, and suggested ways to deformatize the meetings. Participants suggested that meetings could be deformatized by offering food and beverages and by embracing multiple ways of communicating rather than relying on Robert's Rules. According to the *DEA/DEC Handbook*, education bodies use [Robert's Rules of Order](#) to conduct their meetings. Robert's Rules of Order is a meeting organization system with strict rules on how meetings should be conducted, including the use of specific phrasing, who is able to speak at any given time, and how items can be added, removed, or changed on the meeting agenda. The intention of using Robert's Rules is to conduct “fair and

orderly meetings,” with an emphasis on efficiency. Robert’s Rules are widely used in board meetings in diverse organizations from community clubs to political organizations. Critics of Robert’s Rules argue that its dependency on members knowing the correct, and very strict, language in order to participate discourages many communities from participating (Parker, 2019; Susskind & Cruikshank, 2006). Although some participants described learning Robert’s Rules as a factor in trustees’ learning curve, at least one participant described nonadherence to Robert’s Rules as a factor in the communication challenges one education body was facing.

In line with deformatizing the processes, participants had suggestions for making the meeting space more comfortable by centring the focus of the meeting on an activity (e.g., crafting). The activity could then be used to facilitate community members speaking with administrators and trustees about education. Participants also suggested that making the school or meeting space a community space that was used for other events could create positive associations between the public and the physical space. Specifically regarding increasing student involvement, participants suggested hosting the school board meeting at the school during the lunch hour to create fewer barriers to student participation.

Indigenizing Governance. Participants suggested ways the governing and decision-making processes in public education could change to create an environment that is more conducive to engaging Indigenous communities. Suggested strategies included: (a) increasing collaboration with community members and Elders; (b) creating an environment that felt safe for Indigenous trustees; and (c) breaking down the siloed nature of decision-making to create a more holistic system. When asked how Indigenous communities are involved in decision-making, participants shared the many ways the NWT was working to Indigenize education at the school level with language programs, Indigenous learning, and visiting Elders; however, participants had less to share when it came to system-level involvement. Many participants shared that their board consulted with Indigenous community members and Elders on some decisions, but most participants also suggested that involvement ought to be significantly increased. In boards where there were no Indigenous trustees, participants shared that they wished there were Indigenous nominees. But they were adamant that there should not be an appointed Indigenous seat because it could be seen as tokenizing⁴ the

⁴ Tokenizing or tokenism refers to the practice where members of marginalized communities are included in a system in a performative way, wherein the marginalized person(s) becomes a representation of the system’s equity or diversity but is not meaningfully included for their contributions outside of their perceived identity. Moreover,

appointed individual. Participants in this study felt that decision-making should involve Indigenous communities and representatives in ways that were meaningfully inclusive.

Regarding the lack of Indigenous representatives on some boards of trustees, some non-Indigenous participants shared that they felt the board environment may not feel like a safe space for some Indigenous communities; however, these trustees were hesitant to explain these feelings further. These participants offered only very broad solutions to this challenge in saying that the board of trustees had to create an environment that feels safer for Indigenous community members. Creating a governance environment that promotes feelings of safety for Indigenous community members may involve increasing the number of Indigenous members involved in governance, implementing professional development related to understanding cultural responsiveness, and using open communication practices where discussion and questioning are welcomed (Nagler, 2022).

Some participants suggested ways that the siloed nature of school system governance could be changed to create a system where the public could more easily participate. This more holistic organization is already in process in the Tłıchǫ region where the Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency (TCSA) delivers health and education services through one agency, governed by the TCSA board (Tłıchǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, 2017a). As mentioned earlier, although TCSA is part of the Tłıchǫ government, they presently choose to operate using the GNWT education system (Tłıchǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, 2017a). According to some participants, this means that health and education services may not currently be as integrated as intended. In other boards, some participants suggested that the siloing of governance and operations created a system that was not intuitive for community members; they suggested that these responsibilities be less separated to decrease the siloing of the governance structure.

Increasing Public Understanding. Most participants felt that the public was not adequately informed about why they should be involved in school system-level decision-making. Participants felt that low public participation in policy consultation, trustee nominations, town halls, or other outreach was not due to lack of awareness on how to participate, but rather a lack of interest in participating that came from not understanding the importance of being involved. Participants suggested that public understanding on system-level education bodies'

when a person is tokenized, they inadvertently become assumed representatives of the entirety of that social community whom they are made to represent (Kanter, 1977).

responsibilities should be increased overall, with specific public education on how these system-level bodies can influence school budget allocations and school policies.

Multicase Data: All Jurisdictions

Multicase Data: All Jurisdictions

In this section, we present the aggregated findings from all six jurisdictions, before discussing some of the thematic trends across the data.

During the process of selecting the jurisdictions, conducting the interjurisdictional scan, and collecting the data, it became clear that each site is irreducibly unique. Unlike some other nations, education in Canada is largely decentralized; rather than a national school system, each province and territory has its own school systems (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Provincial school systems are funded by the provincial governments, while territorial education is federally funded but territorially controlled. There are also First Nations on-reserve school systems (Government of Canada, 2022b) that are federally funded but managed, controlled, and administered by and for the local First Nation and/or organizations designated by the local First Nation. In this study, we only included a sample of provincially and territorially funded public school systems.

In looking at system-level decision-making structures and processes among the six jurisdictions, we observed that democratic voice was understood and enacted in different ways. For example, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, have systems that include locally elected representatives who serve on elected boards. Québec and Nova Scotia each host two different systems. Québec's English school system has locally elected representatives, while Québec's French system has school service centres that are governed by designated boards of directors. Inversely, Nova Scotia's French system has locally elected representatives, while the English system is centralized to the provincial government through regional centres for education. Finally, the Northwest Territories hosts a combination of locally elected boards, regional boards composed of designates from smaller locally elected boards, and other locally developed organizational structures such as the Tłıchǵ Community Services Agency, which delivers child and family services and education and health services and is governed through a board of representatives appointed by the communities served.

What constitutes "public education" differs among jurisdictions. Under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, all provinces and territories must provide education in both English and French, so all provinces and territories have English and French systems. However, in Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, publicly funded education also includes Catholic education. Lastly, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the NWT also includes the Tłıchǵ Community

Services Agency (TCSA), a First Nations government agency, as a separate public school system that uses some public services.

Findings

In this section, we first present the snapshot of the aggregated public consultation data combined with insights from the interview and focus group data, before discussing the following thematic trends: (a) who participated in the study, (b) their motivations for participating, and (c) their perceptions of the role of education. We conclude the section by discussing how democratic voice is affected by the loss of elected school boards.

Snapshot from the Public Consultation

In this section, we provide a snapshot of responses from the public consultation data. Unlike the previous snapshot sections, we also include insights from the interview and focus group data where relevant alongside the aggregated questionnaire data. We do not make any claims that these findings represent the larger Canadian population, but rather what participants who responded think and know about system-level decision-making in public education.

Involvement in Decision-Making. When it came to perceptions of how the public could be involved in decision-making, the data from the interviews and focus groups did not align with the data from the public consultation. In interviews and focus groups, which were conducted with people closer to decision-making, participants described multiple ways that the public could be involved. According to these participants (who were mainly past and present trustees), parents who did participate often got involved because they were dissatisfied with an element of their child's education, which possibly stemmed from a lack of financial, educational, or physical resources at the school. These participants indicated that parents can and do participate via parent groups at the school level, and that although participating in school-level advisory councils does not constitute involvement in system-level decision-making, these councils sometimes present their concerns to boards of trustees. In some cases, trustees may also sit in on parent advisory council meetings to hear parents' voices and concerns directly.

However, this perception of parental involvement in decision-making contradicts what parents reported in the public consultation. Although there was a high level of respondents in the public consultation who identified as a parent, few were involved in any form of parent group associated with public education. It is worth

noting that there are advisory councils in Nova Scotia (school advisory councils), British Columbia and Manitoba (parent advisory councils), Saskatchewan (school community councils), and Québec (parent committees); the low level of parental engagement could be due to several factors, including parents not knowing how to be involved, parents not having time, or parents finding the avenues to participation to be inaccessible.

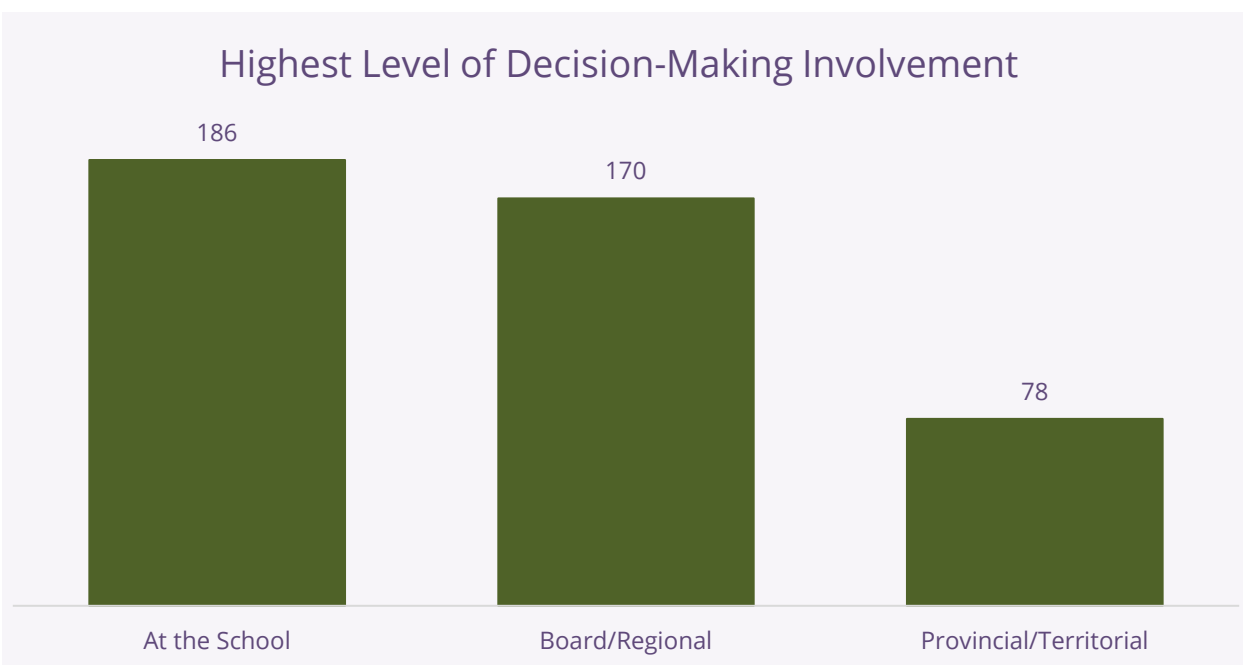
A comparison of the data sources shows that participants had assumptions about the level of involvement that parents have in decision-making. Those individuals who are already closely involved in school system-level decision-making through their professional role or personal interest (i.e., parents of children with special educational needs) assume that parents are—or can be, if interested—involved and thus are using this avenue to exercise their democratic voice. According to some participants in the public consultation, however, this is not the case; for many parents, the avenues for participating in decision-making were perceived as inaccessible, ineffective, or undesirable. Participants also described being involved in public education through involvement in school-level town halls or through providing feedback when boards of trustees requested public consultation. The intention behind these school-level town halls appears to be for trustees to hear from those directly affected by system-level decision-making in more accessible and less formal ways.

Public consultation participants also reported that stakeholders had opportunities to have their voices heard by providing feedback in public forums. Participants expressed that different districts and boards sought different levels of proactive engagement from stakeholders, with some boards actively seeking public consultation through town hall-style meetings, school and community visits, focus groups, and surveys. In contrast, other boards were described as showing little to no drive to obtain stakeholder feedback. In these districts, engagement with stakeholders was often described as non-transparent, with stakeholders who wanted to provide feedback having to navigate difficult-to-use websites and other public facing platforms to find opportunities for engagement.

Out of all questionnaire participants who were asked if they had been involved in system-level decision-making, 47% ($n = 347$) indicated that they had been involved, while 53% ($n = 389$) indicated that they had not been involved. Those who indicated they had been involved were then asked where within the education system they had been involved in decision-making; 331 responded. As indicated in Figure 8.1, participants responded that they were mainly involved at the school level (56%, $n = 186$) and the board or regional level (51%; $n = 170$). A smaller number of people,

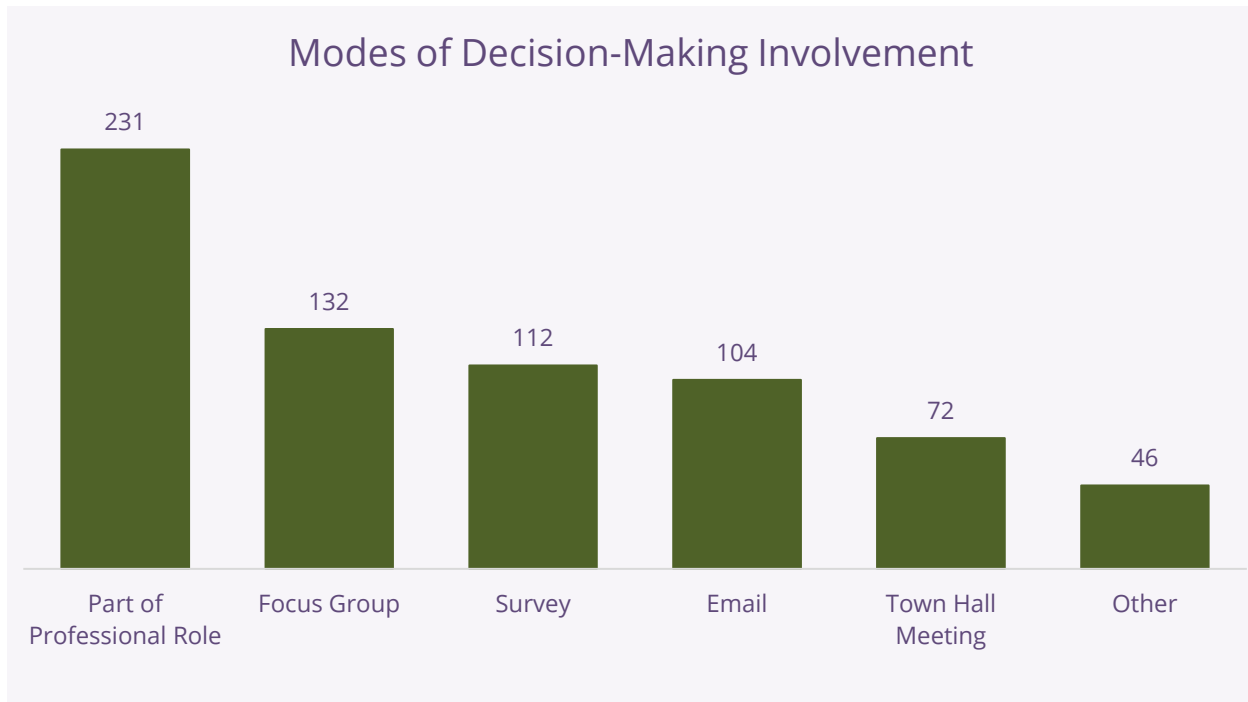
24% ($n = 78$) indicated they were involved at the provincial or territorial level. This is unsurprising, given that there is a higher level of participation at the local level compared to system or board level. This is the case for two reasons: First, school-level systems have been intentionally organized to facilitate increased parental involvement in part because of the belief that their involvement in their child's education leads to greater student success (Baker et al., 2016; Lara & Saracostti, 2019; McDowell, Jack, & Compton, 2018). Second, there appears to be a trend that the further away geographically and structurally the decision-making takes place, the less public involvement there is (Willumsen, 2018).

Figure 8.1. *Highest Level of Decision-Making Involvement for Questionnaire Participants*



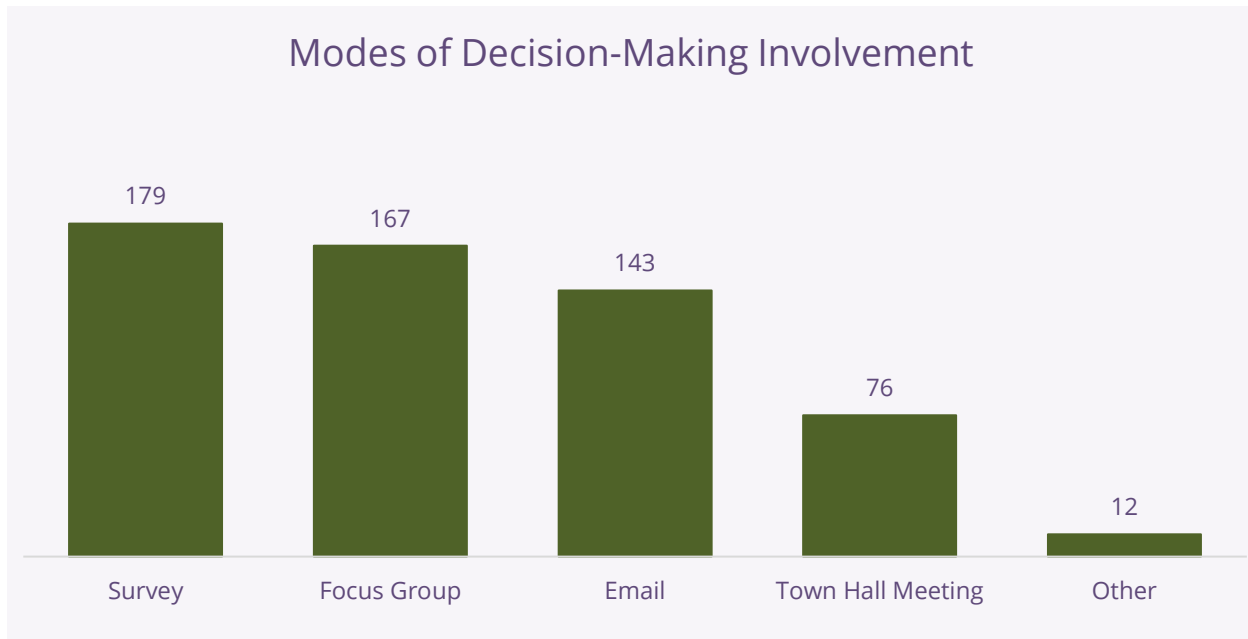
As shown in Figure 8.2, of the 328 overall responses to the question about how participants were involved in the school system-level decision-making, only 22% ($n = 72$) indicated they were involved in town hall meetings; this may indicate a misalignment between what are perceived as effective avenues for engaging local democratic voice and how the local community actually wants to participate. While interview and focus group participants who had more insider knowledge of decision-making (e.g., trustees, superintendents, association leaders) discussed town halls as an effective strategy for engaging local democratic voice, the general public who participated in the public consultation felt that town halls are not a well-used avenue for exercising their local democratic voice.

Figure 8.2. *How Questionnaire Participants Have Been Involved in System-Level Decision-Making*



Generally speaking, participants in this study want to be involved in system-level decision-making and to have avenues to exercise their democratic voice. In the public consultation data, those who indicated that they were not involved in system-level decision-making were then asked whether or not they would like to be involved. Of the 351 who responded, a little over two thirds (69%, $n = 243$) indicated that they would like to be involved and a little under one third (31%, $n = 108$) said they would not like to be involved. Overall, those wishing to be involved (Figure 8.3) indicated they would like to be involved through surveys (71%, $n = 179$), focus groups (66%, $n = 167$), email (56%, $n = 143$), and town halls (35%, $n = 76$).

Figure 8.3. *How Questionnaire Participants Who Have Not Been Involved in System-Level Decision-Making Would Like to Be*



Of the 108 public consultation participants who said they did not want to be involved in system-level decision-making, 100 indicated why they did not want to be involved (Table 8.1). Just over one quarter (26%, $n = 26$) felt they did not have enough time to be involved, one quarter indicated they did not know enough about the topic (25%, $n = 25$), and one fifth were simply not interested in being involved (20%, $n = 20$). Moreover, one third (32%, $n = 32$), stated that they did not feel their involvement would make a difference in decision-making. Sixteen participants selected "Other," and some provided written responses; we identified two main themes in these responses: (a) they felt their age/stage in life was not conducive to contributing and (b) that people with a particular job, role, or expertise should be involved.

Table 8.1. Responses from Questionnaire Participants on Why They Did Not Want to Be Involved in School System-Level Decision-Making

Reasons Why Participants Did Not Want to Be Involved	# of Respondents
I don't feel my involvement will make a difference in decision-making.	32
I don't have time to be involved.	26
I don't know enough about the topic.	25
I don't feel my voice will be heard.	22
I am simply not interested in being involved.	19
Other.	16
I don't see the importance of being involved.	0

Community Representation. Public consultation participants were asked if they felt their school governance system (e.g., school board of trustees, school service centre, regional centre for education, DEA/DEC) represented their community. Responses were almost evenly divided into *yes* (48%, $n = 322$) and *no* (52%, $n = 350$). Those who answered *yes*, they did feel represented, were asked in what ways they feel their school governance system represents their community; 304 responded. Table 8.2 presents these responses.

Table 8.2. *Questionnaire Responses on Why School Governance System Represents the Community*

Reasons School Governance System Represents Community	# of Respondents
The school governance system is locally elected/appointed by my community.	267
I know that my community has a voice in the decisions that are made.	127
There are clear systems for how my community can be involved.	115
My community has a relationship with the governing body.	114
There are people who look like me in decision-making positions.	109
Other.	18

The majority (88%, $n = 267$) of respondents indicated that their school governance system represents their community because it is locally elected/appointed by their community and just under half indicated that they know that their community has a voice in the decisions that are made (42%, $n = 127$). As well, 38% ($n = 115$) felt there were clear systems for how their community can be involved and 38%⁵ ($n = 114$) responded that their community has a relationship with the governing body. A similar number of respondents (36%, $n = 109$) felt that there are people who look like them in decision-making positions.

For those who answered *no* (52%, $n = 350$) (Table 8.3), the survey inquired about the ways they felt their school governance system does not represent their community; 290 responded. Of these, 58% ($n = 169$) indicated that they do not feel represented because they know their community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made at the system level. Another 44% ($n = 128$) indicated that there are no clear systems for how their community can be involved, 41% ($n = 118$) felt their community has no relationship with the governing body, and 24% ($n = 70$) indicated that there are no people who look like them in decision-making positions. Fifty-three participants selected “Other,” and some provided written responses; we identified two themes in these responses: (a) not all voices are heard in decision-making and (b) the provincial/territorial government makes all the decisions.

⁵ Percentages are the same due to rounding.

Table 8.3. Questionnaire Responses on Why School Governance System Does Not Represent the Community

Reasons School Governance System Does Not Represent Community	# of Respondents
I know that my community does not have a voice in the decisions that are made.	169
There are no clear systems for how my community can be involved.	128
My community has no relationship with the governing body.	118
There are no people who look like me in decision-making positions.	70
Other.	53
The school governance system is not locally elected/appointed by my community.	40

Who Should or Should Not Be Involved. Public consultation participants were asked who they thought should be involved in system-level decision-making (Figure 8.4). The interview sample demonstrated a strong lean toward parents being decision-makers at the system level and indicated that students should be more involved. For questionnaire participants who responded ($n = 539$), the top three most selected choices were *educators* at 89% ($n = 478$), *parents* at 88% ($n = 474$), and *students* at 74% ($n = 401$). A large number of questionnaire participants indicated that *community representatives* (68%, $n = 366$) should be involved. Slightly under one half 44% ($n = 238$) felt that the *general public* should be involved in system-level decision-making, and one fifth ($n = 107$) indicated that *politicians* should be involved.

Figure 8.4. *Who Questionnaire Participants Believe Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making*



Moreover, 63% ($n = 337$) indicated that *Indigenous representatives* should be involved and another 45% ($n = 240$) felt *Indigenous Elders* should be involved. In interviews and focus groups, some participants also emphasized the need for those seeking to recruit more Indigenous involvement in decision-making to take the initiative to go into Indigenous communities and discuss participation, rather than keeping the onus on Indigenous community members to take the first step in coming to the school board of trustees meetings.

A substantial number of questionnaire participants ($n = 535$) provided input on how they thought people or groups should be involved in system-level decision-making (Table 8.4). Less than half (47%, $n = 249$) indicated that the selected groups should be involved by being able to vote on decisions (rather than voting to elect a trustee). More participants indicated that some selected groups should be involved through

processes such as being consulted on decisions (83%, $n = 442$), being invited to attend decision-making meetings (78%, $n = 417$), being asked to provide advisory services (69%, $n = 366$), and by providing professional development to decision-makers (42%, $n = 226$).

Table 8.4. *How Selected Groups in Figure 8.3 Should Be Involved in System-Level Decision-Making*

Methods of Involvement for Selected Groups	# of Respondents
They should be consulted on decisions.	442
They should be invited to attend decision-making meetings.	417
They should provide advisory services.	366
They should vote on decisions.	249
They should provide professional development to decision-makers.	226
Other.	31

Who Should Not Be Involved. Public consultation participants identified several groups that they felt should not be involved in system-level decision-making. Some of these individuals also provided reasons for their suggestions. In all jurisdictions, politicians were most frequently listed as the stakeholder group that should not be involved in system-level decision-making. This indicates that, despite most governance systems using publicly elected boards of trustees, these trustees were not seen as politicians by the respondents in this public consultation. According to the definition of a politician as “one who is professionally involved in politics as the holder of or a candidate for an elected office” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., 2b), elected trustees are politicians, but not considered politicians associated with provincial, territorial, or federal elections. Some participants, including trustees and educators, were concerned about inconsistency in the public education system when there is a change in the ruling political party. Some parents responded that special groups (e.g., religious, political), and business organizations should not be involved in school system decision-making because these groups were perceived as being more concerned about their agendas than students’ interests. In some cases, parent respondents were concerned that some of these groups (i.e., business organizations and religious groups) may lack the

knowledge required to make informed education-related decisions and thus should not be involved in decision-making.

Many participants from across stakeholder groups felt that anyone not directly connected to the education system as either a parent or an educator should not be involved in decision-making because they were perceived as not having the relevant knowledge base required to make informed decisions. At times, participant responses were conflicted: some educators responded that parents should not be involved in system-level decision-making because they are more concerned about their children rather than the whole community, while some parents responded that people who do not have children in the school system should not be involved because they are more concerned about their own gains.

What Would Be Lost If There Were No Elected Boards of Trustees? In our public consultation, we asked participants if their jurisdiction or community has a locally elected school or education board of trustees; of the 521 participants who responded, 80% ($n = 416$) indicated *yes*, while 20% ($n = 105$) indicated *no*. No one indicated they did not know.

For those who indicated that they have boards of trustees, we asked participants if they thought anything would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners in their area. Of the 386 who responded, 74% ($n = 287$) indicated that, *yes*, something would be lost if there were no elected school board of trustees/commissioners, and 26% ($n = 99$) did not think anything would be lost if there were no board of trustees. Questionnaire participants were then asked the follow-up question, “What would be lost without an elected school board of trustees/commissioners?” The question received 283 responses overall, and these are presented in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5. *Questionnaire Responses on What Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners*

Lost Element	# of Respondents
The avenue for local voice/local participation in school system-level decision-making would be lost.	257
Recognition for local differences and locally specific needs would be lost.	243
My ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost.	155
The opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost.	97
Other.	47

When asked what would be lost, 91% ($n = 257$) of participants indicated that an avenue for local voice or local participation in school system decision-making would be lost, while 86% ($n = 243$) of respondents indicated that recognition of local differences and locally specific needs would be lost. Another 55% ($n = 155$) indicated that their ability to have a say in decision-making would be lost. A little over one third (34%, $n = 97$) indicated that an opportunity for people to gain experience in local politics would be lost. Forty-seven participants selected “Other,” and some included written responses; we identified three main themes in these responses: (a) there would be a loss of representation/understanding, (b) there would be a loss of democratic process, and (c) there would be concerns associated with accountability and oversight. It should be noted that a small number of interview participants and questionnaire respondents believed that boards of trustees in public education were one tool or mechanism to support other political processes within Canadian democracy; for example, a few felt that some individuals pursuing political careers at the provincial, territorial, and/or federal levels began these pursuits by participating as a school board trustee.

The 99 participants who indicated that nothing would be lost if there were no elected board of trustees/commissioners were asked why they felt this way; 93 responded. These responses are in Table 8.6. Almost three quarters (71%, $n = 66$), indicated that they believed that trustees were on the board for their own personal interests or gain and not for the community. Another 68% ($n = 63$) indicated that they did not believe the board of trustees or commissioners works effectively or

efficiently, while two thirds of respondents did not believe the board of trustees or commissioners was responsible for meaningful decision-making at the system level. Just under a third (29%, $n = 27$) believed that the provincial or territorial government was better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education. Fifteen participants selected "Other," and some provided written responses; the main theme we identified in these responses was that participants felt the present boards of trustees/commissions did not represent the interests of current parents and communities.

Table 8.6. *Questionnaire Responses on Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners*

Reasons Why Nothing Would Be Lost Without Elected Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I believe trustees are on the board for their personal interest/gain, not for the community.	66
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners works effectively/efficiently.	63
I don't believe the board of trustees/commissioners is responsible for meaningful decision-making.	57
I believe the provincial/territorial government is better suited to, or capable of, taking over public education.	27
Other.	15

Of the small number of participants who indicated they do not have boards of trustees in their jurisdiction ($n = 49$), 40 responded to the question asking if they would like to have a locally elected school board of trustees. Of these, 31 indicated *yes* while only nine indicated *no*, and no one selected, "I don't know." The nine responses that were not in favour of reinstating boards may come from the larger movement to abolish boards of trustees over the past 10 years. Similarly, a small number of interview participants also indicated they either did not want boards of trustees reinstated, or that they would support a more centralized system, in their respective jurisdiction.

Those respondents who indicated that they wanted a locally elected board of trustees were asked why. Thirty participants responded to this question and were

able to select the responses that applied to them (Table 8.7). Respondents indicated that they thought boards of trustees would help mitigate the influence of political parties on school board decision-making at the provincial level (87%, $n = 26$). Many felt that their voice is better heard when they can vote for a board of trustees (70%, $n = 21$). Some felt they could have a better connection to system-level decision-making if there were locally elected boards of trustees (67%, $n = 20$). A few felt that having a locally elected board of trustees would allow them to have a greater say in system-level decision-making (43%, $n = 13$).

Table 8.7. *Why Questionnaire Participants Would Like to Have an Elected School Board of Trustees/Commissioners*

Reasons for Desiring a Board of Trustees/Commissioners	# of Respondents
I am concerned about the influence of political parties on school decision-making at the provincial/territorial level.	26
I feel my voice is better heard when I can vote for the board of trustees.	21
I feel I have a better connection to decision-making.	20
I would like to have a greater say in decision-making.	13
I would like to be a trustee one day.	4
Other.	3

Very few participants chose to explain why they did not want to have a locally elected board of trustees. The few who did respond indicated that they did not feel that voting for a board of trustees would enable them to have a voice or that their voice would be heard ($n = 5$), and two people did not feel it would improve their connection to system-level decision-making.

Voting Experience. For most participants in regions that have trustee elections, voting was one of the main ways they exercised their democratic voice. While those in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Anglophone Quebec, Francophone Nova Scotia, and parts of the Northwest Territories retained their right to vote, those in Francophone Québec and Anglophone Nova Scotia did not. Voting history was readily discussed in interviews and focus groups; as well, we explicitly asked public consultation participants who indicated that they had a

locally elected board of trustees whether or not they had voted in the last school board election. Of the 369 who responded to this question, 73% ($n = 268$) indicated *yes* while 27% ($n = 101$) indicated they did not vote in the last school board elections. The 306 who said *yes* were asked if there was any specific reason(s) why they had voted in the last school board trustee elections, 93% ($n = 286$) indicated that they wanted to have a say in who was elected, 59% ($n = 180$), indicated that they are interested in school boards, 53% ($n = 161$) indicated they knew where and how to vote, and 33% ($n = 100$) indicated that they knew the candidate (Table 8.8). Common themes found in the “Other” responses included they themselves ran in the election, they wanted change, they used the voting process as a prevention strategy, and they felt it was their democratic responsibility/civic duty to vote. For those that did not vote, we asked them if there were any specific reason(s) why they did not vote in the last school board election; 72 responded. For this group of respondents, 21% ($n = 15$) indicated that they did not know the candidates, while 21% ($n = 15$) indicated that they did not know when the election was and/or how to vote. The common themes found in the write-in option were that the candidate was acclaimed, there were accessibility issues, the participant was ineligible to vote, or there was no election.

Table 8.8. *Why Questionnaire Participants Did or Did Not Vote in the Last School Board Election*

Reasons Why They Voted	# of Respondents	Reasons Why They Did Not Vote	# of Respondents
I wanted to have a say in who was elected.	286	Other.	44
I am interested in school boards.	180	I didn't know the candidates.	15
I knew where and how to vote.	161	I didn't know when the election was/how to vote.	15
I knew the candidates.	100	I am not interested in school boards.	5
I liked the candidates.	51	I didn't like the candidates.	3
Other.	50	I wasn't sure what the election was for.	2

How Participants Understood Democratic Voice. There are academic fields of study that explore the idea of democracy from various angles, including philosophy (e.g., Rorty, 1991), politics (e.g., Dahl, 1998), digital media (e.g., Van Dijk, 2012), education (e.g., Samuelsson, 2016), and governance (e.g., Pierre, 2000). In this study, the notion of democratic voice implied that members of the public are able to participate in system-level decision-making to varying extents. For some, this participation may begin and end at voting for members of elected boards of trustees; for others, this participation could include advocating for certain decisions at board of trustees meetings or running for a trustee position. In jurisdictions without boards of trustees, this participation could include other means of advocacy, such as public demonstrations in relation to school system-level decisions (e.g., letter writing campaigns). Given that the Canadian School Boards Association's request for research included the notion of democratic voice, the survey asked participants how they understood the concept. Our research team analyzed the interview and focus group data to discern participant understandings, and the public consultation questionnaire asked all respondents, "What does "democratic voice" mean to you?" as an open-ended question.

According to our data, participants' knowledge about the phenomenon of democratic voice in system-level decision-making existed on a continuum from those closest to the decision-making processes to those furthest away from these processes. This continuum was contingent on participants' general level of interest in public education, the positions they held within public education, and the processes in place to involve the public in decision-making.

In jurisdictions where boards of trustees still operate (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec's English system, Nova Scotia's French system, and the Northwest Territories), experienced trustees past and present, as well as superintendents, were able to describe their experiences exercising democratic voice in system-level decision-making in great detail. However, the further removed from the formalized procedures for system-level decision-making an individual was, or the less experience they had working within the system, the less knowledge they possessed about how decision-making processes worked and how they could be involved at that level of public education (or if they could even be involved at the system level), and the more likely they were to misunderstand the decision-making processes. As well, the open-ended comments indicated that many participants misunderstood the roles of trustees and boards of trustees: Many concentrated on issues that were not under the purview of system-level decision-makers, such as curriculum *content*, which is developed at the government level, whereas boards of

trustees would be involved in deciding how the curriculum is *delivered* in the school system.

Many participants understood democratic voice as Canadian citizens' right to vote in public elections and the right to run in public elections. Similarly, many participants understood democratic voice as the right to be—or to have—a representative of their community involved in system-level decision-making. These participants felt it was imperative to have their local community's voice be involved through a representative. Although in most cases this representative was understood to be a democratically elected school board trustee, it was at other times understood to be a representative of a social or ethnoracial community, such as a parent representative or Indigenous representative.

Thematic Trends Across the Data

In this section, we present some of the thematic trends that emerged from our analysis of the multicase data. These themes are organized in a parallel structure to the aggregated findings presented in the previous section: (a) who participated in this study, (b) participants' motivations for participating in this study, (c) participants' perceptions of the purpose of education, and (d) how democratic voice is affected by the loss of elected school boards.

Who Participated in this Study

This report is informed by the voices of approximately 850 Canadians from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories who participated in the online public consultation questionnaire, focus groups, or interviews. Our research team made a targeted effort to engage participants from diverse demographic and professional communities. These participants included parents, trustees, educators, school system leaders, special interest group advocates, politicians, and community members.

With the exception of the Northwest Territories, our study participants were generally from an older age group. This aligns with the statistical data that shows the NWT has the second youngest median age, next to Nunavut (Statista Research Department, 2022). Our participants were also predominantly female, which is in line with research that shows more women than men are involved in Canadian public education (Turcott, 2011). According to the demographic information participants cumulatively shared, respondents were predominantly White. Although this does not capture the general diversity of the Canadian population,

the study's demographic composition is unsurprising as, despite efforts to diversify the workforce, those in the education field are still predominantly White (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020; Ryan et al., 2009).

We began this report by stating our commitment to the truth and reconciliation process. In each jurisdiction, through the interviews, focus groups and public consultation, we tried to capture Indigenous peoples' level of involvement, attitudes, and beliefs associated with system-level decision-making. We also tried to capture the efforts, attitudes, and beliefs of non-Indigenous people in supporting the inclusion of Indigenous voices in system-level decision-making. Very few participants in the interviews or focus groups disclosed their ethnicity or race and therefore we cannot comment on how many of our participants were Indigenous. We do know that at least 44 of the public questionnaire respondents self-identified as Indigenous, Métis, and/or First Nations.

Depending on the jurisdiction, interview and focus group participants were asked context-specific questions about Indigenous peoples' involvement in system-level decision-making. For example, in British Columbia, participants were asked about their familiarity with the First Nations Education Steering Committee and the BC Tripartite Agreement, while Manitoba participants were asked about how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are involved in public education more broadly. Responses based on jurisdiction varied in level of detail. Those who did respond portrayed the level of involvement of Indigenous communities in system-level decision-making as ranging from very minimal involvement to substantial involvement. For example, in the case of Nova Scotia where there are no elected officials, participants indicated that Indigenous communities have varying powers and access to resources. In the current system, there is only one Indigenous representative appointed; this is an issue because, as participants indicated, one representative could not possibly represent all Indigenous people residing in Nova Scotia. In that province, most participants felt that Indigenous communities were less represented in the centralized system compared to the previous system of democratically elected boards of trustees.

In general, participants in this study seemed to believe school systems serve two primary stakeholder groups: parents and students. This means that educators serve parents and students, and boards of trustees and administrative staff keep educators accountable. However, we expanded the concept of educational stakeholders to include members of the public who have an interest in public education—for example, business owners who have an interest in the training of

their future employees and subsidiaries, special interest groups who have an interest in the learning of future politicians, senior citizens who have an interest in the education of those who will provide health care services for aging Canadians, and climate change advocates who have an interest in the education of the children who will inherit forthcoming climate challenges. Because one of the aims of the study was to provide informed recommendations to the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) and by extension to boards of trustees involved in system-level decision-making, our research team tried to reach as many stakeholder types as possible within each study site to determine the impact of local voice on system-level decision-making.

Overall, the study participants included parents, trustees, educators, school system leaders, special interest group advocates, politicians, and community members; however, most participants were closely connected to public education as a professional educator, school board member, and/or parent, as are most Canadians who are actively involved in public education. The level to which participants were closely connected to system-level decision-making, however, varied by jurisdiction. This was a product of the structural and procedural differences among the study sites. For example, in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Anglophone Quebec, Francophone Nova Scotia, and parts of the Northwest Territories, where the boards of trustees were made up of elected participants, we were able to engage trustees with differing levels of experience: from very new (a few months of experience) and novice (within their first term) trustees to very experienced trustees with over 20 years in the role. We were also able to talk to past trustees, members of the public who had unsuccessfully run for the trusteeship, superintendents, and provincial politicians. In comparison, in Anglophone Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec—which both have more centralized systems or boards of directors not elected from the general public—stakeholder groups included individuals who had served as trustees in the previously elected systems, school system staff, and provincial politicians. In these instances, there were no current trustees to interview. In some cases, potential Nova Scotian and Québec participants who were approached declined to participate. Although not all participants who declined to participate explained their reasoning, some chose to explain that, in the more centralized systems, they felt it was too politically or professionally risky to participate. Overall, those who participated in this study did so because they were involved in decision-making, were advocating for a change in decision-making, or were speaking to the outcomes of recent changes in decision-making.

Motivations for Participating in the Study

Most participants in this study chose to be involved to have their voices heard in relation to changes in public education. A small minority took part because they were curious about the study and indicated in the interviews or focus groups that they had not participated in the study with any intention of having a voice in public education decision-making. A few participants commented at the end of the interview or focus group session that they found the interview/focus group informative and educational; they indicated that they left with an enhanced understanding of public education decision-making in their jurisdiction. We received a limited number of email responses to our invitations, which we theorize was because recipients did not see themselves in the system-level decision-making process and therefore chose not to participate. As mentioned previously, a few participants indicated their reasoning for not participating; these reasons ranged from not having enough time, feeling research and/or COVID fatigue from participating in multiple research projects (de Koning et al., 2021; Jacquet et al., 2021), and having concerns about the political or professional implications of participating.

For those who did participate in interviews or focus groups, the majority of participants framed their responses around the idea of change. Although the notion of educational change in itself is not new (Fink & Stoll, 2005; Fullan, 2015; Goodson, 2001; Gremer, 1973; Hargreaves, 2007; Katz, 1971), the ways in which the participants understood change does warrant the attention and consideration of readers. Investigating how participants understand change is significant because there appears to be a growing discussion around how the public is involved in educational decision-making processes, as evidenced by increasing research and publications on the topic (Blackmore et al., 2022; CBC News, 2021; Galway et al., 2013; McGregor & Lucas, 2019; Overgaard, 2019; Sheppard et al., 2013). Participant understandings of change ranged from (a) resisting change, (b) reacting to current structural changes within jurisdictions, and (c) advocating for substantial change throughout decision-making processes. These understandings of change influenced participants' responses around changes in public education.

Resisting Change. In those jurisdictions that use a fairly traditional school board system, there were proponents that advocated for retaining the existing structures and processes. In most of these cases, the existing structure that participants advocated to retain was boards of trustees that are publicly elected with trustees who serve unlimited terms of 3 to 4 years. In terms of involvement of local democratic voice, these participants advocated for no substantial change to

the current system, but instead argued that the public was responsible for becoming more aware and engaged in the current processes. In other words, there was a belief that the foundational structures and processes in place are effective overall and it is only the public's involvement with these structures that ought to change. A similar number of those who resisted substantial change to the traditional board of trustees structure were those who had already experienced—or were expecting to experience—significant change and were now reacting to those changes.

Reacting to Change. Some jurisdictions in the study had experienced varying degrees of structural and procedural changes regarding public involvement in system-level decision-making. These changes included a reduced number of trustee boards through the amalgamation of smaller boards; changing publicly elected boards of trustees to designated boards of directors selected to fulfill specialized knowledge bases; and dissolving boards altogether and replacing them with more centralized systems of governance. Interviewees from jurisdictions experiencing significant change spent much time reacting to the changes that had taken place and reflecting on the previous systems more so than discussing the new processes embedded in the changed system. For example, Manitoban participants discussed the impact of previous amalgamations, Saskatchewanian participants talked about the impact of the loss of taxation authority, Francophone Québécois participants discussed the impact of changing to school service centres, and Anglophone Nova Scotian participants focused on the impact of changing to regional centres for education. For the most part, participants who had long-standing associations with decision-making at the system level explained what democratic decision-making was like in the past compared to what currently exists. In these instances, they detailed the loss of what had been working well and mused about the unintended consequences of the imposed changes. Overall, the majority of participants discussed what they perceived as a loss of local democratic voice in all jurisdictions, through their stories of boards of trustees losing decision-making power, being amalgamated into larger boards, or being abolished altogether as in Nova Scotia. Overwhelmingly, participants pointed to these changes as a primary reason for public disengagement in school system-level decision-making.

It is important to note that participation from individuals currently involved in non-publicly elected systems was quite low. Therefore, we received limited information about how these new centralized systems are working from people with insider knowledge. Many participants who reflected on the decision-making processes involved in designated boards or centralized systems did so from positions external

to the system—such as community members, parents, or staff of advocacy organizations. For participants with less institutional or organizational experience, many had come to accept the current situation in their jurisdiction and were trying to figure out how to work within the new context. This difficulty in accessing insider information in non-publicly elected systems is a significant example of the impact of the loss of local democratic voice; as local democratic voice declines, there seems to be a decline in transparency about how decision-making systems work.

Advocating for Change. A large number of participants shared their desire and efforts to promote new or continued change. The changes they advocated for were not uniform, however: some believed that the historic system of boards of trustees should be dismantled entirely, while others felt that change to the existing historical system was needed to better serve the current social and cultural climate. Those who advocated for the dismantling of elected boards of trustees argued that elected boards did not represent the public (illustrated mainly by low voter turnout and public participation); were ineffective and/or inefficient due to trustees' lack of educational, governance, or fiduciary expertise; and/or were a duplication of services offered by municipal and provincial or territorial governments. A small group of participants also believed that there should be limited local democratic voice and that system-level decision-making should be left to those with particular professional and expert knowledge.

Those who promoted change within existing structures did so because they believed that some elements of having publicly elected representatives provided a way for voices to be heard. However, they also felt that the way these structures operate needed to be changed to better suit the needs of today's public. The degree of change that participants advocated for ranged from (a) requiring little substantive change to the system but more concentrated effort on the part of the board to increase public awareness and participation to (b) requiring substantial change to the ways trustees are elected, the duration of time trustees can spend in the role, and to who is eligible to serve as a trustee. This group of people—those who saw the need for change within the system but did not want to go so far as to remove boards altogether—was composed of the vast majority of participants. Participants' motivation to resist, react to, or advocate for change in how their voices mattered in system-level decision-making was associated with how they understood the purpose of public education.

Perceptions of the Purpose of Education

For many, the purpose of education is straightforward: to educate students. Associated with this basic principle are many other purposes, and there are entire education courses and books dedicated to the different purposes of education (Dewey, 1916). Briefly and for the purposes of this report, examples of these purposes of education align with the following philosophical and ideological approaches: conservative (Gutek, 1997), neoconservative (Elliott & MacLennan, 1994), liberal (Raven, 2005), neoliberal (Harvey, 2005), democratic (Cook & Westheimer, 2006), critical (Kellnar, 2003), and religious (Tyms, 1950). Although some of these purposes can coexist, others conflict.

In our view, participant responses in this study were both consciously and unconsciously informed by their beliefs about the multiple purposes of public education. Only a few participants explicitly described how they understood the purpose of public education, and these tended to be participants who have or had experience in local, municipal, and provincial/territorial politics and scholars in the education, politics, and governance fields. Some of these respondents believed that the purpose of public education was to increase equity for marginalized communities (i.e., critical). In jurisdictions with Catholic publicly funded school systems (Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories), a few participants described the purpose of education through a religious lens. There were also some participants who described the purpose of education as preparing students to participate in a democratic world and uphold democracy in Canada's future. Many participants reflected the neoliberal belief that the purpose of education is to prepare students to enter the workforce. Below, we provide brief summaries of the purposes of education that participants reflected in their interview or focus group responses.

Critical. A critical view of the purpose of education assumes that positive change can be achieved through analysis and critique of our current social relations and circumstances, and that this betterment includes equity and justice for all, including individuals who experience marginalization due to race, gender, class, ability, and so forth (Breunig, 2009; Kellnar, 2003). For some participants, education was perceived as a great equalizer: They saw the purpose of education as reducing the social power gap between communities experiencing marginalization and communities who experience more privilege. For these participants, the motivation to participate in this study was to share the social justice work they were doing or to advocate for increasing social justice work in system-level decision-making. Some of these participants worked for community groups who advocated for increased

attention to particular needs. In these circumstances, participants' motivation to participate was rooted in their personal and/or professional identity.

Religious. A religious view of the purpose of education assumes that education ought to prioritize students' emotional and personal development from a young age, fostering a deep appreciation for religious belief and action later in their life (Crotty, 2009; MacLellan, 2012). In two jurisdictions, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, Catholic schools are part of publicly funded schooling and participants in this study worked in, or engaged with, the Catholic system. In these areas, some participants understood the purpose of education as connected to the Catholic faith. These participants may have been motivated to participate, in part, by this faith-based purpose of education.

Democratic. A democratic view of the purpose of education assumes that the active participation of all individuals in a school community, especially students, is integral to the betterment of society. In this approach, schools are vital to maintaining a democratic society and they should embody the values of equality, fairness, and participation by fostering a safe place for individuals to voice their viewpoints (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Karagiorgi, 2011; McLaughlin, 2005).

Participants who understood the purpose of education as preparing students to participate in society as democratic citizens and to uphold Canadian democracy were motivated to participate in this study because they saw a connection between public education and democracy. For many, having a public education system that is governed by locally elected representatives is a cornerstone of Canada's democracy on the national scale. For these participants, changes to the structure of school system-level decision-making reflected changes and challenges to democracy as a whole. Therefore, their motivation to participate was inspired by a resistance to the move away from democratically elected boards and a desire to spread awareness about the role and significance of democratically elected school boards.

Neoliberal. A neoliberal view of the purpose of education assumes that education is intended to support what is most profitable and sound for the economy. Neoliberalism focuses on individual responsibility for all aspects in life, assuming that the success of each person should and will be determined by their own ability to compete in the market, free of preferential or differentiated treatment (Apple, 2001; Hursh, 2000). A significant portion of participants had a neoliberal view of public education; many described the purpose of public

education through whom they thought—or thought the public thought—public education was for.

Participants who held a neoliberal perspective tended to focus their discussion of change around fiduciary decision-making, private market partnerships, and work-based school programming. Some were concerned about school boards' diminished or diminishing power to garner property tax because it represented a change in school boards' decision-making power. Some were motivated to participate in this study because they were able to discuss school boards' fiscal responsibility and/or efficiency, which they perceived as a key role for school boards. When asked about whose voices should be heard in system-level decision-making, these participants argued for increasing participation from private market stakeholders—for example, local business owners—to ensure the school system was making decisions that supported the preparation of the future workforce. These participants felt that the future workforce ought to be provided with school-level programming that better prepared them for future employment.

Neoconservative. A neoconservative view of the purpose of education assumes that the purpose of education is to instill Eurocentric values of individualism and conservative morality. Under this approach, schooling is connected to maintaining the nuclear family, lowering taxes, maintaining traditionally hierarchical decision-making structures, and prioritizing traditional academic subjects (Apple, 2006; Neumann et al., 2020). Very few participants reflected a neoconservative purpose of education. For these few participants, the motivation for participating was a feeling that the public system was no longer representing parents' voices. Although only a small number of participants reflected this understanding, some participants reported conflicts with very vocal neoconservative advocacy groups that challenged, and at times inhibited, school boards' ability to engage the public in consultation and decision-making, such as in the case anti-SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) groups in British Columbia.

Minority Language Rights. A minority language rights view of the purpose of education assumes that the purpose of education is to teach, strengthen, and maintain cultural identity through language. Schooling for language rights goes beyond merely the language of instruction. Language, culture, and identity are closely tied to one another (Norton, 2016), and the purpose of language education is connected to culture and heritage (Duff & Li, 2009; Government of Canada, 2022c). In Canada, as a bilingual country where English and French are the two

official languages, a minority language rights perspective on the purpose of education focuses on the linguistic autonomy of the minority language in that area. These minority language rights are described in the 1982 *Constitution Act*, “Citizens of Canada (a) whose first language learned and still understood is that of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province in which they reside, or (b) who have received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French and reside in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province, have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language in that province (94)” (*Constitution Act*, Section 23.1).

In our study, French is the minority language in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories, while English is the minority language in Quebec. Those participants affiliated with the minority language school systems reflected a minority language rights view of the purpose of education, wherein education was a primary institution through which language rights and privileges are retained. Moreover, all minority language school systems in our study included democratically elected boards of trustees; nearly all participants in these systems expressed a belief that their language sovereignty would be threatened if the democratically elected system was replaced with a more centralized system.

How is Democratic Voice Affected by the Loss of Elected School Boards?

Although one of the initial objectives of this inquiry was to explore the impact of local community voice in jurisdictions that have democratically elected school boards compared with those where schools were governed differently, in this case, it became increasingly clear that the inquiry could not be a simple comparison between those with and those without boards of trustees. Although three of our research sites could be categorized as having democratically elected school boards (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), the other three could not be categorized as not having elected school boards. For example, in Québec, the Anglophone school system has democratically elected school boards, but the Francophone system uses boards of directors who are sometimes elected internally by specific organizations (i.e., by parental groups) and sometimes appointed (i.e., school service centre staff). In the NWT, some school districts use democratically elected boards of trustees, some use representatives appointed from the local

community, and some share responsibilities between local and regional boards. In Nova Scotia, the Anglophone boards of trustees have been abolished and the provincial government has taken full control of education, while the Francophone system continues to use democratically elected boards of trustees. Overall, our research team came to conclude that school governance systems presented more complexity than could be captured with a simple binary comparison of systems with and without democratically elected boards of trustees.

Rather than losing this complexity by forcing a binary comparison, our research team analyzed all six sites together to identify trends in how democratic voice is supported in the different systems. Through comprehensive data collection in the form of one-on-one interviews, small group focus groups, and a large-scale public consultation questionnaire, we heard from stakeholders across six jurisdictions in Canada about how changes to school governance systems impact their participation in democratic processes at the school system level. As we show in the report introduction, the provinces and territory in this investigation have experienced, to varying degrees, loss of public voice school system-level decision-making. Through this multicase analysis, we conclude that the loss of democratic voice is felt most in Anglophone Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec, where democratically elected boards of trustees have been replaced with systems that do not use local, democratic trustee elections.

Through data collected from the stakeholders who participated in this investigation, we summarize the evidence used to make the claim that removal of democratically elected boards of trustees impedes local democratic voice in public education. In those jurisdictions without democratically elected school boards, we observed:

- ◆ Less public engagement in education.
 - ◆ Participants shared that the general public seems increasingly disengaged in educational matters since the loss of democratically elected school boards. In Nova Scotia, many participants shared the difficulty in recruiting participation in school-level committees.
- ◆ Less transparency in decision-making processes.
 - ◆ Participants shared that they felt they had little understanding of how decisions were made, how they could consult on decisions, and who to contact to discuss decisions.

- ◆ Less accountability of the education system to the public that it serves.
 - ◆ Participants repeatedly expressed that there was little understanding about who was responsible for educational decisions that had been made or were in process.
- ◆ Less perceived freedom to express opposing views.
 - ◆ A few stakeholders in jurisdictions without democratically elected boards of trustees refused to participate in this study, believing that participation posed too much personal or professional risk. This level of fear of expressing sentiments regarding public education demonstrates an erosion of the trust that must exist for democratic processes to work well.

It should be noted that merely reinstating elected boards of trustees will not necessarily guarantee effective future democratic participation as the findings indicate some current elected school board systems continue to have room to grow. We see some loss of democratic processes in jurisdictions that retain boards of trustees, but that loss is felt more strongly in jurisdictions that have lost elected boards of trustees. This is evident even in the difficulty our research team experienced in recruiting participants for this study: in Anglophone Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec, there seemed to be little understanding of how the public could exercise democratic voice at all. Although our participants recognized that there are issues in gaining public engagement within democratically elected board of trustees, without the basic infrastructure of democratic board of trustees elections, those challenges become barriers that obstruct democratic engagement. Further, we see the refusal of some to participate in the study for fear of personal or professional risk as deeply troubling: In a democratic society with a public education system, no member of the public should express a level of fear when contemplating participating in a study executed by a third party with no formal or professional associations with any of the study sites that also has several checks and balances in place for both autonomy and confidentiality. Without the freedom of expression, our democracy cannot function effectively.



Recommendations

Recommendations

As our findings indicate, local school boards that have boards of trustees, where they still exist, tend to exercise a more limited scope of authority over education than in the past. A small number of study participants felt that this change threatened community participation in system-level decision-making in public education. Even though some indicated a preference for a return to wider or enhanced authorities, the delegation of such responsibilities tend to rest solely with provincial governments, which may or may not choose to restore some or all of these powers. Although there is much to learn from history, only focusing retroactively on past systems is less productive than considering what to do with current and future systems to ensure the continuation of democratic voice in public education. School governance systems today can learn from the challenges that may have played a part in the growing movement to remove power and authority from boards of trustees and school boards. For a new and changing Canadian future, policymakers need to find new ways to support a system that fosters democratic participation in public education.

Although we do not claim that the participants in this study are a representative sample of the Canadian public (in quantitative scientific terms), the findings do provide significant insight into the respondents' current concerns about democratic voice in public education system-level decision-making in the five provinces and one territory our research team studied. In this section, we examine the overall challenges the participants encountered while trying to exercise democratic voice and the challenges that those within the public education systems have encountered while trying to engage the public. Based on this analysis, we present 24 recommendations to the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA).

According to the information collected through the interjurisdictional scan, interviews, focus groups, and online public consultation, the degree to which members of the public believe they have a say (and actually did have a say) in system-level decision-making—and attitudes about whose voices should be heard—varied considerably across the jurisdictions. Our research team offers these recommendations with an acknowledgement of the challenges associated with implementing broad, systemic change across these diverse jurisdictions. Some of these recommendations require additional resources, such as professional development or educational materials. Other recommendations go beyond providing resources: reaffirming the position of the CSBA as a facilitator to support its members in promoting institutional cultures within each province to influence

whose voices are heard in public education. As explained in the previous section, the CSBA will likely encounter some who resist change; some who react positively, negatively, or indifferently to any changes made or proposed; and some who will advocate for further or different change based on stakeholders' understandings of the purpose of education. In each of these cases, the CSBA may be required to take on a different supporting role for its members: as mediator, educator, advocate, or otherwise. It should also be noted that these recommendations are interrelated and meant to build from and support each other in large-scale education system change that is meaningful, long term, and approached simultaneously from different entry points (Campbell, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Fullan, 2010).

In this section, we summarize the overall recommendations to the Canadian School Boards Association. For each, we describe the challenges the recommendation is meant to address and then discuss the recommendation; some recommendations may be more relevant to jurisdictions that appear to have more democratically elected systems than for those that do not. We have grouped the recommendations into the following thematic categories:

- ◆ Create a public awareness campaign,
- ◆ Encourage the auditing of citizenship and social studies curricula,
- ◆ Enhance accessibility of engagement practices,
- ◆ Foster partnership and networks,
- ◆ Increase Indigenous involvement,
- ◆ Increase immigrant and new Canadian involvement,
- ◆ Increase targeted parent involvement,
- ◆ Consider ways to increase student and youth involvement,
- ◆ Encourage democratically elected boards to implement clear strategic plan,
- ◆ Expand trustee professional development,
- ◆ Revisit elected school board structure and processes, and
- ◆ Convert existing communication strategies to a knowledge mobilization (KMb) approach.

Create a Public Awareness Campaign

The study data indicated that many participants who were not directly connected to a school system had minimal knowledge of educational governance and the

processes for becoming involved in system-level decision-making. Participants in all six jurisdictions indicated that they were either not aware or misinformed about how they could be involved in decision-making. In many situations, participants wanted to be involved and were frustrated in their attempts to navigate the system where they resided, while others were confused about the process or were not aware that they could be involved. Most participants, other than experienced past and present trustees or high-level school system staff, did not know how school systems are structured and knew even less about the governance roles and responsibilities, structures, and processes. This lack of knowledge was evident over all three methods of data collection (i.e., interviews, focus groups and the public questionnaire) and confirmed previous findings presented in research from elsewhere in Canada (e.g., Piscitelli et al., 2022).

For jurisdictions that have boards of trustees, trustee participants reported facing challenges informing the public of important issues. Trustees shared that, at times, the primary challenge was communicating information to the public when very few people would attend public meetings or town halls; in other cases, the challenge arose from communicating complex processes in ways that are meaningful to the general public. For jurisdictions that did not have boards of trustees, that lack of understanding was even greater, with many participants not knowing how the public could be involved in decision-making or whom to ask to find out how to get involved.

Conversely, a small number of study participants made a case for not including the general public in system-level decision-making based on the public's knowledge level. These participants argued that the general public could not make an informed decision because they often did not possess the requisite knowledge. Examples from international contexts indicate that this might actually be the case. For example, in the wake of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, former UK Press Secretary John Williams (2018) explained that many voters were ill-equipped to make informed decisions when voting for or against Brexit because, in part, politicians and the media failed to make the public comprehensively aware of the wide-ranging consequences of the departure. This failure to provide access to the knowledge required to make informed decisions created a "democratic deficit" (Williams, 2018, p. 211). This democratic deficit is corroborated in the work of canonical democracy scholar Robert Dahl (1998), who positions "enlightened understanding"—the opportunity to have access to adequate information prior to participating—as a key criterion for democratic processes. With this understanding of public awareness as essential for democracy, we provide two recommendations:

(a) plan a public awareness campaign that outlines how systems operate, and how and why the public can be involved; and (b) initiate a public awareness campaign that clarifies the difference between governance and operations.

Recommendation 1: Plan a Public Awareness Campaign

Although a small number of interview participants believed that it is the general public's responsibility to inform themselves about public education (e.g., the benefits of public education, as well as the procedures and processes for involvement), it is difficult to have a public institution if the public is not aware or involved in the decision-making process, given that this is a fundamental component of a democratic structure.

As discussed in the first section of the report and demonstrated in the lack of participant engagement in our three data collection processes across all six jurisdictions—including the responses from would-be participant emails—there appears to be substantial public misinformation about the purpose of boards of trustees, the purpose of public education, election processes, and how to be involved in decision-making. Our research team recommends creating or revitalizing public awareness campaigns that use a knowledge mobilization approach to counter misinformation and misunderstanding.⁶ This recommendation assumes that those who currently have decision-making power (i.e., boards of trustees or provincial/territorial governments) genuinely want the general public to be involved. However, we recognize that governing systems in some provinces may not be actively seeking public involvement.

The focus of that campaign could include raising public awareness of the following:

- ◆ the significance of public education overall,
- ◆ the importance of public engagement in public education,
- ◆ the local public education governance structures and procedures, and
- ◆ the roles and responsibilities of trustees or other representatives (where applicable).

Although some jurisdictions have undertaken widespread efforts to engage the public, the data indicate that most participants who were formal school governance

⁶ More details about the knowledge mobilization approach are discussed further in Recommendations 23 and 24.

system representatives (i.e., trustees), primarily relied on traditional means for public engagement, such as public meetings. Although public meetings are a historical governance practice—and are even mandated in some jurisdictions—our findings indicate that these may not be effective if they are not supplemented with additional outreach efforts. In contrast to traditional methods that rely on the public taking the initiative to participate and seek out information, our recommendation reconfigures the onus of action onto the school governance system. Put plainly, we recommend that school governance systems take action to bring knowledge about decision-making to the public, rather than waiting for the public to come to the system. We expand on potential changes to communication strategies in the final recommendation offered in this report (Recommendation 24).

Recommendation 2: Initiate a Public Campaign That Clarifies the Difference Between Governance and Operations

Relatedly, our research team recommends that the public be educated on the roles and responsibilities of the different layers of school system governance, specifically differentiating between the responsibilities of school governance systems (governance) and administrators (operations). It was clear in the interviews and focus groups, and confirmed in the public questionnaire, that there is confusion about the difference between those decisions categorized as “governance” and “operations.” Governance decisions relate to policymaking, distributing resources, setting priorities and objectives, and distributing responsibilities among teams of trustees, and some leadership positions. Operations decisions relate to day-to-day management, such as teacher and administrator performance reviews, school-level procedures, and most other decisions that directly relate to the daily experiences of students, families, or faculties. In most jurisdictions, governance decisions are the responsibility of system-level decision-making bodies such as boards of trustees or school service centres, while operational decisions are the responsibility of administrators who are usually supervised by superintendents.

We recommend that a public campaign be initiated to inform the public about the roles and responsibilities of each layer of their school governance system, so that members of the public know where to address concerns should they arise. This information could be combined with or separate to the public awareness campaign described in Recommendation 1; such a public campaign should include common topics of concern that the public may have, whether those concerns would be categorized as operations or governance, and accordingly, where those concerns are best addressed. Increased public understanding of the differences between these roles may lead to the public more effectively having their concerns heard,

while also potentially alleviating some of the stress experienced by those in either role repeatedly being presented with concerns over which they have no purview.

Encourage the Auditing of Citizenship and Social Studies Curricula

As our team conducted data analysis for each jurisdiction, it became clear that the interview and focus group participants had knowledge about and understanding of democratic voice in terms of federal, provincial, territorial, and, to some degree, municipal governance and elections but limited knowledge about having democratic voice in relation to their school governance system. Although not part of this study, our research team did explore where the public might learn about rights, responsibilities, and democratic involvement in relation to school board elections, boards of trustees, and public education. For example, a cursory review of the K–12 curricula on citizenship—including social studies, political studies, cultural studies, and so forth—from the six jurisdictions revealed that there is little to no mention of any democratic processes associated with K–12 public education governance.

Recommendation 3: Audit Current K–12 Civic and Citizen Education Curricula Learning Outcomes

In an effort to increase participation in system-level decision-making for public education, especially among students and youth, it is recommended that the CSBA consider conducting an audit of member jurisdictions' K–12 citizenship and social studies curricula learning outcomes. The intention of the audit is to determine if there are opportunities in the current K–12 citizenship and social studies curricula to specifically include learning about local democratic voice in K–12 public education.

Recommendation 4: Work with Provincial and Territorial Governments to Modify and Update K–12 Citizenship and Social Studies Curricula

If the CSBA does determine that there are gaps in the respective K–12 citizenship and social studies curricula, it is recommended that the CSBA lobby the respective provincial and territorial governments for modifications. These modifications should support students and youth to acquire the knowledge and skills required to participate in system-level decision-making in public education. If the public successfully learns about democratic engagement from an early age, it could

potentially improve general understandings of school governance and system-level decision-making, as well as voter turnout in future elections.

Enhance Accessibility of Engagement Practices

It is not always the case that decision-making processes are accessible and available to all citizens. In each research site, there were different forms of inaccessibility in the decision-making processes, such as being overly complex and having linguistic, physical, and geographic barriers. In light of these challenges, it is recommended that the CSBA encourage school governance systems to make engagement practices more accessible to the public.

Many participants felt decision-making processes are overly complex and difficult to navigate. This was partly because every school governance system, and even every school district or division in each jurisdiction, has a different procedure for how the public may submit a motion to be heard or to register a complaint. The complexity appeared to be exacerbated in jurisdictions that had no method of voting or had no boards of trustees. Study participants in the English-speaking Nova Scotia and French-speaking Québec jurisdictions did not know how the general public could be involved in decision-making, submit a motion, register a complaint, or raise a concern. In jurisdictions that did have boards of trustees and formal processes, participating in a board meeting or presenting to the board, which requires using Robert's Rules of Order, was often intimidating for members of the public. This intimidation may prevent the general public from participating at the system level, which can lead to disengagement, unproductive actions, and misinformation. When participants were asked why some communities may not provide feedback to school governance systems, participants expressed that the avenues for providing feedback were often cumbersome or simply not known. When avenues for providing feedback were clear and available, participants surmised that some stakeholders may not participate because they may not have the time, not see the value, or may not feel that their participation would be heard or valued by the school governance system.

Participants also described linguistic, physical, and geographic barriers to participation. Most, if not all, communications from school governance systems are exclusively in English or French. This means that community members who are not fluent in the majority language are unable to understand these important communications, and therefore may not be informed on how and why they can participate in decision-making that affects their community's public education.

Further, language used in decision-making avenues such as board of trustee meetings was often described as overly complex, formal, and/or verbose, making participating in these meetings inaccessible to those who are not already formally educated in that language.

From a disability perspective, participating in decision-making is impeded when spaces for participation are not accessible to those who use wheelchairs, strollers, or mobility devices, or to people with other mobility needs. These decision-making spaces include voting locations, school governance system offices, and spaces for public consultation. When physical barriers prevent certain people from accessing these spaces, this can communicate that these voices are not valued—and therefore not accommodated—in decision-making. For democratic voice to have a role in decision-making, all voices need to have access to requisite spaces for participation. In addition to being a human rights issue, the data indicate that the majority of the studied jurisdictions are struggling with voter and/or public engagement in public education. They also have aging populations (with the exception of the NWT): the majority of individuals who are actively engaged in public education decision-making appear to be between the ages of 40 and 59. As these individuals age, their ability to physically engage in democratic practices will decrease because, as many disability advocates argue, all individuals will experience some form of disability or mobility issue as a part of the aging process. Without additional intervention, voter engagement and involvement in system-level decision-making will continue to decrease.

As mentioned in both the policy scan and at the beginning of this report, some of the six jurisdictions have experienced a reduction in the number of school boards, school districts, or district school boards in their region. Research has shown that reducing the number of school boards can lead to stakeholders perceiving a loss of democratic voice in decision-making (MacKinnon, 2018). In jurisdictions where smaller school boards have been amalgamated into larger boards, the new school boards tend to span larger geographical regions. Although having larger geographical configurations does not automatically mean that there will be a reduction in people's ability to exercise democratic voice, it does mean that past practices and structures for engagement need to be revised. For example, citizens in remote communities may have a more difficult time engaging in democratic processes that are conducted exclusively in a geographically distant urban area. Some participants shared that, in some places, the new boards were able to make adjustments to ensure that community involvement continued; in other newly

amalgamated boards this was not the case. With these barriers to access in mind, our research team makes the following three recommendations.

Recommendation 5: Increase Clarity of Participation Processes

It is recommended that the CSBA work with existing boards of trustees and provincial school board associations to review existing participation processes and find potential opportunities to streamline the processes for clarity. Then, through an effective knowledge mobilization plan, share these procedures with the general public. In addition to the democratically elected boards, the school service centres for Francophone Québec and regional centres for education for Anglophone Nova Scotia are mandated to inform the general public of their decisions, and as such this recommendation is therefore also intended for those two governance structures.

Recommendation 6: Implement Linguistically Diverse Communication Strategies

Becoming multilingual is essential for school systems and schools when figuring out the best way to connect and communicate with communities. Boards of trustees do not necessarily need to start from scratch in finding cost-effective and efficient communication methods for linguistically diverse school populations. It is recommended that the CSBA create an ad hoc committee to investigate some of the creative approaches that some schools and local boards are using to break down language barriers and suggest that other boards adapt them to be used in their own procedures and processes. For example, some of the strategies can include awareness of how to use closed captioning when watching televised board of trustee meetings, or providing access to Wi-Fi at board meetings so that audiences can use some of the free translation software available on smartphones and tablets. For a cost, plug-ins can be added to websites that allow readers to choose different languages when reading announcements.

Recommendation 7: Conduct Accessibility Audits Across Jurisdictions

To capitalize on existing efforts to improve voter accessibility for municipal, provincial, and federal elections, it is recommended that the CSBA conduct an accessibility audit with member organizations in jurisdictions that hold elections for boards of trustees to determine the feasibility of existing accessibility strategies and determine what works and needs improvement. The intention of this recommendation is to keep the currently engaged public involved, and to increase the engagement of others who in the past may have wanted to be engaged but were faced with physical barriers to participation.

Foster Partnerships and Networks

Many study participants felt there was a need for change in terms of how the public is involved in system-level decision-making in public education. Although some meaningful system change takes time and resources that certainly exceed the CSBA's mandate and capacity, it is within the CSBA's advocacy capacity to encourage its members to expand and build partnerships and networks.

Recommendation 8: Expand and Build Partnerships and Networks

The CSBA might consider further encouraging provincial school board associations to expand and/or partner with various organizations, not-for-profit groups, and community groups to support public voice in public education within the structure of boards of trustees and beyond. Included here are some examples of organizations and support groups that can assist or work with school board associations to promote democratic voice in public education. For example, to address linguistic, physical, and geographic barriers to access, school governance systems can partner with advocacy groups. For linguistic barriers, school governance systems can partner with specific community groups, such as [Immigrant Centre Manitoba](#), [Immigrant Services Society of BC](#), or [Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia](#), to identify which forms of communication can be offered to increase accessibility for underrepresented communities. To identify and eliminate physical barriers, school governance systems can partner with accessibility advocacy groups, such as [Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities Inc.](#), the [Realize Accessible Montreal Project \(RAMP\)](#) in Québec, or [the NWT Disabilities Council](#). For geographic barriers, school governance systems can partner with transportation agencies or consider establishing multiple, potentially temporary decision-making spaces that are accessible to multiple communities, as is the practice in federal elections.

Increase Indigenous Involvement

In all study jurisdictions, participants highlighted the need to increase Indigenous representation in decision-making. Indigenous involvement in educational decision-making should be a targeted endeavour because of increasing Indigenous population growth (Statistics Canada, 2022b), because of their position as the original peoples and caretakers of what is now called Canada, and because doing so will support the realization of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) calls to action that include public education. Barriers to Indigenous involvement are the result of colonization. Participants further explained that barriers specific to

Indigenous involvement in decision-making range from geographic barriers that often result in ineligibility through to difficulty in winning elected positions, potentially due to social prejudice.

For example, some participants indicated that they were ineligible to participate in decision-making because they live outside of the school governance system boundaries, even though their child or children from their community attend school within those boundaries. In particular, participants associated with First Nations communities in jurisdictions with democratically elected school boards explained that, in some cases, First Nations children live on reserve but attend public school off reserve. In these cases, the on-reserve community may not be eligible to run or vote in school board elections because they are not geographic residents of the school board community. This means that, even though the children are attending and learning in the public school system, the community is ineligible to participate in the democratic processes governing that system.

In jurisdictions with democratically elected boards of trustees, participants indicated that there are barriers to being elected as trustee for all potentially interested individuals. These barriers include the frequency of long-term trustees taking acclaimed seats and the significance of name recognition (discussed further in Recommendation 22). In these circumstances, there can be even fewer opportunities for Indigenous people to be voted into a trustee position. Participants felt that for many potential nominees—Indigenous or otherwise—the intensive demands of the role, including the nomination and campaign process, may be too onerous or may make the nomination process unfeasible. Although this financial and time commitment may be difficult for some trustees, this observation may also illustrate a bias among study participants that Indigenous people will not have the time or financial resources to participate. Participants did little to describe the potential prejudice, discrimination, or racism that Indigenous nominees may face during the campaign process, which could deter them from nominating themselves in the first place.

Recommendation 9: Investigate Ways to Increase Indigenous Involvement

Although it is the mandate and purview of the provincial and territorial governments to decide on governance structures for public education, the CSBA can, in its advocacy capacity, raise awareness of the need for increased Indigenous engagement and present possible considerations to the provincial and territorial governments on how to improve Indigenous engagement regardless of whether or

not the jurisdiction has democratically elected boards of trustees. It should be noted that this work aligns with and builds upon the CSBA's ongoing work supporting Indigenous education and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (Canadian School Boards Association, 2018). Strategies for increasing Indigenous involvement in decision-making must be context-specific and developed by and in partnership with the local Indigenous communities. Therefore, we use this section not to provide recommendations to be applied in all jurisdictions, but rather to share participant suggestions for increasing Indigenous involvement that could be considered in conversation with Indigenous communities. Before acting upon any strategies for increasing Indigenous involvement, we recommend school governance systems reach out to Indigenous communities to speak directly about participating in decision-making, listen openly to communities' knowledge and experience of school governance systems, and aim to build meaningful relationships as the foundation for increasing involvement. Similarly, participants and reviewers of this report identified that Métis communities are often not represented as distinct from First Nations, and not considered for representation in system-level decision-making. We recommend that the CSBA and its members recognize Métis Nation governments as distinct in these conversations.

One strategy that participants commonly named to increase Indigenous representation was having every board of trustees, board of directors, or school governance system have a designated or appointed Indigenous position, or more than one position, to ensure that there is always at least one Indigenous voice involved in decision-making. Appointed positions could be advisory, voting or non-voting, or a designated trustee with full trustee rights and responsibilities. Further, multiple roles could be designated, such as an Indigenous coordinator, Indigenous representative, or Indigenous advisory committee to support Indigenous inclusion at multiple levels. It is crucial that Indigenous representatives are elected or appointed by their own communities—for example, having land-based First Nations elect or appoint representatives from their Nation, Métis communities elect or appoint a Métis representative, Inuit communities elect or appoint an Inuit representative, and urban Indigenous communities elect or appoint an urban Indigenous representative.

It is important to note, however, that there is the risk that an appointed or elected Indigenous position would put undue responsibility on a single individual to represent the whole Indigenous community, and that it could inadvertently discourage non-Indigenous trustees from educating themselves on the work of

reconciliation. In other words, by having an elected or appointed Indigenous representative, non-Indigenous trustees may not feel it is their responsibility to do reconciliatory work because that responsibility may be assumed to fall on the Indigenous representative. This could lead to boards inadvertently practising tokenism, where members of a marginalized community are included as a means to reflect the system's equity or diversity but are not meaningfully included for their contributions outside of their perceived identity. Moreover, when a person is tokenized, they inadvertently become an assumed representative of the entirety of the social community they are said to represent (Kanter, 1977). To avoid tokenism, it may be more productive to build long-term, meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. Through this relationship building, the overall board environment may become more conducive to Indigenous participation, and better support relationships built in the spirit of reconciliation.

A small group of participants spoke about replacing democratically elected boards with fully appointed boards. These participants were in favour of having a fully appointed board of trustees and felt that, if this system were in place, all boards would already have Indigenous representation. Although participants did not indicate how such an appointed board may be operationalized, many processes would need to be worked out prior to implementing such a system. For example, decisions would have to be made regarding who would be responsible for appointing trustees, whether trustees would be appointed with full and equal authority and responsibility, and whether different trustees would hold different roles. In terms of Indigenous representation, provincial and territorial governments would have to decide whether trustees who are appointed as representatives of a specific community—for example, an Indigenous representative—would be appointed by their own community or an external body (e.g., the provincial government), and whether this representative would be entrusted with full decision-making authority, or only appointed to make specific decisions.

As part of investigating ways to increase Indigenous involvement, the CSBA and its partner associations may benefit from analyzing current legislation through a decolonizing lens, to understand how legislation may create barriers to Indigenous representation. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association undertook such an investigation in a 2022 report and identified significant legislative barriers as well as multiple potential avenues for rectification. Once such reviews are completed, we recommend that the CSBA work with member associations to advocate for legislative changes that better enable and empower Indigenous representation in

system-level decision-making, while respecting Indigenous diversity and sovereignty.

Increase Immigrant and New Canadian Involvement

A few participants in each of the six jurisdictions acknowledged that some of their community members were excluded from participating in public school governance because they were not Canadian citizens. Non-Canadian citizens are ineligible to vote in, or run for, school board elections. At first glance, ineligibility might appear to be of little concern because, pragmatically, there must be inclusion and exclusion criteria about who can vote. In the current context of international security concerns, versions of these parameters need to be enforced; in particular, individuals who are visiting Canada or who have not been residing in Canada should not be able to influence policies that they then take no responsibility for enforcing or following. However, immigration policy decisions at the national level have unintended consequences at the provincial and territorial level for the governance of public education. For example, approximately 218,000 refugees arrived in Canada between 2015–2021 along with a little more than 1.3 million immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2022c). These waves of newcomers include school-age children (Ebied, 2023), which means that both children and their parents will be involved in the public education system. Refugee and immigration numbers are expected to increase in the future for various reasons, including the growing numbers of displaced people because of the global climate crisis (The UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2018). Recent reports from Statistics Canada demonstrate that immigrant populations play a central role in Canada's future population growth with immigrants potentially representing approximately 30–34% of the Canadian population by 2041 (Statistics Canada, 2022c). It takes on average 3–5 years to acquire Canadian citizenship (Government of Canada, 2022d) and this wait time will have an impact on whose voices are represented at the boardroom table in some locations for public education.

Migratory trends demonstrate that immigrants tend to eventually settle in regions with people who have similar religious, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. This means that (a) some schools and school systems may have substantial numbers of parents and community members who are not eligible to vote in school board elections and (b) there likely is also a large number of immigrant and refugee parents and grandparents who have children in the public education system but can have no direct influence on system-level decisions. This situation can also lead

to the perpetuation of misinformation about how parents and community members can be involved in their children's education.

Recommendation 10: Partner with Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to Advocate for Voter Eligibility

Although the CSBA does not have authority over immigration or refugee processes, the association does engage with CMEC, which has a representative from each province and territory. Among other things, part of CMEC's mandate is to provide an education policy forum and consult with the Canadian federal government on educational issues of mutual interest among the Canadian provinces and territories. It is recommended that the CSBA consider advocating to CMEC about adding boards of trustees' voting eligibility, in terms of involvement for immigrant and refugee parents who may have been in the country for an extended period of time and are awaiting their citizenship, to CMEC's meeting agenda. Although the CSBA cannot influence voter eligibility directly, CMEC members are positioned to bring the information shared by the CSBA to higher levels of government who do have influence in such decisions.

Recommendation 11: Implement a Newcomer and Refugee Engagement Strategy

It is recommended that the CSBA, in their advocacy capacity, work with member trustee associations to encourage school governance systems to implement an engagement strategy plan that specifically informs newcomer and refugee communities about how they can be involved in decision-making and why school system-level decision-making may affect their communities. Although non-Canadian citizens cannot vote or run in elections, these communities can participate in other ways during the long wait to acquire citizenship, such as through public consultation. Unfortunately, these communities are often excluded from participation in school communities due to, for example, language proficiency or discrimination (Cureton, 2020). To promote participation, school governance systems can establish engagement strategy plans that use languages other than English or French. Moreover, newcomer and refugee communities that have children who attend public schools may use services that are provided by the public education system or community organizations such as Settlement Workers in Schools. Eventually, immigrant parents may become Canadian citizens and want to be involved through voting or running in school board of trustee elections in the future.

Increase Targeted Parent Involvement

Participants in the interviews and public consultation questionnaire raised concerns around the lack of parent involvement in system-level decision-making. Our research team flagged this as notable, given the data demonstrating that there are many opportunities for parental involvement in system-level decision-making within most of the jurisdictions studied. However, many participants who identified as parents in the public consultation clearly signalled that they have not been involved, and many of these also indicated they did not know how to become involved. Although efforts to raise awareness of how public education decision-making is structured can also target parents (Recommendations 1 and 2), it is recommended that the CSBA encourage member associations to consider how to increase parental involvement in public education as part of each school board's strategic plan and include parental involvement in the knowledge mobilization component of an advanced communication plan. Specific efforts should be directed at generating more involvement from a diversified parent population and parental involvement beyond the school site.

Recommendation 12: Increase Parent Participation from Underrepresented Populations

It is well documented that English-speaking women from White, heterosexual family units tend to be overrepresented in parental involvement (Brooks & Hodkinson, 2022; Jezierski & Wall, 2016). As argued elsewhere in this report, the Canadian population is increasingly diverse, and that diversity is not necessarily represented in system-level decision-making spaces. Just as there is a call to diversify the education workforce to better represent the populations they serve (Abawi, 2021; Ryan et al., 2009), the composition of parent involvement should represent the students and communities that schools serve. It is recommended that the CSBA consider ways it can support parents from underrepresented communities and encourage them to participate in active decision-making roles, such as on parent councils or in school governance systems, so that decision-making bodies better represent increasingly diverse school communities. Further, it is recommended that the CSBA critically assess these actions to ensure they support diverse understandings of parental involvement and the role of education, which may differ from traditionally Eurocentric perceptions (see Cranston & Cook, 2020, for more information).

Recommendation 13: Encourage the Use of School Parent Councils

The low level of parental engagement is especially notable in Nova Scotia, where there are school advisory councils—predominantly consisting of parents—and parent councils. Although school advisory councils and parent councils are two avenues for parental engagement, they appear to be an underused structure for parents exercising democratic voice in system-level decision-making. Study participants indicated that the use of parent councils at the school level was inconsistent. Some described in great detail the parent councils they thought were effective, while others responded that their council was inactive or dysfunctional. It is recommended that the CSBA continue to work with their members and partners, such as the Canadian Association of School System Administrators, the Canadian Association of Principals, and the Canadian Teachers' Federation, to encourage better use of school parent councils. Active parent councils can be organizational touch points to diversify parental involvement in public education and a go-to place for trustees in making connections to communities, as well as a way for parents to eventually become involved in system-level decision-making.

Recommendation 14: Encourage and Support Paths for Parental Involvement Beyond the School Sites to Include System-Level Decision-Making

For the parent participants in this study who were involved in decision-making in public education, it was clear that this involvement occurred mainly at the school level. This is unsurprising, given that there have been concerted efforts from provincial and territorial governments to increase parental engagement in their children's education in most if not all of the jurisdictions studied. The Saskatchewan parent-teacher home visit pilot project is one example of these government efforts (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021). However, the majority of the jurisdictions studied do not engage in school site-based management (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2020), which means that schools themselves have little educational decision-making power, especially at the system-level. As a result, most parental engagement in public education comes from an individualist approach—parents learning how best to support their own child's learning rather than involvement in public education for the public good. It is recommended that the CSBA work with its member trustee groups to encourage and support paths for parental involvement that are beyond the school site. In this case, we are specifically referring to parental engagement in committees such as the British Columbia District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), the British Columbia Confederation of

Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC), or the Saskatchewan Curriculum Advisory Committee.

Consider Ways to Increase Student and Youth Involvement

Out of the 509 responses to the public consultation question about age, only 16 participants indicated they were within the 18–29 age range, and 74 were within the 30–39 age range. At first glance, some might consider that the underrepresentation of youth and young adults and the overrepresentation of participants over 50 years of age merely reflects the skewed demographics of an aging Canadian population. In this case, it can be argued that those interested in and involved in public education are aging away from the public education system; this potentially means that the voices of those who have more recently been influenced by the daily operations of public education could be missing from decision-making in the jurisdictions represented in this report. Younger voices could provide valuable information for decision-making in public education, and they appear to be underrepresented. When asked if students and youth should be involved, a few participants did not believe that students should be involved because they were perceived to not have had enough life experience to meaningfully contribute.

However, the majority indicated that students should be involved in decision-making. Some interviewees did indicate that there was marginal involvement of students and youth, such as a student representative on a board of trustees for those jurisdictions that had boards of trustees, but it appears in many cases most of these seats are not filled. There was also no indication of student and youth participation in jurisdictions that have no boards of trustees. Students can be involved in student councils at the various school sites but neither this, nor the representation on boards of trustees, appears to promote further engagement in system-level decision-making.

As the population ages, the involvement of individuals over 50 years of age in public education and system-level decision-making will decrease over time because of aging and death, immigration patterns notwithstanding. This population trend also coincides with all-time low engagement in public education as demonstrated in the low turnout for elections and voting statistics (McGregor & Lucas, 2019). The general forecast for future involvement in system-level decision-making in public education will continue to be low unless there are concerted interventions.

Recommendation 15: Investigate Ways to Increase Student and Youth Involvement in System-Level Decision-Making

In addition to auditing the civic and social studies education curricula, it is recommended that the CSBA investigate ways to increase engagement of students and youth in public education beyond school sites and promote these strategies with member organizations and partners. Specifically, it is recommended that the CSBA recommit to the actions listed in its public letter of support featured in the 2021 OSTA-AECO report, *Student Representation Across Canada* (OSTA-AECO, 2021):

- ♦ Be clear about the school board's vision and commitment for student voice.
- ♦ Support schools to be involved in encouraging student involvement. Ask them to provide information about school boards, their purpose, and the role of a trustee. Ask them to seek out diverse candidates.
- ♦ Offer training for students so they can effectively participate in the governing structures and develop as young leaders.
- ♦ Assist students who become involved in governance to conduct surveys seeking input from a variety of voices.
- ♦ Make use of student advisory groups where students are selected to represent a range of voices in decisions that influence policy.
- ♦ Include more than one student representative on board committees or other governing bodies.
- ♦ Support student conferences, associations, and professional development opportunities, where input from a larger number of students can be solicited. (p. 12)

Encourage Democratically Elected Boards to Implement a Clear Strategic Plan

Past and present trustees described board structures and processes; some of these participants did so with great pride in their efficiencies. Others spoke of what is supposed to happen but, in reality, does not. Upon analyzing these responses, it was clear that, to ensure democratic voice has a role in system-level decision-making, internal decision-making processes need to be effective and efficient. Some boards of trustees do this well, while others appear to be in a state of perpetual crisis. It is recommended that the CSBA encourage school governance

systems to revisit and revise their strategic plans for clarity and, if they do not have one, develop and implement a clear strategic plan. A strategic plan is a defined process through which an organization intends to actualize its defined vision, mission, and objectives (Ford & Ihrke, 2020). Through a strategic plan, organizations develop unified goals so that all stakeholders and representatives work together with the same intention (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Without a strategic plan, boards of trustees can face challenges that several participants identified in this study, such as inadequately differentiating between governance-related decisions and operations-related decisions, and trustees misunderstanding the responsibility they have to all of their constituents, rather than to their individual community.

Participants described the importance of trustees understanding the difference between operations and governance. In jurisdictions with school boards, boards of trustees are responsible for governance decisions, such as policymaking, distributing resources, setting priorities and objectives, and distributing responsibilities among teams and some leadership positions. In contrast, operations decisions, such as teacher and administrator performance reviews, school-level procedures, and most other decisions that directly relate to the daily experiences of students, families, or faculty members, are the responsibility of superintendents and other administrators. Notably, these roles are less distinct in Nova Scotia, where those who had previously been superintendents in school boards were transitioned into the position of regional executive directors of regional centres for education (*Education Act*, 2018, Section 99.3.a). In Nova Scotia, regional executive directors report directly to the Minister of Education and oversee the operations of both the regional centre for education and the schools served by the regional centre (*Education Act*, 2018, Section 65). Regardless of the difference between operations and governance decisions, we recommend that the CSBA encourage boards to each develop a clear strategic plan that outlines the responsibilities of all stakeholders.

A clear strategic plan will effectively articulate the responsibilities of each role. When these roles are not clearly defined, boards of trustees may inadvertently make operations decisions about which they are not adequately informed, and administrators may make governance decisions without representing the wishes of the constituents or may even make decisions that do not align with established values, priorities, and goals.

Once trustees are elected, they do not hold individual power to make system-level change; rather, they hold the power to vote on motions and to advocate for

different interests through participation on the board and on committees. This distinction—between a trustee’s individual interests and actual group responsibility—came up frequently in this study, as both a challenge trustees faced when broadening their perspectives from the school level to the system level, and a tension trustees experienced in being accountable to their constituents. However, trustees are also responsible for working with their colleagues on the board. For example, it was shared that a parent may run for nomination on a platform promising a solution to a challenge in their child’s school. Upon being elected, that parent may learn that they now have to base their decision-making and voting power on the needs of all children in the district rather than only children at their school, and that other schools may be facing greater challenges than the challenges they perceived in their immediate environment. A clear strategic plan will differentiate between the scope and exercise of individual power and the scope and exercise of board responsibility, while also setting district-wide goals to which all trustees can refer when voting on decisions.

Recommendation 16: Encourage Boards to Implement a Clear Strategic Plan

Even if governance boards are populated with engaged people who are aware of their role and how governance is structured, there is no guarantee that the board will run effectively and efficiently. Although most stakeholders with insider knowledge of their school governance system acknowledged that a strategic plan did exist, those boards that were perceived as ineffective were often considered as such because their strategic plans were unclear, poorly communicated, or infrequently updated. The work of school governance systems appears to be more effective and receive higher public approval when school boards have a clear strategic plan that is often referred to. Some of our participants had firsthand experience with boards of trustees that worked in reference to their strategic plans and how these plans helped to keep the work of trustees in focus. Other trustees, both past and present, had never been a part of a strategic planning process. It is recommended that the CSBA encourage its members to engage with school boards in the strategic planning process and to build upon their professional learning materials with tools that aid boards in their strategic planning.

The research is clear on the benefits of strategic planning: It supports the development and communication of shared missions, vision, and values, which in turn guide unified decision-making and keep all stakeholders accountable to these unified goals (Henrikson, 2022; Jasparro, 2006; Leggate & Thompson, 1997). One study revealed a correlation between school board members’ prioritization of the

strategic plan and higher levels of academic performance for students in their respective districts (Ford & Ihrke, 2020).

Some important aspects that boards should consider including in a clear strategic plan include:

- ♦ Unified goals, missions, values, and overall vision for the district.
- ♦ Established roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, with explanation of how these roles and responsibilities support the unified goals.
- ♦ Accountability measures for key stakeholders including trustees and superintendents.
- ♦ Methods to ensure community and education partners' participation and engagement with the overall vision of the board.
- ♦ Established timelines for revisiting the strategic plan to ensure coherence, timeliness, and relevancy.

Expand Trustee Professional Development (Democratically Elected Boards)

Most of the interview participants spoke about their knowledge level. In jurisdictions that included boards of trustees, many trustees spoke about the informal learning they undertook for their position. Those who demonstrated substantial knowledge about system-level governance did so from their academic expertise in governance, lived experience working within the system, or a combination of both. Excluding those who possessed academic working knowledge of various models of public education system-level decision-making, all trustees (past and present) and public education employees referred to the misalignment between what they thought the role, function, and processes were for decision-making at the system level and the reality. Regardless of their educational experience, the majority discussed having to learn about system-level decision-making on the job. Many thought they understood the role and governance process only to find that once in the role, adjustments had to be made in relation to their own expectations and understandings.

For some proponents who were not in favour of publicly elected boards of trustees, their argument was that the public was not informed enough to make decisions for the system. In some cases, they described jurisdictions where boards of trustees

had appeared to have lost their way. Some participants also shared strategies on how boards of trustees were able to get back to developing appropriate educational priorities. One of these strategies was to provide specific professional learning opportunities for board members. These practices currently appear to be sporadic and driven by individuals and/or specific boards of education. As part of the CSBA's mission to support boards of trustees, it is recommended that the CSBA promote ongoing professional learning opportunities. Specifically, in jurisdictions where there are elected trustees and commissioners, there needs to be ongoing education (in addition to pre-election awareness) that all elected and appointed members must complete to carry out their duties. This education should be designed to foster long-term education in three stages: onboarding, ongoing professional development, and succession planning.

Recommendation 17: Implement Strategic Onboarding Plans

As part of the CSBA's continued efforts to broker professional learning opportunities, it is recommended that the CSBA review their current suite of professional learning opportunities and include content that focuses on effective onboarding practices for new trustees. Onboarding refers to practices designed to support the effectiveness and efficiency of new people joining an organization (Klein & Polin, 2012). Participants emphasized the need to develop an onboarding plan for new members that includes understanding school governance, norms, protocols, priorities, and principles. In addition, some participants suggested that there ought to be more emphasis on team building to support the development of an internal culture of collaboration. In jurisdictions with democratically elected boards of trustees, trustees work together on all decisions; team-building strategies were perceived as essential to building the foundation for trustees to openly discuss, negotiate, and collaborate on decisions brought to board tables.

Recommendation 18: Increase Ongoing Professional Development

In an effort to provide more role clarity, it is recommended that the CSBA encourage its members to create, or make use of available, information about trustee roles and responsibilities as well as the governance process and to disseminate this information to local school boards using different communication modes. Some of the mechanisms participants shared in this investigation included: (a) facilitate workshops or webinars for people considering running for school boards prior to elections, as well as for registered candidates; (b) make information available about roles, responsibilities, and governance processes, not only on websites but also through interactive infographics and through social media platforms; and (c)

include information in different formats and languages, and also for people with visual impairments and deaf and hard of hearing people.

Recommendation 19: Encourage Succession Planning

Many participants in jurisdictions that have democratically elected school boards regularly have single candidates running for each seat during elections or find that the same people may serve as trustees for decades. Low levels of contest and turnover during elections may be related to a lack of succession planning. Succession planning refers to processes for identifying and developing new leaders within an organization, for the purpose of increasing engagement and resource retention (Gray, 2014). In the case of boards of trustees, succession planning refers to experienced trustees identifying and developing new trustees to continue in the role and encouraging community members to take on the role of trustee. Succession planning allows current board members to think about ways to have others replace them to continue the work and advance in areas of relevance. Succession planning is also an opportunity to invite more diverse voices to trustee and leadership roles. It is recommended that the CSBA consider providing its members with content and/or modules about the topic of succession planning and, in their advocacy capacity, encourage boards and trustees to create clear succession plans using these professional learning materials. It is important that these professional learning materials also include ways to encourage diversification of the trustee pool.

Revisit Elected School Board Structure and Processes

A large portion of our participants indicated that they were in favour of maintaining or restoring boards of trustees as one way to promote democratic voice in public education. However, participants from most jurisdictions that still had boards of trustees also indicated that there need to be modifications and changes to the structures, processes, and procedures associated with board governance structures.

Recommendation 20: Review Requirements for Those in Decision-Making Roles for Public Education

Depending on each jurisdiction, those who make decisions at the school system level could include elected trustees or commissioners, appointed representatives, or elected municipal members. Participants from the six jurisdictions studied in this report indicated that whoever is in the decision-making role should be connected to the communities they represent. For example, participants repeatedly expressed

that elected or appointed trustees should be people who are connected to their community, beyond simple name recognition. In some jurisdictions, there was a call to revisit trustee eligibility requirements. In jurisdictions where there are elected and appointed representatives, there should be a set of requirements beyond age, citizenship, and length of residence. Potentially, new requirements can be introduced that demonstrate candidates' involvement in and connection to the communities they would potentially represent. In some jurisdictions outside of Canada, community letters of support are necessary as part of the required package for candidate registration during each election. It is recommended that the CSBA, in their advocacy capacity, review the requirements for those in decision-making roles at the system level, and encourage its members to advocate for revised requirements for jurisdictions that would benefit from these changes. An important consideration will be ensuring that any new requirements are not impediments to participation.

Recommendation 21: Advocate for Limits on Number of Trustee or Commissioner Terms

In some situations, trustees were repeatedly acclaimed for decades. In the interview and focus group data, some participants went to great lengths to explain how in some cases the candidates who were being repeatedly acclaimed were not necessarily ideal. They described a culture where potential candidates would not run against present trustees because the current trustees would have the advantage of name recognition on the ballot. In these cases, potential candidates viewed this as an unfair advantage and felt the risks were too high to enter the campaign; because school board elections remain grassroots, potential candidates would have had to spend their own personal money to fund a campaign that had a high probability of not being successful. It is recommended that the CSBA encourage its members to review local contexts and if applicable, to advocate to their respective provincial and territorial governments for limits on the number of consecutive terms for which trustees can run. In some cases, the incumbent trustee has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the trustee role and the general public is satisfied with the work they are doing and as such, would like to see the individual in the role for more than one term. In some governance structures, the number of repeated consecutive terms is limited to two; other boards include two term limits that are non-consecutive. Participants hoped that by limiting terms for trustees, this would encourage renewal and the changeover of ideas and perspectives.

Recommendation 22: Create Alternative Engagement Processes

Many interview and focus group participants believed that board processes and procedures needed to be reconceptualized, citing situations where they as individuals felt inhibited by the formalized processes used during meetings. Others, many of whom were from the NWT, described alternate ways of engaging in the decision-making process. It is recommended that the CSBA explore alternative engagement or procedural practices, some of which already exist, to promote reduced reliance by school governance systems on the formalities required under Robert's Rules of Order in decision-making meetings and by way of establishing more accessible meeting organization systems. Further changes that participants suggested could promote greater accessibility included: using more diverse ways of participating such as through mobile device applications, at-home written options, or verbal communication formats; public events that include food and beverages and/or community-based activities that decentre the formality of public meetings; and moving meetings to more neutral spaces in which all community members can feel comfortable. These strategies may be considered in either stand-alone fashion or as complementary to existing requirements for formal decision-making meetings and procedures. Some boards may find strengths in using the same practices used by elected assemblies at other levels of governance in Canada.

Convert Existing Communication Strategies to a Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) Approach

Public education functions in a time when information has never been so easy to access, and online connectivity has made it more possible than ever to be connected to broader groups of people more globally. On the other hand, there is increased misinformation, growing social isolation and exclusion, lowered standards of living, work intensification, and more mental health issues. Participants in all jurisdictions noted how their local jurisdiction had often lost dedicated education reporters and/or observed less education reporting in the local traditional news media outlets (i.e., print, television, and radio). It is within this current social context that governance of Canadian public education exists.

It was not clear whether the jurisdictions in this study primarily engaged in traditional communication methods, embarked on innovative communication approaches, or used a combination of both. What is clear is that, for the most part, what is presently being used as the communication strategy for both elected boards of trustees and jurisdictions with no school board elections has been

generally ineffective at reaching the general public and encouraging participants to be involved in democratic decision-making at the system-level.

A strong communication strategy to enable the public to be involved in system-level decision-making—one that goes beyond a one-way movement of information from the board or school system out to the public and includes an interactive approach—is needed. This is best accomplished with a comprehensive knowledge mobilization plan that takes into consideration the majority of the recommendations presented in this report. Effectively using a knowledge mobilization approach can help the CSBA put into practice many of these recommendations and build upon the CSBA's existing communication processes and advocacy work.

Recommendation 23: Evaluate CSBA's Communication Processes and Consider Including a Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) Approach

Knowledge mobilization is a catch-all term that encompasses many things, such as knowledge sharing, knowledge communication, and knowledge translation—all of which are necessary components for a robust and strong mobilization plan. Knowledge mobilization includes the co-creation or collaboration of key stakeholders in, for example, using new knowledge and understanding to inform decision-making for the public good. By implementing a KMb approach, the CSBA and its members will be practising and emulating the many recommendations suggested for boards of trustees and other jurisdictions in promoting democratic voice and public involvement in system-level decision-making. A few key aspects of an effective KMb plan are knowing one's audience, being clear on purpose and messaging, and engaging with stakeholders in a meaningful way. The CSBA and its members must remain clear about the audiences and stakeholders to whom they are accountable, and it is recommended that they develop a KMb plan that considers targeted efforts and messaging to audiences, such as students and youth, Indigenous communities, parents, and diverse populations; partnership organizations might help start the process of strengthening public engagement in public education.

Effective KMb approaches are ongoing and not sporadic. This is key to meaningful change because stakeholders need to feel that their involvement matters and is respected. This occurs with ongoing engagement methods that are not just one way but include practices that allow the public or specific public groups to be heard. Such scenarios enable healthy dialogues where not all recommendations or advice will be enacted. In such cases, however, stakeholders are provided with feedback as to why this is the case. One-way information sharing is insular: effort—time,

knowledge, and expenses—is expended by those invited only to have the invitees collect or “take” the information and then the invitees are not communicated with again. This has been an ongoing practice in municipal, provincial, and federal governance structures. In most cases, future engagement is reduced because individuals and groups will report that they feel their voices are not heard or that nothing has changed.

Knowledge mobilization approaches feature built-in feedback or reporting loops for those who have been involved, so that they can share why feedback has been used or not used or how the information has been used to inform decisions. In these situations, the ongoing dialogue helps to engender other important understandings about the topics at hand so that stakeholders have a more informed understanding of the issue(s). A small number of participants in this study raised concerns about trustee accountability; engaging in this method of ongoing communication would also improve trust in and support for trustees, and this practice could be a part of the accountability process and improve transparency. Although other research would need to substantiate this, these practices could also increase engagement with public education and support for democratic voice in public education. An effective communication plan would enable a way for dialogue to occur with various stakeholder groups by helping them to come together and collaborate.

Recommendation 24: Invest in Incorporating Effective Information Communication Technology

An effective knowledge mobilization plan builds upon existing communication plans. In addition to evaluating existing communication plans, it is recommended that the CSBA, its members, and local school boards consider enhanced and more strategic use of information communication technology (ICT), such as social media platforms, as a part of the existing communication plan or enhanced knowledge mobilization plan. The COVID-19 pandemic created many negative and unintended outcomes, but there were also positive unintended consequences for expanded modes of communication. Jurisdictions across Canada experienced a period of accelerated ICT learning. Although many considered ICT learning and communication to be temporary solutions for working through a global health crisis, these ways of working have now come to be a part of everyday life for a larger portion of the public than in pre-pandemic times. Now is the time to capitalize on these measures and infrastructures, investing in their proficiencies to bring key stakeholders together and enable them to discuss issues and share concerns,

policies, and practices. Examples from study participants include the use of a smartphone app in the Northwest Territories to survey the school community about specific topics using short questions. Another example is the active use of Facebook and other social media platforms by school boards and board associations to share information with constituents.

Conclusion

Conclusion

In the provinces and territories, school board systems were created to position local communities as responsible for—and in control of—local education (Sancton, 2015). As communities grew, so too did school board systems, adopting democratically informed systems of elected trustees and locally informed decision-making. Over the last 50 years, however, school boards have grown to cover sometimes immense geographic areas; this growth has resulted in increased monitoring by provincial and territorial governments, which in turn has resulted in decreased decision-making power and increased accountability pressures (Wallin et al., 2021). In some cases, such as Nova Scotia and Francophone Québec, school boards have been abolished altogether. For the purposes of our investigation, we have explored how these (and other) changes have influenced the role of democratic voice in public education. This inquiry was commissioned because of trustee concerns around the loss of the public's involvement—or as many of our respondents termed it, local democratic voice—in decision-making for publicly funded K–12 education in parts of Canada.

We have presented findings from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Because education in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility, each jurisdiction has approached public education differently. However, a few trends were present in nearly all jurisdictions: (a) members of the public want to be involved in decision-making and want to retain democratic decision-making systems in public education; (b) systems that continue to have democratically elected school boards are trying to increase public engagement in decision-making processes; and (c) the general public, including those pursuing nomination to democratically elected school boards, are inadequately informed of key information related to how school systems and democratic decision-making function. Participants across all jurisdictions shared many proud accomplishments in their school system, such as advancements in Truth and Reconciliation work, initiatives to increase participation from underrepresented communities, and highly successful public engagement campaigns to retain democratically elected school boards. However, all jurisdictions also shared an acknowledgement of the need for change: as Canada's population changes, school governance systems must also change.

In listening to participants' experiences, reflections, and ideas for the future, we have included 24 evidence-informed recommendations for the Canadian School Boards Association. We hope that these recommendations support the ongoing

work that is already happening in jurisdictions across Canada to increase public awareness and engagement in public education and to ensure Canada's education systems are equitable, diverse, and effective at all levels.

References

References

- Abawi, Z., & Eizadirad, A. (2020). Bias-free biased hiring? Racialized teachers' perspectives on educational hiring practices in Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 193, 18–31.
<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/68280>
- Apple, M. (2001). Comparing neo-liberal projects and inequality in education. *Comparative Education*, 37(4), 409–423.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060120091229>
- Apple, M. (2006). Understanding and interrupting neoliberalism and neoconservatism in education. *Pedagogies*, 1(1), 21–26.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15544818ped0101_4
- Authier, P. (2023, May 4). New education bill is met with outrage from Quebec Anglophone groups. *Montreal Gazette*.
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebec-education-minister-tables-legislation-giving-himself-more-management-power>
- Baker, T. L., Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R. J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. *School Community Journal*, 26(2), 161–184. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1124003.pdf>
- BCSTA. (n.d.). *Boards of education are essential*. <https://bcsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BCSTA-Boards-of-Education-are-Essential-2019.pdf>
- Bedard, G. J., & Mombourquette, C. P. (2015) Conceptualizing Alberta district leadership practices: A cross-case analysis. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 14(2), 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2014.997936>
- Blackmore, J., MacDonald, K., Keddie, A., Gobby, B., Wilkinson, J., Eacott, S., & Niesche, R. (2022). Election or selection? School autonomy reform, governance, and the politics of school councils. *Journal of Education Policy*, 38(4), 547–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.2022766>

- Breunig, M. (2009). Teaching for and about critical pedagogy in the post-secondary classroom. *Studies in Social Justice*, 3(2), 247–262.
<https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v3i2.1018>
- British Columbia Government News. (2022, September). *Education by the numbers* [Information bulletin. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022ECC0066-001332#:~:text=As%20of%20the%202021%2D22,the%202022%2D23%20school%20year.>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2014, December 5). *Province and trustees recommit to co-operative path forward* [Information Bulletin].
https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2013-2017/2014educ0081-001834.htm
- British Columbia Ministry of Education and BC School Trustees Association. (2018, November 30). *Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the British Columbia School Trustees Association*.
<https://bcsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-MOE-BCSTA-MOU-WEB.jpg>
- British Columbia School Trustees Association. (2018, December 3). *BCSTA and Ministry of Education sign updated Memorandum of Understanding* [Media Release]. <https://bcsta.org/media-release-bcsta-moe-mou-2018/>
- Brooks, R., & Hodkinson, P. (2022). The distribution of “educational labour” in families with equal or primary carer fathers. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(7), 995–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2114426>
- Bruemmer, R. (2021, Oct. 5). After Echaquan report, Legault repeats there is no systemic racism in Quebec. *Montreal Gazette*.
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/after-echaquan-report-legault-repeats-there-is-no-systemic-racism-in-quebec>
- Campbell, C. (2021). Leading large-scale educational change in the twenty-first century: Educational leadership pre-, during, and post-pandemic. In D. M. Netolicky (Ed.), *Future alternatives for educational leadership: Diversity, inclusion, equity and democracy* (pp. 143–161). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131496-15>

- Campbell, D., & Fullan, M. (2019). *The governance core: School boards, superintendents, and schools working together*. Corwin.
- Canada, British Columbia, & First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2018, July 1). *British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success*. <https://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AGREEMENT-BCTEA-2018-FINAL-Signed-with-Schedules-WEB-VERSION-2018-08-1.pdf>
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-12.html#h-40>
- Canadian School Boards Association. (2018). *CSBA update: Implementation of TRC calls to action*. <http://cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CSBA-Update-Implementation-of-TRC-Calls-to-Action-March-2018.pdf>
- CBC News. (2009, March 18). Saskatchewan school boards stripped of power to set taxes. *CBC News Saskatchewan*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-school-boards-stripped-of-power-to-set-taxes-1.820998>
- CBC News. (2021, December 23). 8 Yukon schools to vote on whether to join First Nations school board framework. *CBC North*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-schools-first-nations-school-board-framework-1.6296953>
- Charter of the French Language, CQLR c C-11.
- CivicInfo BC. (2023). *CivicInfo BC*. www.civicinfo.bc.ca
- Commission scolaire Francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest. (2022). *Commission scolaire Francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest*. <https://www.csftno.com/>
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). (n.d.). *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial*. <https://csap.ca/>

- Conseil scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. (2022). *Annual report 2021/2022*. https://www.csf.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/csf_bilan_annuel_2022_spread_ENG.pdf
- Cook, S., & Westheimer, J. (2006). Introduction: Democracy and education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(2), 347–358. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20054167>
- Council on Mi'kmaq Education. (2008). *About the council on Mi'kmaq education*. <http://cme.ednet.ns.ca/about.shtml>
- Cranston, J., & Cook, S. (2020). Integrate or assimilate? How the discourse of Manitoba's "School partnerships: A guide for parents, schools, and communities" enforces hegemonic understandings of parental involvement on recently-resettled refugees. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 193, 2–17. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/68880>
- Crotty, L. (2009). Leadership in religious education: A critique from the Australian perspective. In M. de Souza, G. Durka, K. Engebretson, R. Jackson, & A. McGrady (Eds.), *International handbook of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions* (pp. 779–798). Springer.
- Cureton, A. E. (2020). Strangers in the school: Facilitators and barriers regarding refugee parental involvement. *The Urban Review*, 52(5), 924–949. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-020-00580-0>
- Dahl, R. (1998). *On democracy*. Yale University Press.
- Darbyson, K. (2021, August 15). Rural parents protest Bill 64. *The Brandon Sun*. <https://www.brandonsun.com/local/2021/04/15/rural-parents-protest-bill-64>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Rothman, R. (2015). *Teaching in the flat world: Learning from high-performing systems*. Teachers College Press.

- de Koning, R., Egiz, A., Kotecha, J., Ciuculete, A. C., Ooi, S. Z. Y., Bankole, N. D. A., Erhabor, J., Higginbotham, G., Khan, M., Dalle, D. U., Sichimba, D., Bandyopadhyay, S., & Kanmounye, U. S. (2021). Survey fatigue during the Covid-19 pandemic: An analysis of neurosurgery survey response rates. *Frontiers in Surgery*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsurg.2021.690680>
- De Smet, A., Tegelberg, L., Theunissen, R., & Vogel, T. (2020). *Overcoming pandemic fatigue: How to reenergize organizations for the long run*. McKinsey & Company.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Education. (2021). *African Nova Scotian Education Framework*. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/psp/equity-inclusive-education/african-nova-scotian-education-framework>
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Feather Trail Press.
- Duff, P. A., & Li, D. (2009). Indigenous, minority, and heritage language education in Canada: Policies, contexts, and issues. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.66.1.001>
- Ebied, R. (2023). *Settlement workers in schools' (SWIS) support for K–12 refugee students: A resilience and compassion-based approach* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario]. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository, 9349. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/9349/>
- Edwards, J., Ketchen, D., & Short, J. (2014). *Mastering strategic management* (1st Canadian ed.). BCcampus Open Education. <https://opentextbc.ca/strategicmanagement/>
- Education Act*, SNWT 1995, c.28.
- Education Act*, Statutes of Saskatchewan, 1995, E-0.2
- Education (CSAP) Act*. 1995-96, c. 1, s. 1; 2018, c. 1, Sch. A, s. 105.
- Education Act*, CQLR 2020, c. I-13.3
- Education Act* (Nova Scotia), 2018, c. 1, Sch. A, s. 1.

- Éducation Québec. (n.d.). *Information sheet: Part 3 of the compulsory training for governing board members*. https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/Centre_de_services_scolaire/sheet-3_functioning-governing-board.pdf
- Elliott, B., & MacLennan, D. (1994). Education, modernity, and neo-conservative school reform in Canada, Britain, and the US. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15(2), 165–185. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1393225>
- Empire-Advance, V. (2021, August 19). Municipalities send open letter to the Government of Manitoba. *Empire-Advance*. <https://www.empireadvance.ca/opinion/municipalities-send-open-letter-to-the-government-of-manitoba-4297674>
- Fink, D., & Stoll, L. (2005). Educational change: Easier said than done. In A. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Extending educational change* (pp. 17–41). Springer.
- First Nations Education Steering Committee and British Columbia School Trustees Association. (2022, April 22). *Memorandum of Understanding between the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA)*. <https://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/MOU-FNESC-BCSTA-2022-04-22.pdf>
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). *Case study*. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (pp. 1713–1719). Elsevier.
- Ford, M. R., & Ihrke, D. M. (2020). School board member strategic planning prioritization and school district performance. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 19(4), 597–609. <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/15700763.2019.1638420>
- Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*. Corwin.
- Fullan, M. (2015). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

- Galway, G., Sheppard, B., Wiens, J., & Brown, J. (2013). The impact of centralization on local district governance in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education Administration and Policy*, 145, 1–34.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1017209.pdf>
- Garcia-Morena, V. A., Gertler, P., & Patrinos, H. A. (2020). School-based management and learning outcomes: Experimental evidence. In M. Nishimura (Ed.), *Community participation with schools in developing countries* (pp. 211–229). Routledge.
- Gerring, J. (2020). *Case study research: Principles and practices* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Glaze, A. (2018). *Raise the bar: A coherent and responsive education administrative system for Nova Scotia*. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/raisethebar-en.pdf>
- Goodson, E. F. (2001). Social histories of educational change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2, 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011508128957>
- Governance Review Committee. (2009). *School board governance: A focus on achievement. Report of the Governance Review Committee to the Minister of Education of Ontario*. Ontario Ministry of Education.
[https://www.opsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Report of the Governance Review Committee to the Minister of Education.pdf](https://www.opsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Report_of_the_Governance_Review_Committee_to_the_Minister_of_Education.pdf)
- Government of Canada. (2017). *Northwest Territories' territorial symbols*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/provincial-territorial-symbols-canada/northwest-territories.html>
- Government of Canada. (2022a). *Grants and contributions to support First Nations elementary and secondary educational advancement*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1549896875316/1615722490085>
- Government of Canada. (2022b). *Indigenous peoples in Manitoba*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1626886719453/1626886859809>
- Government of Canada. (2022c). *Section 23 – Minority language educational rights*. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art23.html>

- Government of Canada. (2022d). *Apply for citizenship: Who can apply*.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-citizenship/become-canadian-citizen/eligibility.html#pr>
- Government of Manitoba. (2022). *Enrolment Report: September 29, 2022*.
https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/finance/sch_enrol/enrolment_2022.pdf
- Government of Northwest Territories. (2017). *DEA and DEC member handbook 2017-2018*.
https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/dea_dec_handbook-english-2017_2018_1.pdf
- Government of Northwest Territories. (2020). *Annual reports for Northwest Territories education bodies for the 2019-2020 school year ending June 30, 2020*.
https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/td_246-192.pdf
- Government of Northwest Territories. (2022a). *School funding framework: School funding for education bodies in the Northwest Territories. 2022-2023 School year*.
https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/school_funding_framework_2022-23.pdf
- Government of Northwest Territories. (2022b). *Update on Education Act modernization* [News release]. <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/update-education-act-modernization>
- Government of Saskatchewan. (n.d.). *Information for municipalities concerning education property tax*.
<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/municipal-administration/taxation-and-service-fees/information-for-municipalities-concerning-education-property-tax>
- Government of Saskatchewan. (2021, November 15). *Saskatchewan launches innovative parent teacher home visits pilot project* [News release].
<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/november/15/saskatchewan-launches-innovative-parent-teacher-home-visits-pilot-project>

- Government of Saskatchewan. (2023). *2018–2022 provincial enrolment summary*.
<https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/77115>
- Gray, D. (2014). Succession planning 101. *Professional Safety*, 59(3), 35.
https://action-learning.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SuccessionPlanning_PS_3.2014-.pdf
- Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Foundation Inc. (2023). *Home page*.
<https://foundation.gscs.ca/>
- Gremer, J. (1973). *On educational change*. National Association of Elementary School Principals.
- Grunwald, E. (2022, September 12). N.W.T. school boards “concerned” by shortage of substitute teachers. *CBC North*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/supply-teachers-shortage-school-board-n-w-t-1.6578280>
- Gutek, G. (1997). *Philosophical and ideological perspectives in education* (2nd ed.). Allyn and Bacon.
- Halmarson, D. (2021, June 11). T-shirt campaign protests proposed education bill in Manitoba. *CTV News Winnipeg*. <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/t-shirt-campaign-protests-proposed-education-bill-in-manitoba-1.5467223>
- Hargreaves, A. (2007). The long and short of educational change. *Educational Canada*, 47(3), 16–23. <https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/EdCan-2007-v47-n3-Hargreaves.pdf>
- Hargreaves, A. (2020). Leading from the middle: Its nature, origins and importance. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(1), 92–114.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-06-2019-0013>
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford Academic.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199283262.001.0001>

- Henrikson, R. (2022). Reflections on school board evaluation practices to support meaningful feedback for superintendent growth and improvement. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 17(3), 265–290.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/19427751211002234>
- Henriquez, G. (2023, May 4). Quebec’s new education reform, Bill 23, would grant more powers to minister. *Global News*.
<https://globalnews.ca/news/9674524/quebec-education-reform-minister-bill-23/>
- Hursh, D. (2000). Neo-liberalism and the control of teachers, students, and learning: The rise of standards, standardization, and accountability. *Cultural Logic: A Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice*, 4(1).
<https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/clogic/article/view/191986/188921>
- Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c I-5
- Jacquet, J. B., Pathak, R., Haggerty, J. H., Theodori, G. L., & Kropsch, A. C. (2021). Research fatigue in unconventional oil and gas boomtowns: Perceptions, strategies and obstacles among social scientists collecting human subjects data. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 73(10), Article 101918.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101918>
- Jasparro, R. J. (2006). Strategic planning: Is it worth the effort? The superintendents’ perspective. *Higher Education*, 17.
<https://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/highered/17>
- Jezierski, S., & Wall, G. (2019). Changing understandings and expectations of parental involvement in education. *Gender and Education*, 31(7), 811–826.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2017.1332340>
- Kam, C. D., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2013). Name recognition and candidate support. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(4), 971–986.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12034>

- Kamel, G. (2020). *Investigation report: Law on the investigation of the causes and circumstances of death for the protection of human life concerning the death of Joyce Echaquan*. 2020-00275.
https://www.coroner.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Enquetes_publicques/2020-06375-40_002_1_sans_logo_anglais.pdf
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). Some effect of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(5), 965–990. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777808>
- Karagiorgi, Y. (2011). On democracy and leadership: From rhetoric to reality. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 14(3), 369–384.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2010.496872>
- Katz, M. B. (1971). *Class, bureaucracy, and schools: The illusion of educational change in America*. Praeger Publishers.
- Kellnar, D. (2003). Towards a critical theory of education. *Democracy & Nature*, 9(1), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1085566032000074940>
- Klein, H. J., & Polin, B. (2012). Are organizations on board with best practices onboarding? In C. R. Wanberg (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational socialization* (pp. 267–302). Oxford University Press.
- Lara, L., & Saracostti, M. (2019). Effect of parental involvement on children's academic achievement in Chile. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1464–1464.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01464>
- Leggate, P. M. C., & Thompson, J. J. (1997). The management of development planning in international schools. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 11(6), 267–273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513549710186894>
- Les Cégeps du Québec. (2023). *Quebec and its regions*.
<https://www.cegepsquebec.ca/en/quebec/quebec-and-its-regions/#:~:text=The%20province%20of%20Quebec%2C%20the,tourist%20attractions%20that%20await%20you.>
- Lichtman, M. (2010). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

- Liewicki, N. (2021, August 15). Armed with musical instruments, “Kill-the-Bill” supergroup marches door-to-door against Bill 64. *CBC Manitoba*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/bill-64-music-teachers-manitoba-government-1.6141578>
- Lucas, J. (2016). *Fields of authority: Special purpose governance in Ontario, 1815–2015*. University of Toronto Press.
- Macintosh, M. (2021, May 3). Manitoba education reform bill built on “false, divisive premises”: former administrators. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/05/03/manitoba-education-reform-bill-built-on-false-divisive-premises-former-administrators.html>
- MacLellan, D. (2012). Faith-based schooling and the politics of education: A case study of Ontario, Canada. *Political Development, Faith-Based Schooling and Secularisation*, 6(1), 37–60. <https://doi.org/10.54561/prj0601037m>
- MacKinnon, D. (2018). *School district size and the impact of changes to governing school boards*. <http://cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/School-District-Size-and-the-Impact-of-Changes-to-Governing-School-BoardsJan2018.pdf>
- Maharaj, S. (2020). From oversight to advocacy: An examination of school-board leadership. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 19(3), 431–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1585548>
- Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. (2023). *Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc.* <https://mfnerc.org/>
- Manitoba Indian Brotherhood. (1968). *Wahbung: Our tomorrows*. Author.
- Manitoba School Boards Association. (2023). *School boards and trusteeship in Manitoba*. <https://mbschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Guide-to-School-Boards-and-Trusteeship.pdf>
- Manness, C., & Mackinnon, J. (2020, March). *Our children's success: Manitoba's future*. The Report of the Commission on K to 12 Education. <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/educationreview/docs/public-discussion-paper.pdf>

- McDowell, K., Jack, A., & Compton, M. (2018). Parent involvement in pre-kindergarten and the effects on student achievement. *The Advocate*, 23(6), Article No. 5. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2637-4552.1004>
- McGregor, R. M., & Lucas, J. (2019). Who has school spirit? Explaining voter participation in school board elections. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 52(4), 923–936.
- McLaughlin, D. (2005). Cultivating habits of democracy: Asking the hard questions. *Education Canada*, 45(1), 1–6.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Métis Nation of Greater Victoria, Métis Nation British Columbia, & The Board of Education of School District No. 61. (2022). *Métis Education Agreement*. <https://www.sd61.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2022/09/Metis-Education-Agreement.pdf>
- Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. (n.d.). *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey*. <https://www.kinu.ca/about-us>
- Nagler, C. (2022). *Psychological safety in the Native American workplace* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the College of St. Scholastica].
- Neumann, E., Gewirtz, S., Maguire, M., & Towers, E. (2020). Neoconservative education policy and the case of the English Baccalaureate. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(5), 702–719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1708466>
- Newton, P. M., & Sackney, L. (2005). Group knowledge and group knowledge processes in school board decision making. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(3), 434–457. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4126478>
- Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *School enrollments and graduates*. <https://www.statsnwt.ca/education/school-enrolment-graduates/>
- Norton, B. (2016). Identity and language learning: Back to the future. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(2), 475–479. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.293>

- Nova Scotia Legislature. (n.d.). *Premiers*.
<https://nslegislature.ca/about/history/past-premiers>
- Nova Scotia Legislature. (2017). Acadian and Francophone *Education Act* / Loi sur l'éducation acadienne et Francophone - Bill 156 An Act Respecting Acadian and Francophone Education. <https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-64-session-1/bill-156>
- Nova Scotia Legislature. (2022, April 22). *Debates and proceedings*. Order of the Legislature by Hansard Reporting Services.
https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/hansard-debates/assembly-64-session-1/house_22apr22
- Office of the Auditor General. (2015). Report of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. <https://www.oag-ns.ca/audit-reports/regional-school-board-governance-and-oversight-business-continuity-management-funding>
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Racial discrimination* [Brochure].
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-brochure>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2015). *Education policy outlook: Canada*. OECD Publishing.
<https://www.oecd.org/education/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20CANADA.pdf>
- OSTA-AECO. (2021). *Student representation across Canada*. <https://osta-aeco.org/student-representation-across-canada/>
- Overgaard, V. (2019, August). *Elected school boards and high-quality public education: A literature review examining the relationship between high-quality public education systems and governing school boards*. Canadian School Boards Association. <http://www.cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ElectedSchool-Boards-Literature-Review-FINAL.pdf>
- Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Politician. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://www.oed.com/dictionary/politician_n?tab=meaning_and_use#29495024

- Parker, M. (2019, November 5). Members, not Robert, should rule. *The Call*.
<https://socialistcall.com/2019/11/05/roberts-rules-dsa-meetings-democracy/>
- Perrins, D. (2017). *Review of the education PreK–12 funding distribution model*.
https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/98097/98097-Funding_Model_Review_Report.pdf
- Pierre, J. (Ed.). (2000). *Debating governance: Authority, steering, and democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Piscitelli, A., Perella, A., & Payler, A. (2022). Public expectations of school board trustees. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy / Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation*, 198, 19–34.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1086425ar>
- Probe Research. (2018). *Manitobans' views on the future of the provincial school board system: September, 2018 omnibus survey*. Probe Research.
[www.tmsd.mb.ca/documents/Links%20\(Home%20Page\)/181113%20MSBA%20Sept%20Omni%20Report.pdf](http://www.tmsd.mb.ca/documents/Links%20(Home%20Page)/181113%20MSBA%20Sept%20Omni%20Report.pdf)
- Province of Nova Scotia. (2019). *Nova Scotia School Advisory Council handbook*.
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/sachandbook.pdf>
- Province of Nova Scotia. (2022). *Enrolments by region/board (historical)*.
<https://stats-summary.ednet.ns.ca/historical-board>
- Pollock, K., & Hauseman, D. C. (2015). Canada: Principal leadership in Canada. In H. Arlestig, C. Day, & O. Johansson (Eds.), *A decade of research on school principals: Cases from 24 countries* (pp. 202–232). Springer International Publishing. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-23027-6_11
- Public Schools Act*, RSM 1987, c. P250
- Pushor, D. (n.d.). *Leadership institute on systemic parent engagement*.
<https://www.debbiepushor.ca/institute>

- Quebec English School Boards Association. (2022, January 19). *Brief on Bill 9: An Act Respecting the National Student Ombudsman*.
<https://gesba.qc.ca/en/nouvelles/brief-on-bill-9-an-act-respecting-the-national-student-ombudsman/>
- Raven, J. (2005). Liberal education and Liberalism in modern society. *The Good Society*, 14(3), 29–37.
- Robert's Rules. (2023). *Robert's rules of order*. <https://robertsrules.org/>
- Rorty, R. (1991). *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, (Vol 1). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173643>
- Ryan, J., Pollock, K., & Antonelli, F. (2009). Teacher diversity in Canada: Leaky pipelines, bottlenecks, and glass ceilings. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 32(3), 591–617. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/3053>
- Samuelsson, M. (2016). Education for deliberative democracy: A typology of classroom discussions. *Democracy & Education*, 24(1), Article no. 5.
<https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol24/iss1/5>
- Sancton, A. (2015). *Canadian local government: An urban perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (2020). *2020 Saskatchewan school board elections*. <https://saskschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/elections-2020-full.pdf>
- Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation. (2023). *Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation*.
<https://spsfoundation.ca/>
- Sattler, P. (2012). Education governance reform in Ontario: Neoliberalism in context. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 128, 1–28.
- School Act*, RSBC, 1996, c.412

- Sheppard, B., Galway, G., Brown, J., & Wiens, J. (2013). *School boards matter: The report of the pan-Canadian study of school district governance*.
<https://cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/School-Boards-Matter-Report-Small.pdf>
- Statista Research Department. (2022). *Median age of the resident population of Canada in 2022, by province*.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/444816/canada-median-age-of-resident-population-by-province/>
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *Northwest Territories. Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001. Ottawa, Ontario. Data products, 2016 Census.
- Statistics Canada. (2021). *Table 98-10-0347-01. Immigrant status and period of immigration by gender and age: Canada, provinces and territories*.
<https://doi.org/10.25318/9810034701-eng>
- Statistics Canada. (2022a). *Membership in a Métis organization or Settlement: Findings from the 2021 Census of Population*.
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021006/98-200-X2021006-eng.cfm>
- Statistics Canada. (2022b, Sept. 21). Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>
- Statistics Canada. (2022c, Oct. 26). Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>
- Statistics Canada. (2022d). *Table: 37-10-0007-01: Number of students in regular programs for youth, public elementary and secondary schools, by grade and sex*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710000701>

- Statistics Canada (2023a). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released February 8, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2023b, March 14). *Table 17-10-0009-01: Population estimates, quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/1710000901-eng>
- Statistics Canada. (2023c). *Manitoba [Province] (table). Indigenous Population Profile. 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-510-X2021001. Ottawa. Released June 21, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/ipp-ppa/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2023d). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2023e). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Susskind, L. E., & Cruikshank, J. K. (2006). *Breaking Robert's Rules: The new way to run your meeting and get results*. Oxford University Press.
- Task Force on Northern Post-Secondary Education. (2022). *A shared responsibility: Northern voices, northern solutions*. <https://northernpse.ca/sites/default/files/2022-03/final%20report%20laid%20out.pdf>
- The Canadian Press & News Staff. (2023, May 4). Quebec education minister tables reform, gives himself more power. *CityNews*. <https://montreal.citynews.ca/2023/05/04/quebec-education-minister-tables-reform/>
- The Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11.*

- The Local Government Election Act*, 2015, L.-30.11, Statutes of Saskatchewan.
- The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*, 1996, C.C.S.M. c. M235.
- The Public Schools Act*, 2017, C.C.S.M. c. P250.
- The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*, 1996, C.C.S.M. c. M235.
- The Public Schools Act*, 2017, C.C.S.M. c. P250.
- The UN Refugee Agency UN [UNHCR]. (2018). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2018*. <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>
- Tłı̨chq̓ Ndek'àowo/Government. (2017a). *Tłı̨chq̓ Community Services Agency*. <https://tlicho.ca/agencies/tlicho-community-services-agency>
- Tłı̨chq̓ Ndek'àowo/Government. (2017b). *Tłı̨chq̓ Ndek'àowo/Government*. <https://tlicho.ca/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to action*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf
- Turcotte, M. (2011). Women and education. In *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical Report* (pp. 89–110). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-503-X.
- Tyms, J. D. (1950). A philosophy of religious education. *Journal of Religious Thought*, 7(2), 144–156.
- Van Dijk, J.A.G.M. (2012). Digital democracy: Vision and reality. In I. Snellen, M. Thaens, & W. van de Donk (Eds.), *Public administration in the information age: Revisited* (pp. 3–49). IOS Press.
- Wallin, D., Young, J., & Levin, B. (2021). *Understanding Canadian schools: An introduction to educational administration* (6th ed.). University of Saskatchewan. <https://openpress.usask.ca/understandingcanadianschools/>

- Williams, J. (2018). When people don't know what they don't know: Brexit and the British communication breakdown. *Defence Strategic Communications*, 4, 207–224. <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/when-people-dont-know-what-they-dont-know-brex-it-and-the-british-communication-breakdown/127>
- Williams, O. (2022, October 1). Two sets of Yellowknife school board trustees are acclaimed. *Cabin Radio*. <https://cabinradio.ca/106015/news/politics/two-sets-of-yellowknife-school-board-trustees-are-acclaimed/>
- Willumsen, D. M. (2018). So far away from me? The effect of geographical distance on representation. *West European Politics*, 42(3), 645–669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1530887>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE.



Appendices



Appendix A

Canadian School Board Governance Interjurisdictional Scan

**Prepared for the Canadian School Boards Association
by Katina Pollock & Associates**

**Researchers:
Dr. Katina Pollock
Ruth Nielsen
Chloée Godin-Jacques**



CSBA: Interjurisdictional Scan

The contractual agreement for a research study on the impact related to loss of local democratic voice for the Canadian School Boards Association (2021) between the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) and Dr. Katina Pollock includes a requirement of a governance scan. It is argued in the governance literature that board governing should reflect the context in which the board resides (Plecki et al., 2006). To understand the context of each jurisdiction being studied, our research team has conducted an interjurisdictional scan of each system-level governance structure. This interjurisdictional scan outlines the roles and responsibilities of educational decision-makers that sit in the space between the provincial/territorial Department of Education and the school. The contextual information elicited from understanding the affecting policies and legislation allowed our research team to pick up on subtle nuances during data collection and analysis, for example, when participants understood the organisation of their governance structure differently than what is laid out in legislation.

Scan Organization

This scan is divided into several sections. In this first section, we (a) explain our rationale for conducting the study at this time, (b) define our key terms, (c) name our sites of inclusion, and (d) provide our justification for what is included and excluded in the scan. The next through to the last section each provide the context of system-level decision-making in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories, respectively. In each, we provide a brief preamble about education in that jurisdiction before providing two tables: the first table provides demographic and contextual data, and the second outlines the decision-making authorities and their responsibilities in the named jurisdiction.

Key Terms and Information

It is important to define some of the key terms we used to conduct this scan. Below, we define how we understood policies and documents, demographic and contextual data, organizing body, legislation, organization responsibilities, and organization representatives.

Policies and Documents

In this scan, “policy” refers to governing acts, legislation, policy and programs memorandums (PPMs), memorandums of understanding (MOUs), treaties, and school board policies (if there is a board); “documents” are considered grey

literature, such as reports from professional associations, unions, not for profit organizations, White Papers, evaluations, and material from news outlets such as TVO, and industry publications, such as EdCan and People for Education.

Demographic and Contextual Data

In the introduction to each jurisdiction, we provide some demographic and contextual data. In this summary, we share the following data for each jurisdiction: population, 2016 household income, public education budget, number of public schools, number of public school teachers, number of public school students, and graduate rate. The intention behind sharing this information is for readers to have a general understanding of the context within, and differences between, each jurisdiction.

Organizing Body

In this scan, we use the term “organizing body” to denote the organization we are describing in terms of its function in public education according to provincial policies and documents, responsibilities, and representatives. The term “organizing body” was selected because it is general enough to correspond with the wide range of organizations that participate in public education across Canada and does not describe a hierarchical relationship. If there is a hierarchy between organizations, this is described in the “organization responsibilities” section.

Legislation

“Legislation” refers to rules and laws set by the government. Each provincial/territorial government has a Ministry of Education and associated Act that details all laws and rules of government related to matters of education in that province/territory. Within each Act, there is legislation that explains how educational governance is structured, including the duties of school districts (BC), school boards (SK, MB, QC, NWT), school service centres (QC), regional centres for education (NS), or Divisional Education Councils and District Education Authorities (NWT). Under the “Legislation” section in each table, we provide relevant excerpts from the associated legislation, where applicable.

Organization Responsibilities

“Organization responsibilities” refers to the broad range of powers and duties that are appointed to the organization as a whole, as it pertains to decision-making in public education. In this section of the table, we summarize these powers and duties as set forth by legislation and/or documents.

Organization Representatives

Although “trustee” is a common term for elected representatives of school boards, the term is not suitable for representatives of all organizations in all jurisdictions. For example, in jurisdictions with school service centre representatives (QC) and appointed members of regional centres (NS), the term “trustee” does not apply. Therefore, we have used the broader term “representatives” as the table heading, and use the locally relevant term in the corresponding section.

Sites of Investigation

In this scan, the sites of investigation are five provinces (BC, SK, MB, QB, NS) and one territory (NWT).

Province/Territory

In Canada, K–12 public education is the responsibility of the provinces and territories. The sites of investigation in this scan are: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. Across the sites, the school system-level decision-making system goes by different names: board of education (BC, SK), education district (NWT), district education authority (NWT), divisional education council (NWT) regional centre for education (NS), and school division (MB). However, many of these systems are known as “school boards,” colloquially.

Justification for Inclusion/Exclusion

[Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) guarantees the rights of minority language speakers to receive instruction in the minority language (French or English) in all provinces and territories. Accordingly, we include French and English representation in all sites. Of the sites included, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories maintain [constitutional rights of education \[Section 93\]](#) for denominational schools (Queen’s Protestant and Roman Catholic). For these sites, associated school boards are included in the scan, though not separately from nondenominational boards. Nova Scotia is unique in that the [Education Act 2018](#) also recognizes the [Council on African-Canadian Education \(CACE\)](#) as having legislative rights to education. Therefore, we have included the Council on African-Canadian Education in the scan for Nova Scotia. Lastly, where present (BC, MB, QC, NS), we include formal associations, school systems, or other formal education-governance systems related to First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit education.

British Columbia

British Columbia: English

British Columbia organizes provincial schooling governance between school districts—sometimes called school boards (e.g., Vancouver school board)—the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), and the Ministry of Education. School districts are governed by locally elected trustees as Boards of Education. There is no limit on how many terms local trustees can serve. The BCSTA presents a unified voice for all school districts. The BCSTA is governed by representatives from each school district and has a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) \(2018\)](#) with the provincial Ministry of Education. Under this MOU, the province and school districts commit to shared responsibility over local schooling through the BCSTA.

British Columbia: French

French schools in BC are governed by the locally elected [Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique \(CSFCB\)](#), a school board that supports 38 schools separately from the BCSTA.

British Columbia: First Nations, Métis, & Inuit

First Nations in British Columbia administer First Nations schools, which are supported by the First Nations School Association (FNSA) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). The FNESC also provides advisory, advocacy, and support services for First Nations students attending public and independent schools in British Columbia. Collaboration between the province of BC, the FNESC, and the FNSA regarding First Nations education in BC is set out in the [BC Tripartite Education Agreement \(2018\)](#).

Table 1: Demographic and Contextual Data for British Columbia

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Teachers	Students	Graduation Rate
British Columbia	5,158,728	\$69,995.00	\$7.1 billion	1,571	46,000	563,514	89.9%
*Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated							

Table 2: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in British Columbia

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>The British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA)</u></p> <p>The BCTSA represents 60 school boards across the province.</p> <p><u>Mission Statement:</u> “The mission of the BCSTA is to support and advocate for effective public boards of education in British Columbia.”</p>	<p><u>MOU with the Ministry of Education, 2018</u></p> <p>MOU between the BC Ministry of Education and the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), to officiate a governance-based relationship between the BC Ministry of Education and individual school boards, wherein decisions are made in the spirit of collaboration.</p> <p>MOU is an “aspirational document” reflecting the principles of the province and the BCSTA, based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public confidence • Commitment to action • Partnership • Consultation and Notification • Flexibility 	<p><u>The British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original and continuing goal of improving student achievement through community engagement • Advocate for school districts to support student needs and improve student outcomes • Ensure superintendent carries out Board’s strategic plan 	<p><u>The British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives are active, elected trustees in BC school districts/Conseil scolaire francophone • Membership year is July 1–June 30 <p><u>BCSTA Members:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence directions and priorities BCSTA based on local needs • Advocate for local school district • Make resolutions at Annual General Meeting and provincial governance councils • Enact BCSTA bylaws, procedures, and policies • Aid in communication between school districts, BCSTA, and provincial government • Vote in BCSTA decisions <p><u>Officers of the Association</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Education (honorary President of the Association) • President • Vice-President • Immediate past president • 5 Directors • Chief Executive Officer

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
English School Districts 60 school districts in the province	<u>BC School Act, 1996</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 30 (1) There is to be a board of education for each school district. (3) The minister must, by order, establish the following for each school district: a. the number of trustees for the school district; b. whether trustees are to be elected i. from the school district at large, in which case the school district is the trustee electoral area, ii. from a number of trustee electoral areas specified by the minister that are in total the entire school district, or iii. in another manner that is a combination of the methods under subparagraphs (i) and (ii); c. if there is more than one trustee electoral area, the number of trustees to be	<u>BC School Act, 1996</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 65 (1.1) A board is responsible for the improvement of student achievement in the school district. (2)A board may a. establish committees and specify the functions and duties of those committees, b. establish a district advisory council comprised of persons representing parents' advisory councils and other organizations in the community, and c. delegate specific and general administrative and management duties to one or more of its employees. 73(1) A board may (a) subject to the orders of the minister, open, close or reopen a school permanently or for a specified period of time, and (b) temporarily close a school building if the health or safety of the students is endangered. 75(1) Subject to the other provisions of this Act and the regulations and to any orders of the minister under this Act, a board must make available an	<u>BC School Act, 1996</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 32(1) Except as provided in this Division, a person is qualified to be nominated for office and to be elected or appointed to and hold office as a trustee if, at the relevant time, the person meets all the following requirements: a. the person must be an individual who is, or who will be on general voting day for the election or the effective date of the appointment, as applicable, age 18 or older; b. the person must be a Canadian citizen; c. the person must have been a resident of British Columbia, as determined in accordance with section 42, for at least 6 months immediately before the relevant time; d. the person must not be disqualified under this Act or any other enactment from being nominated for, being elected to or holding office as a trustee, or be otherwise disqualified by law. 35(1) Elections of all trustees, to be

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>elected from each.</p> <p>31(1) As an exception to section 30 when a new school district is created, the minister must, by order, determine whether the first trustees of the school district are to be appointed by the minister or elected.</p> <p>(2) If the minister determines that the first trustees are to be elected, the trustee election must be held as directed by order of the minister.</p> <p>76(1) All schools and Provincial schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles.</p> <p>(2) The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religious dogma or creed is to be taught in a school or Provincial school.</p>	<p>educational program to all persons of school age who enroll in a school in the district</p> <p>85(2) Without limiting subsection (1), a board may, subject to this Act and the regulations, do all or any of the following: (a) determine local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools in the school district; [...] (i) develop and offer local programs for use in schools in the school district;</p>	<p>known collectively as a general school election, must be held in the year 2014 and in every 4th year after that.</p> <p>(2) General voting day for the general school election must be on the 3rd Saturday of October in the year of the election.</p> <p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all students within the board's jurisdiction have opportunities to reach their maximum potential and chosen goals. • Participate in governance and oversight in the interest of all of the district's students. • Ensure decisions are grounded in promoting student achievement and well-being • Support student success • Act as conduit between government and families

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSFCB)</p> <p>Only school board representing French schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Member of FNCSF <p>Mission Statement:</p> <p>"Inspiring a learning community with an innovative education, a lively and shared French culture, as well as with the opportunities to gain valuable life skills."</p> <p>Mission:</p> <p>«Inspirer une communauté d'apprenants par une éducation innovante, une culture francophone vivante et partagée ainsi que par l'acquisition d'habiletés essentielles de vie et d'avenir»</p>	<p>BC School Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>166.12 (1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> establish a francophone education authority, assign a name to a francophone education authority, and prescribe an area, to be known as a francophone school district, over which a francophone education authority has jurisdiction. 	<p>BC School Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>166.12 (2.1) A francophone education authority is responsible for the improvement of francophone student achievement in the francophone school district.</p> <p>166.4 (1) Sections 73, 74, 74.01, 76 to 85, other than sections 79.1 and 85 (1), and section 87 apply for the purposes of this Part [Power and duties of a francophone education authority].</p>	<p>Who Can Be a School Board Trustee?</p> <p>Any resident in an area prescribed by regulation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council who is a member of a francophone education authority.</p> <p>BC School Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>166.21 (1) The regional trustees that are elected or appointed under this Part constitute the board of regional trustees of the francophone education authority.</p> <p>(2) The board of regional trustees of a francophone education authority may exercise all the powers, functions and duties of the francophone education authority.</p> <p>(3) Unless expressly required to be exercised by bylaw, all powers of the board of regional trustees may be exercised by bylaw or resolution.</p> <p>(5) The board of regional trustees may</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> establish committees and specify the functions and duties of those committees, and delegate specific and general administrative and

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
			<p>management duties to one or more employees of the francophone education authority.</p> <p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegates specific and general administrative and management duties to one or more employees of the francophone education authority. Holds meetings at minimum once every 3 months. Election every 4 years.
<p><u>The First Nations Education Steering Committee</u></p> <p>132 First Nations communities (Bands)</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> “The First Nations Schools Association will collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners’</p>	<p><u>British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA)</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>4.1 Canada and British Columbia recognize FNEESC, working with the FNSA, as having demonstrated the capacity to administer education programs and services on behalf of First Nations and First Nation Schools in British Columbia, to implement research-based and relevant programs to support First Nation Schools to deliver quality education</p>	<p><u>The First Nations Education Steering Committee</u></p> <p>Provincial advisory board to support First Nations education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides research, communication, information dissemination, advocacy, administration, and networking <p><u>British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA)</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>4.7 British Columbia is responsible for the provision of quality education</p>	<p><u>First Nations Education Steering Committee</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Membership is open to BC First Nations communities (Band) Each Band can have one member ≥ 18 years of age, some exceptions apply Appointed by First Nation Band or Tribal Council

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and will equip them to realize their full potential, within self-governing First Nations communities.”	and improve student outcomes, to provide Second and Third Level Services to First Nations and First Nation Schools, and to advocate for and advance the interests and needs of First Nation Students attending BC Schools.	services to First Nation Students attending any BC Public School. 4.8 British Columbia will continue to work with FNESC to improve educational outcomes for First Nation Students in BC Schools. 4.9 British Columbia and FNESC agree to continue to work in collaboration to support the successful transfer of First Nation Students between BC Public Schools and First Nation Schools under this Agreement, and their Bilateral Protocol [...] 4.13 British Columbia mandates and funds local boards of education to deliver education services to students, including First Nation Students, attending BC Public Schools, and is responsible for implementing effective measures to hold local boards of education accountable	
<p><u>First Nations School Association</u></p> <p>130 schools</p> <p>Mission: “The First Nations Schools Association will collaborate with First</p>	<p><u>British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA)</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>4.1 Canada and British Columbia recognize FNESC, working with the FNSA, as having demonstrated the capacity to administer education programs and services on behalf of</p>	<p><u>First Nations School Association</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents and works on behalf of First Nations controlled schools in BC, and almost all of the First Nations schools in BC are members of the Association. Supports First Nations schools in 	<p><u>First Nations School Association</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Authorized Representative” from each school has voting privileges at the Annual General Meeting. All First Nations schools may be members Each school has an Authorized Representative to attend meetings.

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
Nations schools to create nurturing environments that will develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and will equip them to realize their full potential, within self-governing First Nations communities."	First Nations and First Nation Schools in British Columbia, to implement research-based and relevant programs to support First Nation Schools to deliver quality education and improve student outcomes, to provide Second and Third Level Services to First Nations and First Nation Schools, and to advocate for and advance the interests and needs of First Nation Students attending BC Schools.	creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorized representatives vote on decisions at the annual general meeting.
Notes: In May 2022 FNEC and the BCSTA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to "confirm and set[s] out a mutual commitment [...] to engage in dialogue and joint action on specific issues and initiatives to improve the education outcomes of First Nations learners in provincial public schools" (1.1)			

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan: English

Saskatchewan organizes provincial schooling governance between school boards and the Ministry of Education. School boards are governed by locally elected trustees. There is no limit on how many terms a locally elected trustee can serve. School boards can choose to hold membership with the Saskatchewan School Board Association (SSBA), which is a nonprofit organization that provides support to school boards and acts as a collective and unified voice advocating for school board interests. The SSBA is a separate entity from the Ministry of Education.

Saskatchewan: French

French schools in SK are represented by the locally elected [*Conseil des écoles fransaskoises*](#). The conseil holds membership with SSBA, alongside all English and Catholic school boards.

Saskatchewan: First Nations, Métis, & Inuit

In Saskatchewan, individual First Nations administer First Nations schools on-reserve, while off-reserve schools are administered under provincial authority through boards of education. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education document, [*Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework*](#), broadly sets out goals related to Indigenous education for boards of education throughout the province.

Table 3: Demographic and Contextual Data for Saskatchewan

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Teachers	Students	Graduation Rate
Saskatchewan	1,179,300	\$75,412.00	\$2.66 billion	770	13,500	184,941	79.8% (89.5 non-Indigenous; 46.7% Indigenous)
*Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated							

Table 4: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in Saskatchewan

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA)</p> <p>27 school boards, including 18 public schools, 8 Catholic schools, and 1 French</p> <p>All school boards in the province are members in SSBA</p> <p>SSBA is a member of CSBA</p> <p>Mission Statement</p> <p>“Provide leadership, coordination and services to member boards of education to support student achievement.”</p>	<p>See note below*</p>	<p>Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership, support, and advocacy services to member school boards. • Hold representation on working groups related to Education and local government. • Support representatives’ communication with the education community and community at large. • Share and develop information specific to boards of education. • Provide group insurance, employee benefits, group tendering, legal services, and strategic human resources and employee relations for school board and association staff. 	<p>Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA)</p> <p>The Executive consists of representatives from 7 constituencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic • Central • Francophone • Indigenous • Northern • Southern • Urban Public <p>SSBA Executives and Representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide services to and engagement with members • Advocate for members and associations • Promote the building of community relationships • Vote on new policies / directives • Communicate policies, directives, and priorities between Association, school boards, and the community
<p>Notes: *There is no legislation specific to the SSBA as it is a non-profit organization not formally affiliated with the Province of Saskatchewan</p>			

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
English Boards of Education	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>40(1) A school division consists of any area of Saskatchewan that is designated pursuant to this Act and the regulations to be the unit for local governance of schools and for the provision and administration of educational services in those schools.</p> <p>(2) In accordance with this Act and the regulations, a school division may be divided into one or more subdivisions for the purposes of the election of members of the board of education</p> <p>61(1) Each school division must have a board of education consisting of the number of members specified in the minister's order mentioned in section 42 or in a subsequent order.</p>	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>85(1) [...] a board of education shall:</p> <p>(a) administer and manage the educational affairs of the school division in accordance with the intent of this Act and the regulations;</p> <p>(b) exercise general supervision and control over the schools in the school division and make any by-laws with respect to school management that may be considered necessary for effective and efficient operation of the schools;</p> <p>(c) subject to the other provisions of this Act, approve administrative procedures pertaining to the internal organization, management and supervision of the schools, but educational supervision authorized by the board of education is to be subject to the approval of the ministry;</p> <p>(e) appoint and employ under written contract qualified teachers for the schools of the school division, and any principals and other assistants as the board of education considers necessary;</p> <p>(w) prescribe procedures with respect to the design, maintenance and supervision of school accommodation for the purposes of maintaining satisfactory standards of comfort, safety and sanitation for the pupils and other users of the accommodation;</p> <p>87(1) Subject to the powers of the conseil scolaire</p>	<p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set board priorities • Advocate for education • Address local and provincial issues • Work as a team - individual trustees do not have decision-making authority • Communicate community wants and needs to school board • 6-10 hrs/week on school board-related meetings • Attend board events • Serve on school board committees • Participate in trustee professional development • Approve educational programs • Determine financial priorities • Keeping school board accountable for results <p><u>Who Can Be a School Board Trustee?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each board of election must have at least 1 member from each subdivision • Number of representatives is based on population, geographic layout, and transportation patterns

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		<p>with respect to the division scolaire francophone and minority language education programs, a board of education may: (a) employ, or retain the services of, any ancillary personnel that may be considered necessary to administer the policies and programs of the board of education; (b) enter into agreements for any purpose considered necessary and advantageous to the quality and efficiency of educational and related services [...]</p> <p><u>The Education Regulations, 2019</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>6 (2) A board of education shall, for each school community council in the school division, appoint an employee of the board of education, other than any member of that school community council, to be the returning officer for the election of members of the school community council.</p> <p>11 A board of education shall, for each school community council in the school division: (a) designate a senior administrative employee to be responsible for that school community council; and (b) provide orientation, training, development and networking opportunities for members.</p>	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>20(1) At all meetings of a board of education:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Questions are to be decided by a majority of votes; the chairperson has the right to vote; in the case of an equality of votes, the question is deemed to be decided in the negative.

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>Conseil des écoles fransaskoises</u></p> <p>Only school board representing French schools</p> <p>Member of FNCSF Member of SSBA</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> «Avec ses écoles d'excellence en français langue première, le CÉF est un environnement sain et accueillant, qui prépare les élèves à leur réussite éducative, identitaire et culturelle.»</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> Welcoming and safe space that prepares students for success in their studies, identities, and cultures.</p>	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>42.1</p> <p>(1) The Conseil scolaire fransaskois is established as a corporation on the date set out in the minister's order establishing the Conseil scolaire fransaskois.</p> <p>(2) The corporation shall have a common seal and shall possess and may exercise all of the powers vested in a corporation by The Legislation Act insofar as they are necessary for carrying out the provisions of this Act.</p> <p>(3) The conseil scolaire shall consist of not less than five and not more than 10 members.</p>	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>86</p> <p>With respect to francophone education areas, fransaskois schools and the division scolaire francophone, the conseil scolaire, subject to any directive of the minister, shall:</p> <p>(a) administer and manage education matters in the division scolaire francophone in accordance with the intent of this Act and the regulations;</p> <p>(b) exercise general supervision and control over minority language education programs and fransaskois schools and make any by-laws that may be considered necessary for effective and efficient operation of fransaskois schools and the delivery of minority language education programs;</p> <p>(c) subject to the other provisions of this Act, approve administrative procedures pertaining to the internal organization, management and supervision of the conseil scolaire and fransaskois schools, but any educational supervision authorized by the conseil scolaire is subject to the approval of the ministry;</p> <p>(e) appoint and employ under written contract</p>	<p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set board priorities • Advocate for education • Address local and provincial issues • Work as a team - individual trustees do not have decision-making authority • Communicate community wants and needs to school board • 6-10 hrs/week on school board-related meetings • Attend board events • Serve on school board committees • Participate in trustee professional development • Approve educational programs • Determine financial priorities • Keeping school board accountable for results <p><u>Who Can Be a School Board Trustee?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each board of election must have at least 1 member from each subdivision • Number of representatives is based on population, geographic layout, and transportation patterns

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		<p>qualified teachers for francophone schools, and any principals and other assistants as the conseil scolaire considers necessary;</p> <p>(w) prescribe procedures with respect to the design, maintenance and supervision of francophone school accommodation for the purposes of maintaining satisfactory standards of comfort, safety and sanitation for the pupils and other users of the accommodation</p> <p>88(1) Subject to section 87, the conseil scolaire may: (a) employ, or retain the services of, any ancillary personnel that may be considered necessary to administer the policies and programs of the conseil scolaire; (b) enter into agreements for any purpose considered necessary and advantageous to the quality and efficiency of educational and related services to the pupils of the division scolaire francophone</p>	<p><u>The Education Act, 1995</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 20(1) At all meetings of a board of education:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Questions are to be decided by a majority of votes; the chairperson has the right to vote; in the case of an equality of votes, the question is deemed to be decided in the negative.
<p><u>School Community Councils</u> School-level council made up of elected individuals from the community who help advance the educational objectives of the local school</p>	<p><u>The School Division Administration Regulations: The Education Act, 1995</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 140.1 (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), every board of education shall establish a school community council for each</p>	<p><u>The Education Regulations, 2019</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Regulations 12 A school community council shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake activities to enhance its understanding of: (i) the economic, social and health needs of the community; (ii) the aspirations for the education and well-being of the pupils within the community; and (iii) the resources and supports for the school, parents, guardians and community; In cooperation with the school staff, develop 	<p><u>The Education Regulations, 2019</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from Regulations 5 (2) Each school community council shall consist of: (a) the elected members mentioned in clause 140.2(a) of the Act; and (b) the members appointed pursuant to subsections (3) and (4). (3) A board of education shall appoint as members: (a) subject to clause (b), for each school community council in the school</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>school in the school division.</p> <p>(2) Two or more school community councils in the same school division may petition the board of education of their school division to recommend to the minister that those school community councils be amalgamated to form one school community council.</p>	<p>and recommend to its board of education for approval a school-level plan that is in accordance with the board of education's strategic plan;</p> <p>D. Communicate annually to the parents, guardians and community members about its plans, initiatives and accomplishments;</p> <p>13 A school community council may:</p> <p>A. provide advice and recommendations to the board of education respecting policies, programs and educational service delivery, including fundraising, school fees, pupil code of conduct, grade discontinuance, school closure, religious instruction, and language of instruction but not including educational service delivery by a specific teacher;</p> <p>B. provide advice to the school staff respecting school programs; and</p> <p>C. Provide advice to other Organizations, agencies and governments on the learning needs and well-being of pupils.</p>	<p>division:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. If practicable, 1 or 2 pupils who attend that school who are enrolled in the secondary level; ii. The principal of that school iii. One teacher from that school; and iv. In consultation with the other members, any other individuals; <p>(4) If a pupil at a school resides on reserve, the board of education shall, for the school community council for that school:</p> <p>(a) request that the Indian band, for whose use and benefit the reserve where the pupil resides has been set aside, identify individuals willing to represent that Indian band on the school community council; and</p> <p>(b) if practicable, appoint at least one of those individuals to the school community council.</p>

Manitoba

Manitoba: English

Manitoba organizes provincial schooling governance between school boards and Manitoba Education. School boards are governed by locally elected trustees. There is no limit on how many terms a locally elected trustee can serve. School boards can choose to hold membership with the Manitoba School Board Association (MSBA), a nonprofit membership Organization that provides support to school boards and acts as a collective and unified voice advocating for school board interests. The MSBA is a separate entity from Manitoba Education.

Manitoba school boards retain taxation authority, meaning that school boards have some control over local education property taxes as part of their budgetary power. However, at the time of this writing, the Manitoba government has instituted a [education funding model review team](#) to develop a new education funding model, with the potential to replace or revise the education property taxation.

Manitoba: French

French schools in MB are represented by the locally elected [Division scolaire franco-manitobaine \(DSFM\)](#), which retains membership with MSBA.

Manitoba: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education in Manitoba operates through complex systems of independent, provincial, and federal authority.

Under Federal authority, First Nations in Manitoba have entered into an agreement that establishes a separate [Manitoba First Nations School System](#), which (at the time of this writing) includes 11 First Nations schools across the province. In addition, there are 32 Band-operated schools serving 28 First Nations outside of the Manitoba First Nations School System. All 43 First Nations schools are supported by the [Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre \(MFNERC\)](#). There are a further 14 schools serving 7 First Nations that operate independently from the MFNERC.

Four school divisions ([Frontier School Division](#), [Park West School Division](#), [Rolling River School Division](#), and [Fort La Bosse](#)) have provincially regulated partnerships, enabling agreements between local First Nations and those school boards to administer approximately 30 schools in First Nations and Indigenous communities.

The MSBA has no formal role relative to First Nations schools in Manitoba, however as indicated in Table 6, the MSBA does have an Aboriginal and Indigenous Planning Committee which shares the goal of improving educational outcomes for First Nations students in member school boards.

Table 5: Demographic and Contextual Data for Manitoba

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Teachers	Students	Graduation Rate
Manitoba	1,386,333	\$68,147.00	\$2,957,900,000	700 *	16,000	186,372 ***	82.6%
Notes: *There are 960 total schools, including public, independent, and First Nations schools. The 700 represents the number of public schools included in the provincial budget. ** Approximate membership in the Manitoba Teachers' Society, representing teachers working in Manitoba public schools. *** Total enrolled in public schools September 30th, 2019. Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated							

Table 6: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in Manitoba

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>Manitoba School Board Association (MSBA)</u></p> <p>38 school boards; 1 affiliate First Nation Education Authority (Nelson House Cree Nation [Nisichawayasihk First Nation])</p> <p>All public school boards in the province are members in MSBA, including the francophone public school board (DSFM)</p> <p><u>MSBA Mission Statement:</u> “The mission of the Manitoba School Boards Association is to enhance the work of locally elected school boards through leadership, advocacy and service, and to champion the cause of public education for all students in Manitoba.”</p>	<p><u>Manitoba School Boards Association Act</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p><u>2</u> The Manitoba Association of School Trustees is continued as a body corporate under the name The Manitoba School Boards Association.</p> <p><u>3</u> <u>3</u> The association has all the powers, rights, and privileges, conferred on and vested in a corporation under The Corporations Act and The Interpretation Act.</p>	<p><u>Association Responsibilities</u></p> <p>To provide programs and services relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Labour relations b. Human resource management c. Risk Management d. Trustee education e. Employee benefit plans f. Property and liability insurance g. Policy development h. Non-teaching pension management i. Advocacy services j. Nutrition grant administration 	<p><u>Manitoba School Boards Association Act</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p><u>5</u> A board may become a member for the association upon payment of the prescribed membership fee</p> <p><u>7(1)</u> The executive of the association is to consist of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the president; b. (b) two vice-presidents, of whom one must be from a school division or district in which 6,000 or more pupils are enrolled and the other must be from a school division or district in which fewer than 6,000 pupils are enrolled; c. (c) the immediate past president; and d. (d) any other director elected or appointed to the executive of the association in accordance with the by-laws of the association. <p><u>7(2)</u> Any person who is a member of a board which is a member of the</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
			association is eligible to be elected or appointed as a member of the executive of the association.
English School Boards “School board” means the board of trustees of a school division or a school district; (« commission scolaire »)	<u>Manitoba Public Schools Act</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 3(3) From the effective date of its incorporation, a school board has the powers granted to it, and is responsible for the performance of the duties and is subject to the liabilities charged upon it, under this Act. [See 48(1) for complete list of powers] 41(4) Every school board shall	<u>Manitoba Public Schools Act</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act <u>41(1)</u> Every school board shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide adequate school accommodation for the resident persons who have the right to attend school as provided in section 259; b. (b.1) ensure that each pupil enrolled in a school within the jurisdiction of the school board is provided 	Who can be a school board trustee? <u>Manitoba Public Schools Act</u> Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act <u>22(1)</u> A person is qualified to be nominated for and elected as a trustee of a school board, if the person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. is a Canadian citizen; b. is of the full age of 18 years, or will be of the full age of 18 years at the date of the election; c. is an actual resident in the school division or school

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	provide or make provision for education in Grades I to XII inclusive for all resident persons who have the right to attend school.	<p>with a safe and caring school environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours; (b.2) ensure that a written policy is established respecting the appropriate use of (i) the Internet [...], digital cameras, cell phones [...], respecting school food and nutrition [...], concerning respect for human diversity;</p> <p>c. Authorize the disbursement of any moneys that are to be expended or have been expended in accordance with subsection 53(4);</p> <p>E. . [...] make available for examination and inspection in the office of the secretary-treasurer of the school board at any reasonable time by any resident of Manitoba a copy of (i) the final budget for the current year or any year within the last five years [...] and (ii) the audited financial statements of the school board for any year within the</p>	<p>district, and will have been so for a period of at least six months at the date of the election; and</p> <p>d. is not disqualified under any other provision of this Act or under any other Act.</p> <p><u>25(1)</u> [...], each trustee shall hold office for a term of four years, and thereafter until his successor is elected or appointed and takes office.</p> <p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for and participate in school board and committee meetings. • Advocate for high learning expectations for all students • Hold a general election on the fourth Wednesday of October in the year 2006 and in each fourth year after that. • Speak and vote at school board meetings → Trustees do not have individual decision-making authority. <p><u>Official Trustee</u></p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		<p>last five years</p> <p>(K.1) identify pupils who are disengaged from school, or who are at risk of becoming disengaged, and establish policies and procedures to support them [...]</p> <p>(K.2) establish policies and procedures to assist pupils who have significant difficulties with attending school to regularly attend school;</p> <p>(V) provide to parent advisory councils, local school committees and school committees any information that is reasonably necessary for their operation</p>	<p><u>28(1)</u> The Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint an official trustee for any school division or school district, the affairs of which are not being or cannot be, in his opinion, satisfactorily managed by the school board of that school division or school district, as the case may be.</p> <p><u>28(2)</u> Every official trustee appointed under this section (a) has all the powers and authority conferred by this Act upon a school board and upon its officers;</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM)</p> <p>The only school board representing French schools.</p> <p>Mission Statement: «Assurer l'épanouissement de chaque apprenante et apprenant dans une perspective d'inclusion et de respect au profit de la communauté franco-manitobaine d'aujourd'hui et de demain.»</p> <p>Mission Statement: "Ensure the growth of each student in a space of inclusion and respect for the franco-manitobaine community – today and tomorrow."</p>	<p>Manitoba Public Schools Act</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p><u>21.4(1)</u> The francophone school board, consisting of trustees elected in accordance with sections 21.35 to 21.38, is responsible for the administration of the francophone school division.</p> <p>21.6(1) The francophone school board may enter into agreements with other school boards or the minister, or both, regarding</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The provision by the francophone school board of programs outside its boundaries or in schools it does not operate; and The payment or sharing of costs respecting the delivery of those programs. 	<p>Manitoba Public Schools Act</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p><u>21.5(1)</u> The francophone school board shall, subject to this Act and consistent with and to the extent required by section 23 of the Charter,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> provide a francophone program for resident pupils in such minority language education facilities as may be required; and provide a programme d'accueil for resident pupils whose French language skills do not meet the language requirements of the francophone program. <p><u>21.31(1)</u> To ensure that its pupils master the French language, the francophone school board shall provide at least 75% of its classroom instruction in each grade in the French language.</p> <p><u>21.31(2)</u> To ensure that its pupils develop and maintain proficiency in the English language, the</p>	<p>Manitoba Public Schools Act</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p><u>21.35(1)</u> The election of trustees of the francophone school board shall be in accordance with this section and sections 21.36 to 21.38.</p> <p><u>21.35(2)</u> The nomination of candidates and the conduct of elections of trustees of the francophone school board shall be in accordance with the regulations.</p> <p><u>21.35(3)</u> For certainty, <i>The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act</i> does not apply to the election of trustees of the francophone school board.</p> <p><u>21(50)</u> Each school division and school district must hold a general election on the fourth Wednesday of October in the year 2006 and in each fourth year after that.</p> <p>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May promote and distribute information in the province about programs available in

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		francophone school board shall require English to be a subject of instruction in every class in Grades IV to XII in the francophone school division, but the time allotment for English in each grade must not exceed 25% of classroom instruction.	<p>the francophone school division.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May engage in activities to promote the French language and culture in connection with its duty to provide education. • Prepare for and participate in school board and committee meetings. • Advocate for high learning expectations for all students. • Hold a general election on the fourth Wednesday of October in the year 2006 and in each fourth year after that. • Speak and vote at school board meetings → Trustees do not have individual decision- making authority.
<p><u>Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc (MFNERC)</u></p> <p>Provides services and supports to 58 First Nations schools from 49 Manitoba First Nations.</p>	<p><u>Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MFNERC was established by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 1998 	<p><u>Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc (MFNERC)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the province's leading education, administration, technology, language, and culture services to First Nations schools in Manitoba • Provides education, 	<p><u>Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc (MFNERC)</u></p> <p>MFNERC has a Board of Directors that is composed of members who are leaders in education and/or hold education portfolios within their First Nations governance structure.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>MFNERC Mission:</u></p> <p>“To help First Nations improve education for all learners to achieve: mino-pimatisiwin (Cree/Ojibwe/Ojibwe-Cree)</p> <p>To help First Nations improve education for all learners to achieve: honso aynai (Dene)</p> <p>To help First Nations improve education for all learners to achieve: tokatakiya wichoni waste (Dakota).”</p>		<p>administration, technology, language, and culture services to First Nations schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides professional development for school board members, administrators, teachers, and teaching assistants MFNERC provides oversight of MFNSS. Specific areas of responsibility are administered by MFNERC departments including: Finance, Human Resources, and IT. (p. 12) 	<p><u>MFNERC Staff are:</u></p> <p>Specialists in First Nations education, administration, language and technology with skills that are uniquely suited to providing support to First Nations schools.</p>
<p><u>Manitoba First Nations School System (MFNSS)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides division services to 11 First Nations with 11 schools Is supported by the MFNERC Is the first of its kind in Canada <p><u>Mission:</u> “To help First Nations improve education for all learners to achieve”</p>	<p><u>Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions</p> <p>Jun-12.06 “THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the AMC Chiefs-in-Assembly mandate the MFNERC to develop and implement a Manitoba First Nations Education System to include, but not be limited to, enhanced second level services (school division type) and enhanced third level services (department of</p>	<p><u>Manitoba First Nations School System (MFNSS)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “MFNSS administers and manages elementary and secondary (N-12) education programs, services, and funding for participating First Nations, including provincial tuition and private home placement.” (p. 6) “The primary responsibility of MFNSS is to ensure students and schools have a 	<p>“Each participating First Nation Chief and Council has the opportunity to identify a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) to serve as an advisory body to MFNSS on local priorities and aspirations in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs, policies, procedures, and activities; Human resources; School facility operation and maintenance; Short and long-term priorities and planning; and



Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
"mino-pimatisiwin (Cree/Ojibwe/Ojibwe-Cree)" "honso aynai (Dene)" "tokatakiya wichoni washte (Dakota)"	education type) for the MFNERC." "FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, that the AMC mandate the re-establishment of an AMC Chiefs Committee on Education to guide the development of the Manitoba First Nations Education System and provide political direction on First Nations education initiatives in Manitoba."	quality education system based on a foundation of the languages and cultures of participating First Nations." (p. 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student transportation." (p. 13)

Québec

Quebec: English

Quebec organizes provincial schooling between English school boards, French school service centres, the Quebec English School Board Association (QESBA), Fédération des centres de services scolaires du Québec (FCSSQ), and the Ministère de l'Éducation/Ministry of Education. English school boards serve English-speaking schools and are governed by locally elected trustees. There is no limit on how many terms an elected trustee can serve. English school boards can hold membership with the QESBA, which is governed by school board representatives.

Québec: French

French school service centres serve French schools and are governed by a selected board of directors, each composed of: five parent representatives designated by the parents' committee, one teacher, one non-teaching professional staff member, one support staff member, one school principal, and one member of the executive staff all designated by their peers, five community members who are not members of the school service centre's staff, including one governance expert, one finance expert, one person from the community, sport, or cultural section, one person from the municipal, health, social services, or business section, and one person aged 18-35 all designated by the parent and school service centre staff representatives. All school service centres are members of the FCSSQ, which is governed by an appointed board. The FCSSQ is affiliated with the Ministère de l'Éducation/Ministry of Education.

Québec: First Nations, Métis, & Inuit

The [First Nations Education Council](#) supports 24 First Nations schools in Québec.

Table 7: Demographic and Contextual Data for Québec

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Teachers	Students	Graduation Rate
Québec	8,578,300	\$59,822.00	\$10.5 billion	370	8000*	964,110	64%
Notes: * Approximate membership in the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers. Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated							

Table 8: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in Québec

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>La Fédération des centres de services scolaires du Québec (FCSSQ)</u></p> <p>61 school service centres across the province.</p> <p>Mission: “At the heart of the challenges of the public education system, the FCSSQ puts its expertise at the service of its members in carrying out their mission and highlights the excellence and innovation of the centres of school services (CSS) throughout Québec. It unites its members and partners around common issues, in a perspective of collaboration rich in collective learning.”</p> <p>Mission: «Au cœur des enjeux du système public d'éducation, la FCSSQ met son expertise au service de ses membres dans la réalisation de leur mission et</p>	<p><u>Educational Act, 2020</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act.*</p>	<p><u>La Fédération des centres de services scolaires du Québec (FCSSQ)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership services to all French-speaking school service centres and the Littoral School Service Centre. • Exists to serve and respond to common member needs, interests, and priorities. • Provides labour relations, material and information resources, financing, school transportation, vocational training, educational services for young people and adults, and other training services. • Collaborates with students, parents, teachers, educational professionals, school and school service centre administrators, the Quebec Ministry of Education, the Government of Quebec, the Government of Canada, and minority and majority language community representatives, groups, and institutions. 	<p><u>La Fédération des centres de services scolaires du Québec (FCSSQ)</u></p> <p>Representatives are directors general of French-language school service centres that hold membership with FCSSQ.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
met en lumière l'excellence et l'innovation des centres de services scolaires (CSS) partout au Québec. Elle unit ses membres et partenaires autour d'enjeux communs, dans une perspective de collaboration riche en apprentissages collectifs.»			
Notes: *At the time of writing, no legislation could be found regarding the FCSSQ, however, this could be due to the recent passing of Bill 40. <i>Bill 40: An Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act with Respect to School Organization and Governance</i> , was passed on February 8th, 2020, dissolving French-language school boards and replacing them with the system of French language school service centres.			

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
French School Service Centres	<p>Educational Act, 2021</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act.</p> <p>111. The Government shall, by order, divide the territory of Québec into two groups of territories: one of territories for French-language school service centres and the other, of territories for English-language school service centres*. The territory of the Cree School Board, that of the Kativik School Board and that of Centre de services scolaire du Littoral established by chapter 125 of the statutes of Québec, 1966-67, are excluded from such division, however.</p> <p>A school service centre shall be established in each territory.</p>	<p>Educational Act, 2021</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act.</p> <p>207.1. The mission of a school service centre is to establish educational institutions in its territory, to support those institutions and to accompany them by procuring access to the goods and services and offering the optimal conditions enabling them to provide students with quality educational services and see to their educational success, so that the population may attain a higher level of knowledge, social development and qualification.</p> <p>To that end, while showing due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, the school service centre organizes the educational services offered in its institutions and ensures their quality as well as the effective, efficient, fair and environmentally responsible management of its human, physical and financial resources.</p> <p>The school service centre also sees to the promotion and enhancement of public education in its territory, in</p>	<p>Educational Act, 2021</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act.</p> <p>143. A French-language school service centre shall be administered by a board of directors composed of 15 members, as follows: (1) five parent representatives who are parents of students attending an institution under the school service centre's jurisdiction, who are members of the parents' committee, who are not members of the school service centre's staff and each of whom represents a district; (2) five members of the school service centre's staff, including one teacher, one non-teaching professional staff member, one support staff member, one principal of an educational institution and one member of the executive staff; and (3) five community representatives who are domiciled in the school service centre's territory and who are not members of the school service centre's staff, that is,</p> <p>a. One person with expertise in</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		<p>collaboration with its educational institutions and the parents' committee, and contributes, to the extent provided for by law, to its region's social, economic and cultural development.</p> <p>For the purposes of the second paragraph, "principle of subsidiarity" means the principle whereby powers and responsibilities must be delegated to the appropriate level of authority so that decision-making centres are adequately distributed and brought as close as possible to the students.</p>	<p>governance, in ethics, in risk management or in human resources management;</p> <p>b. One person with expertise in finance or accounting or in financial or physical resources management;</p> <p>c. One person from the community, sport or cultural sector;</p> <p>d. One person from the municipal, health, social services or business sector; and</p> <p>e. One person aged 18 to 35.</p> <p>143.3. The members of a school service centre's board of directors are designated for three-year terms. Designation processes shall be held.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA)</p> <p>Nine school boards in the province.</p> <p>Mission Statement: " [...] advocate appropriate education for students in both the youth and adult sectors and to enhance the effectiveness of school commissioners and member school boards in the areas of education, finance, administration, and labour relations. [...]"</p>	<p>Québec Education Act, 2021</p> <p>Note: On August 10th, 2020, the Superior Court ordered a stay of the application of the <i>Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act with Regard to School Organization and Governance</i> (2020, c. 1) to English-language school boards until a judgment is rendered on the merits of the application for judicial review challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Act.</p>	<p>Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime focus of the Association is to fulfill the needs of school boards. • Advocate appropriate education for students in both the youth and adult sectors. • Enhance the effectiveness of school commissioners and member school boards in the areas of education, finance, administration and labour relations. • We communicate, collaborate and cooperate with other educational organizations including the Ministry of Education. • Advocate for minority language (English) schools in Quebec. 	<p>Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA)</p> <p>Representatives are elected school board members from English school boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QESBA president is elected for 4 years, and can run 2 terms (8 years total)

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
English School Boards Nine school boards in the province.	Québec Education Act, 2021 Note: On August 10th, 2020, the Superior Court ordered a stay of the application of the <i>Act to Amend Mainly the Education Act with Regard to School Organization and Governance</i> (2020, c. 1) to English-language school boards until a judgment is rendered on the merits of the application for judicial review challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Act.	Québec Education Act, 2021 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act *	School Board Commissioners' Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent views of their community • Regularly attend meetings and events • Respond to constituents' inquiries • Develop means of communicating with constituents on important educational issues Who Can Be a School Board Commissioner? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All English parents automatically registered on the English Electoral List • ≥18 years of age • Canadian citizen • Has been resident of the English-language school district for at least 6 months
Governing Boards Nine school boards in the province.	Québec Education Act, 2021 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 74. The governing board shall analyze the situation prevailing at the school, principally the needs of	Body Responsibilities Note: The following represents only select provisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises powers and functions related to following matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ School's educational project ◦ Student supervision 	Who Can Be on a Governing Board Note: The following represents only select provisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 8-20 members • At least four parents • At least four members of the school staff, as well as one

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>the students, the challenges tied to educational success and the characteristics and expectations of the community served by the school. Based on the analysis and taking into account the commitment-to-success plan of the school service centre, the governing board shall adopt the school's educational project, oversee the project's implementation and evaluate the project at the intervals specified in it.</p> <p>Each of these stages shall be carried out through concerted action between the various participants having an interest in the school and in educational success. To that end, the governing board shall encourage the collaboration of students, parents, teachers, other school staff members, and community and school service centre representatives.</p> <p>75. The governing board shall send the school's educational project to the school service centre and make it public within 30 days after</p>	<p>policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rules of conduct ○ Approach for the implementation of the basic school regulation ○ Time allocation for each subject and the use of the school's premises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A centre's governing board exercises powers and functions related to matters such as the centre's policies and action plan, the approach for the implementation of the applicable basic regulation, the implementation of the programs of studies and the programs relating to student services and popular education, the centre's operating rules and the use of the centre's premises <p>Decisions must be made in the best interest of students</p>	<p>member of the daycare staff in schools providing childcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two students in schools providing instruction at the Secondary IV and V levels <p>Two community representatives</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>sending it. It shall also make public the evaluation of the school's educational project. The educational project and any evaluation of it shall be communicated to the parents and the school staff.</p>		
<p><u>First Nations Education Council (FNEC)</u></p> <p>Made up of 8 First Nations of Québec.</p> <p><u>Mission Statement:</u> :The First Nations Education Council (FNEC) contributes to the complete takeover of and inherent jurisdiction over education by its member First Nations. The FNEC represents and defends the interests of this collective strength by promoting the realities of each nation and respecting their identity, culture and traditions. Excellence, student success, cultural pride and control of</p>	<p>*** Note***</p> <p>Information regarding Indigenous education support and advisory was scarce at the time of this writing. However, two recent events indicate that Indigenous education supports may be increasing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Advisory Board on English Education published <i>Indigenous Education: Walking on both sides of the river (2017)</i>. This brief advises Quebec Education on how Indigenous knowledges and languages may be included in English schools, and how English-language schools may increase communication and collaboration with Indigenous communities. • Québec Education Minister Jean- 	<p><u>First Nations Education Council (FNEC)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides support for First Nations schools. • Serves 22 communities, including 24 schools. • Serves both French- and English-speaking First Nations communities. <p><u>FNEC Mandate:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that First Nations regain full control of their education. • Ensuring that educational rights of First Nations communities are respected. • Advancing and increasing the quality of First Nations educational programs and services. 	<p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising general board in its responsibilities. • Ensuring overall functioning. • Fulfilling board mandates. <p>Allocating and managing finances and budgets.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
education and for First Nations are at the heart of its mission."	<p>François Roberge and Indigenous Affairs Minister Ian Lafrenière recently announced that \$20 million would be budgeted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create educational materials integrating Indigenous realities • Provided support to Indigenous public school students <p>Integrate Indigenous knowledges into public school curricula</p>	Maintaining links with other First Nations organizations working in education.	

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia: English

Nova Scotia organizes provincial schooling between [seven regional centres for education \(sometimes called school boards\)](#), [one French school board](#), and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Regional centres for education are affiliates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that serve schools in the given geographical region. Regional centres are governed by appointed representatives rather than locally elected representatives.

Nova Scotia: French

French schools in NS are represented by the locally elected [Conseil scolaire acadien provincial](#) school board under the Department of Education.

Nova Scotia: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

In Nova Scotia, Indigenous education in both First Nations schools and public schools is supported by the [Council on Mi'kmaq Education](#). On-reserve schools operate under the jurisdiction of the [Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey](#).

Table 9: Demographic and Contextual Data for Nova Scotia

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Teachers	Students	Graduation Rate
Nova Scotia	981,889	\$60,764.00	\$1 billion	370	9,333	123,237	92.3%
*Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated							

Table 10: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in Nova Scotia

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Regional Education Centres Seven regional centres for education in the province.</p> <p>Mission Statement: “Each regional centre has a unique mission statement, developed for the needs and goals of that region.”</p>	<p>Education Act, 2018 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>(54) The Minister is hereby constituted a corporation sole as a regional centre with respect to each of the former regional school boards dissolved by this Act</p> <p>(62) A regional centre may, in the performance of its duties,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work with and share services with another regional centre, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, the Bureau or a department; Hire, pay, promote, demote, reassign, discipline and dismiss staff of the regional centre; Acquire, hold and dispose of personal and real property; Enter into agreements with any persons, municipalities, organizations or governments to advance the purpose of this Act, administer programs or provide for services; 	<p>Education Act, 2018</p> <p>(61) A regional centre shall, in accordance with this Act and the regulations,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote excellence in education and the achievement of all students enrolled in its schools and programs; Develop and implement educational programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings with their peers in age, in accordance with the regulations and the Minister’s policies and guidelines; Manage and control its public schools, programs and related services in the school region under its jurisdiction; Provide for the education and instruction of all students enrolled in its schools and programs in accordance with this Act and the regulations; Facilitate vibrant community involvement in the effective delivery of education, including engagement and consultation with school 	<p>All RED representatives are appointed.</p> <p>Regional Executive Director (RED) The RED of each regional centre is appointed by the Minister of Education and accountable to the Deputy Minister of the department. The RED is mandated to promote enhanced community involvement, a responsibility once shared with elected school boards and now assigned to one individual role.</p> <p>Responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operation of the regional centre office, public schools, and services Supervision of all employees Educational performance of students Administering and evaluating programs Ensure adherence to public school program Maintain safe, orderly, and supporting learning environment in schools Provide leadership to the

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>e. Where directed by the Minister, provide such programs and services as the Minister considers desirable; and Subject to the direction of the Minister, do such things as may be necessary for or incidental to the exercise of its powers and the performance of its duties</p>	<p>advisory councils on issues within the prescribed mandate of the school advisory councils; and</p> <p>f. Represent regional perspectives in the development of provincial and local policies and programs.</p>	<p>school region, esp. Principles and staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish performance standards and process for supervision and evaluation of staff • Cooperate with other educational entities and departments • Report annual on student performance • Oversee the policies of the regional centre and the Province

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Singular French school board in the province.</p> <p>Mission: «Le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial offre une éducation en français de première qualité, en tenant compte de son mandat culturel.»</p> <p>Mission: "The Conseil scolaire acadien provincial offers first-class education in French, taking into account its cultural mandate."</p>	<p>Education (CSAP) Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) 11 (1) The Governor in Council may establish a school board with jurisdiction throughout the Province, a body corporate to be known as the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, for the purpose of providing a French-first-language program to the children of entitled parents (2) The Conseil acadien is responsible for the delivery and administration of all French-first-language programs. (3) A public school, or part of a public school, in which a French first-language program is provided shall be known as an école acadienne. (4) Upon the establishment of the Conseil acadien: a) every conseil d'école is dissolved;</p>	<p>Education (CSAP) Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) 11 (4) Upon the establishment of the Conseil acadien b) the Conseil acadien becomes responsible for the control and management of every educational facility of a conseil d'école; (16) The Conseil acadien shall a. Promote and distribute information about the French-first-language program; b. Include in its learning materials information about the Acadian culture; c. In providing its educational programs, engage in activities that promote Acadian culture and the French language.</p>	<p>Education (CSAP) Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) 13 (1) The Conseil acadien shall be elected by entitled persons, at the same time as the regularly scheduled elections for school boards. Counsellors' Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate actively in decision-making processes • Acknowledge needs of communities • Represent acadiens interests and act as a voice to transmit their narratives • Respect final decisions • Participate in committee work as required • Attend external meetings if desired

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
Council on Mi'kmaq Education (CME) CME Mission: "To provide guidance and advice to the Minister of Education on the development, implementation, and funding of all educational programs and services which impact on the educational concerns of Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia."	Education Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) 17 (1) The Council on Mi'kmaq Education is hereby continued.	Education Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) (2) The Council on Mi'kmaq Education shall <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the rights and interests of the Mi'kmaq by providing recommendations to the Minister on programs and services in public schools and to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education on postsecondary and adult education; Meet annually with the Minister to discuss the development of Mi'kmaq education; and Perform such other duties prescribed by the regulations. 	Education Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) (3) The Minister shall appoint the members of the Council on Mi'kmaq Education for such terms and upon such conditions prescribed by the regulations. (4) The Council on Mi'kmaq Education shall meet at least four times each year.
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) Mission: "To actively promote excellence in Mi'kmaq education, interests and rights for our communities and to facilitate the development of lifelong learning by: Engaging every community, learner	Mi'kmaq Education Act (1998) Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 4 The purpose of this Act is to enable communities to exercise jurisdiction in relation to education, as provided in the Agreement. 7 (1) A community shall, to the extent provided by the Agreement, provide or make provision for primary, elementary and secondary educational programs and services for residents of its reserve.	Mi'kmaq Education Act (1998) Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 6 (1) A community shall, to the extent provided by the Agreement, provide or make provision for primary, elementary and secondary education programs and services to all residents of its reserve. (2) The educational programs and services provided by a community must be comparable to the programs and services provided by other education systems in Canada in order to permit the transfer of	Mi'kmaq Education Act (1998) Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act 3 (1) For the purposes of this Act, a community shall act through its council 10 (2) The chiefs of the communities are the members of the corporation and together constitute its board of directors, and the board may provide, by by-law or otherwise, for the management and conduct of the affairs of the corporation.

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>and teacher to live their dreams, including the power to broaden the meaning of education and supporting dreams that are achievable for each student to the extent of their possibilities, interests and capabilities.</p> <p>To respond to the needs of Mi'kmaq communities and students in attaining an education enabling them to be the best they can be at every stage of their educational journey."</p>	<p>8 A community education board established by the laws of the community may carry out any powers conferred on it by those laws or by resolution of the council acting pursuant to section 7.</p>	<p>students to and from those systems without academic penalty, to the same extent as the transfer of students between those other educational systems.</p>	
<p>Council on African-Canadian Education (CACE)</p> <p>Mission: "To promote the rights and interests of African Canadian learners by ensuring equitable access to educational</p>	<p>Education Act, 2018</p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>19 (1) The Council on African-Canadian Education is hereby continued.</p>	<p>Education Act, 2018</p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>19 (2) The Council on African-Canadian Education shall :</p> <p>(a) promote the rights and interests of African-Nova Scotians by providing recommendations to the Minister on programs and services in public</p>	<p>Education Act, 2018</p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>19 (3) The Ministry shall appoint the members of the Council on African-Canadian education for such terms are conditions as prescribed by the regulations.</p> <p>(4) The Council on African-Canadian</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
experiences which centre them in their own cultural, historical and social references.”		<p>schools and to the Minister of Advanced Education on postsecondary and adult education;</p> <p>(b) Meet annually with the Minister to discuss the development of African-Canadian education; and</p> <p>(c) Perform such other duties as prescribed by the regulations.</p>	<p>Education shall meet at least four times each year.</p> <p>(5) Meetings of the Council on African-Canadian Education shall be presided over by a member of the Council chosen by the Council.</p>
Provincial Advisory Council on Education	<p><u>Education Act, 2018</u></p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>11 (1) There is hereby established a Provincial Advisory Council on Education</p>	<p><u>Education Act, 2018</u></p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>15 PACE shall advise the Minister on matters relating to education and, in particular,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Those matters referred to PACE by the Minister; b. Regional or local matters that affect education; and c. Such other educational matters as PACE wishes to bring to the attention of the Minister.* 	<p><u>Education Act, 2018</u></p> <p>(Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act)</p> <p>11 (2) PACE is composed of [the following appointed members]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Chair of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial or such other member of the Conseil as may be designated by its members; b. The Chair of the Council on Mi'kmaq Education or such other member of the Council as may be designated by its members; c. The Chair of the Council on African-Canadian Education or such other member of the Council as may be designated by its members; and d. Up to 12 individuals chosen



Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
			<p>after taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Regional, cultural and gender representation and representation for persons with a disabilityii. The individual's knowledge and experience, andiii. The desirability of achieving an equitable representation of the diversity of educational and community interests served by public education in the Province. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members serve two year terms for up to two terms.
Note: *Initial communication with jurisdictional representatives indicates that, although mandated, there has been no update on associated work since June 2021.			

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
School Councils * Advisory	Education Act, 2018 & Education (CSAP) Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) (21) (1) A school advisory council may be established in accordance with the regulations for a public school or a group of schools. (2) A regional school advisory council may be established in accordance with the regulations to represent two or more groups of schools within a school region or across school regions. (3) The composition and powers and duties of a school advisory council or regional school advisory council, and the terms and conditions upon which its members serve, are as prescribed by the regulations	Education Act, 2018 & Education (CSAP) Act, 2018 (Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act) (22) A school advisory council or regional school advisory council shall <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assist a regional centre to ensure that the regional centre's public schools and related services are meeting the needs of the communities and regions they serve; and Perform such other functions as are prescribed by the regulations and as assigned by the Minister or the regional centre* The SAC Handbook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advising principals, RCEs, and EECD on policies, school practises and initiatives, and communication Work with principals to improve student achievement and well-being Prepare annual report Create internal by-laws and agreement policies Participate in provincial and regional meetings Determine spending priorities All SAC decisions are advisory and not binding. 	The SAC Handbook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All SAC members have right and responsibility in SAC decision-making using democratic approaches. SAC members determine suitable decision-making strategy for context (ie: consensus, voting). SAC members communicate with partners through newsletter, school websites, or otherwise.



Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>*Contact with the jurisdictional representatives at the time of writing indicate that SACs operate very differently in actuality from what is delineated in the legislation. The SACs have not been made a key component of educational governance at this date. Further, insights from preliminary interview data indicate that not all schools have SACs, and those which do operate differently school to school.</p>			

Northwest Territories

Northwest Territories: English

Northwest Territories organizes territorial schooling governance between District Education Authorities (DEAs), Divisional Education Councils (DECs), the Yellowknife Education District No. 1, Yellowknife Catholic Schools, the Tłı̨chʼı̨ Community Services Agency (TCSA), and the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment. District Education Authorities are governed by locally elected or appointed trustees. Most DEAs, excluding the Dettah DEA and the Ndilı̨ DEA, appoint one representative to the local Divisional Education Council (DEC). The Yellowknife Education District No. 1 is governed by locally elected trustees serving six public schools in NWT's largest city, Yellowknife. Similarly, [Yellowknife Catholic Schools](#) are composed of locally elected trustees serving three schools. The TCSA provides education services to Tłı̨chʼı̨ communities of Behchokò (Rae-Edzo), Gamèti (Rae Lakes), Wekweèti (Snare Lake), and Whati (Lac La Martre), and is governed by members representing each community, and a chairperson appointed by the Tłı̨chʼı̨ First Nation.

Northwest Territories: French

French schools in NWT are governed by the locally elected [Commission scolaire francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest](#), a school board that supports two schools.

Northwest Territories: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

Each educational body in NWT sets out the priorities, advocacy, and support services they provide in ways that are culturally responsive to the needs of the local community. Within most of these communities, the population and accordingly the DEA and DEC members are predominantly Indigenous, meaning that local education is governed by the local Indigenous community. Accordingly, there is no overarching First Nations, Métis, or Inuit school authority. However, the Tłı̨chʼı̨ First Nation has taken control over their education as part of their land claims and self-government—the first in NWT.

Table 11: Demographic and Contextual Data for the Northwest Territories

	Population	2016 Household Income	Budget	Schools	Educators	Students	Graduation Rate
Northwest Territories	45,504	\$117,688	\$160,437,000	49	800	8700	78%

*Dates accurate as of 2021 unless otherwise indicated

Table 12: Decision-Making Authorities and Responsibilities in the Northwest Territories

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>District Education Authorities</p> <p>There are 32 District Education Authorities (DEAs), including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellowknife Education District No. 1, • Yellowknife Catholic Schools, • Commission scolaire francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest <p>Missions: Each DEA and School Board has a unique mission and locally determined priorities.</p>	<p>NWT Education Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>81 (1) Subject to section 86, the Minister may, by regulation, establish a District Education Authority for each education district to govern the education district</p> <p>86 (1) The residents of an education district may petition the Minister, in accordance with the regulations, for the establishment or operation of a District Education Authority in a form or manner other than that set out in this Act.</p>	<p>NWT Education Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>117. (1) Subject to subsections 81(3), (5), (6) and 102(3), an education body* shall, for the area within its jurisdiction,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (a) provide education to all students [...]; • (c) administer and manage the educational affairs of the education body in accordance with this Act and the regulations; • (d) consider any comments and recommendations, with regard to a school, that are provided by the students, student representatives, parents and school staff who have an interest in that school; • (e) at the beginning of each academic year, invite each principal to have a student representative from each school attend and participate in the public meetings of the education body and establish guidelines for the participation of student representatives in those meetings; [...] • (k) with the advice of education staff, parents and community elders, develop and deliver culture based school programs in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum; • (l) provide direction to and supervise the Superintendent in the recruitment, hiring, 	<p>NWT Education Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>89. (1) The Local Authorities Elections Act applies to all matters respecting the election of the members of a District Education Authority.</p> <p>(2) The residents of an education district shall elect members to the District Education Authority in accordance with the regulations made pursuant to subsection 81(8).</p> <p>(3) The term of office of a member of a District Education Authority is two, three or four years, corresponding to the term length of the members of the governing body of the community that the District Education Authority represents.</p> <p>(3.1) Notwithstanding subsection (3), the term of office of a member</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
		<p>employment, discipline and dismissal of education staff and school staff [...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (o) hold a public meeting annually to consult with parents, community elders and other members of the community regarding the goals and plans for the school program for the next school year. <p>34 (2) A District Education Authority shall ensure that a discipline policy is developed for the education district, that is consistent with the Territorial School Code of Conduct and that governs the breach by a student of the Code of Conduct, the school rules or the responsibilities of a student under this Act or the regulations.</p> <p>34.1. (1) A Divisional Education Council or, if there is no Divisional Education Council for an education district, a District Education Authority shall ensure that (a) a safe schools plan is established for the schools in the education district; (b) the schools in the education district implement the plan; (c) the plan is made available to the public; and (d) the plan is reviewed at least annually, to ensure that it complies with the regulations.</p> <p>71. (1) A District Education Authority shall, in accordance with the requirements of this section and in accordance with the regulations, determine a language of instruction to be used in the education district.</p>	<p>of the Yellowknife District No. 1 Education Authority or the Yellowknife Public Denominational District Education Authority elected in the first election following the coming into force of this subsection is one year.</p> <p>90. (1) The District Education Authority shall select members as chairperson and vice-chairperson.</p> <p>(2) The District Education Authority shall select one member to serve as representative on the Divisional Education Council and may select one member to serve as alternate representative on the Divisional Education Council.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
Notes: * "'Education body' means a District Education Authority, a Divisional Education Council or a <i>commission scolaire francophone de division</i> , or all of them, as the case may be; (<i>organisme scolaire</i>)."			
<p><u>Divisional Education Councils (DECs)</u></p> <p>There are four DECs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaufort Delta DEC serves 9 schools in 8 DEAs • Dehcho DEC serves 9 schools in 8 DEAs • Sahtú DEC serves 5 schools in 5 DEAs • South Slave DEC serves 8 schools in 5 DEAs <p>Missions: Each DEC has a unique mission and locally determined priorities.</p>	<p><u>NWT Education Act, 1996</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>102. (1) Subject to section 103, the Minister may, by regulation, establish a Divisional Education Council for each education division to govern the education division.</p> <p>103. (1) Where an education division includes more than one education district, the District Education Authorities in the education division may petition the Minister in accordance with the regulations for the establishment or operation of a Divisional Education Council in a form or manner other than that set out in this Act.</p>	<p><u>NWT Education Act, 1996</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>117. (1) Subject to subsections 81(3), (5), (6) and 102(3), an education body* [DEA &/or DEC] shall, for the area within its jurisdiction,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (a) provide education to all students [...]; • (c) administer and manage the educational affairs of the education body in accordance with this Act and the regulations; • (d) consider any comments and recommendations, with regard to a school, that are provided by the students, student representatives, parents and school staff who have an interest in that school; • (e) at the beginning of each academic year, invite each principal to have a student representative from each school attend and participate in the public meetings of the education body and establish guidelines for the participation of student representatives in those meetings; [...] • (k) with the advice of education staff, parents and community elders, develop and deliver culture based school programs in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum; • (l) provide direction to and supervise the Superintendent in the recruitment, hiring, 	<p><u>NWT Education Act, 1996</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>89 (2) The District Education Authority shall select one member to serve as representative on the Divisional Education Council and may select one member to serve as alternate representative on the Divisional Education Council.</p> <p>104. (1) A Divisional Education Council shall be composed of the representatives of the District Education Authorities of the education districts in the education division and any members appointed under this section.</p> <p>104 (2) A member of a Divisional Education Council holds office for the duration of his or her term as a member of a District Education Authority.</p> <p>104 (3) The Minister may, at the request of a Divisional Education</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	<p>103 (5) Where a Divisional Education Council is established under subsection (4), the Minister shall allocate powers and duties to the Divisional Education Council in accordance with section 102.</p>	<p>employment, discipline and dismissal of education staff and school staff [...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (o) hold a public meeting annually to consult with parents, community elders and other members of the community regarding the goals and plans for the school program for the next school year. <p>34.1. (1) A Divisional Education Council or, if there is no Divisional Education Council for an education district, a District Education Authority shall ensure that (a) a safe schools plan is established for the schools in the education district; (b) the schools in the education district implement the plan; (c) the plan is made available to the public; and (d) the plan is reviewed at least annually, to ensure that it complies with the regulations.</p>	<p>Council, appoint additional members to the Divisional Education Council for the term requested, up to three years.</p> <p>106. (1) A Divisional Education Council shall select members to be chairperson and vice-chairperson.</p>
<p>Notes:* "'Education body' means a District Education Authority, a Divisional Education Council or a <i>commission scolaire francophone de division</i>, or all of them, as the case may be; (<i>organisme scolaire</i>)."</p>			

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><u>Commission scolaire francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest</u></p> <p>The only school board representing French schools.</p> <p><u>Mission Statement:</u> «Offrir des services d'éducation de qualité en français langue première aux niveaux préscolaire, primaire et secondaire aux enfants et aux élèves des Territoires du Nord-Ouest et en faire la promotion.»</p> <p><u>Mission Statement:</u> "Offer superior education services in French at the preschool, elementary, and high school levels to children and students of Northwest Territories."</p>	<p><u>NWT Education Act, 1996</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>84. (1) Where one or more conseils scolaires francophones exist, the conseil or conseils may, on meeting the requirements of the regulations, request the Minister to establish a commission scolaire francophone de division for the Territories.</p> <p>(2) On receipt of a request under subsection (1), the Minister shall, by regulation, (a) set out the area within the jurisdiction of the commission scolaire francophone de division; and (b) set out the form and manner for the establishment and operation of the commission scolaire francophone de division.</p>	<p><u>NWT Education Act, 1996</u></p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>117. (1) Subject to subsections 81(3), (5), (6) and 102(3), an education body [DEA &/or DEC] shall, for the area within its jurisdiction,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (a) provide education to all students [...]; • (c) administer and manage the educational affairs of the education body in accordance with this Act and the regulations; • (d) consider any comments and recommendations, with regard to a school, that are provided by the students, student representatives, parents and school staff who have an interest in that school; • (e) at the beginning of each academic year, invite each principal to have a student representative from each school attend and participate in the public meetings of the education body and establish guidelines for the participation of student representatives in those meetings; [...] • (k) with the advice of education staff, parents and community elders, develop and deliver culture based school programs in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum; • (l) provide direction to and supervise the Superintendent in the recruitment, hiring, employment, discipline and dismissal of education staff and school staff [...] 	<p><u>School Board Trustee Responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate with, inform and encourage the involvement of parents, staff and the community with respect to the Commission's decisions and activities. • To establish the goals and priorities which allow us to achieve the educational standards set by the Northwest Territories, and meet students' needs in a way that reflects the wishes of the community. • To develop and implement policies and guidelines on the standards and expectations for the activities of the administration, teachers and students. • To influence the territorial government in order to make progress on priority education issues. • To recruit and assess the superintendent.

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
	(3) Where the Minister establishes a commission scolaire francophone de division under subsection (2), the Minister (a) shall, by regulation, allocate to that commission scolaire francophone de division all of the powers and duties set out in (i) section 117, except paragraph (1)(v), and (ii) section 118; and (b) may, by regulation, allocate to that commission scolaire francophone de division some or all of the powers set out in section 119.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (o) hold a public meeting annually to consult with parents, community elders and other members of the community regarding the goals and plans for the school program for the next school year. 	<p>NWT Education Act, 1996</p> <p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>85. Members of a commission scolaire francophone de division shall be elected in accordance with the procedure set out in the regulations.</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p>Tłıcho Community Services Agency Act, 2005 Serves 4 NWT communities: Behchokò (Rae-Edzo), Gamèti (Rae Lakes), Wekweèti (Snare Lake) and Whatı (Lac La Martre)</p> <p>It is the first NWT First Nation to take control over local education as part of their land claims and self-government.</p> <p>Mission*</p> <p>Preamble: <i>For thousands of years, Tłıcho people have lived in harmony with their families, their communities, and with the land. Our people took pride in passing on our knowledge, skills, and values to each generation and in the excellence of this tradition, our survival as a people was assured. In this century we became dependent on the church and the government and in this loss of control, we find that our families, the</i></p>	<p>Tłıcho Community Services Agency Act, 2005 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>13. (1) The Agency has the following powers, duties and functions:</p> <p>a) the powers, duties and functions of a divisional education council under the Education Act, as prescribed;</p> <p>NWT Education Act, 1996 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>102.1. (1) The Tłıcho Community Services Agency established by the <i>Tłıcho Community Services Agency Act</i> is deemed to be a divisional education council and is subject to</p>	<p>Tłıcho Community Services Agency Act, 2005</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the Tłıcho Community Services Agency (TCSA) is to improve the health, wellness and education of the people in Tłıcho communities by providing a range of easily accessible, integrated programs and services. The Agency manages the delivery of education, health, wellness and social programs and services for the NWT communities of Behchokò (Rae-Edzo), Gamèti (Rae Lakes), Wekweèti (Snare Lake) and Whatı (Lac La Martre). 	<p>Tłıcho Community Services Agency Act, 2005 Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>3. (2) A board composed of five members or such greater number as may be prescribed, shall govern the Agency.</p> <p>(3) The Board shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the plans, policies and programs of the Agency necessary to carry out its duties and functions under this Act; Implement any policies of the Government of the Northwest Territories applicable to the duties and functions of the Agency; and Ensure that the powers, duties and functions of the Agency under this Act or any other enactment or under the Services Agreement are properly carried out. <p>NWT Education Act, 1996</p>

Organizing Body	Legislation	Organization Responsibilities	Organization Representatives
<p><i>community, language, and culture are threatened. Our very cervical as a people is at stake. Thus...</i></p> <p>Mission: "The mission of the TCSA is to develop a continuum of care that will return control of education, health and social programs and services to the people of our communities, support them in the task of strengthening their families, promote the knowledge and skills they need to survive today and model the values they need to live in harmony with their families, our communities and our land."</p>	<p>the provisions of this Act applicable to divisional education councils, except to the extent of any inconsistency with the <i>Tłıchoᑦ Community Services Agency Act</i>.</p>		<p>Note: The following represents only select provisions from the Act</p> <p>86.1. (1) The Minister may amend a regulation establishing a District Education Authority in a Tłıchoᑦ community to provide that the member of the Board of the Tłıchoᑦ Community Services Agency appointed by the community government shall, by virtue of that office, sit as a member of the District Education Authority.</p>
<p>Note: "Our Agency's mission statement includes a contextual preamble which makes the statement much longer than is the practice of most organizations. This was intentional, as it was believed to be critically important to highlight the unique nature of the Agency, the Tłıchoᑦ people, and the communities it serves."</p>			



Works Cited

Plecki, M. L., McCleery, J., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Redefining and improving school district governance*. The Leadership Issue Project. The Wallace Foundation.

Sancton, A. (2015). *Canadian local government: An urban perspective*. Oxford University Press.



Copyright©2023. All rights reserved. Any redistribution, reproduction, or use of part or all of the questionnaire questions in any form or by any means is prohibited, except with the prior written permission of the researchers.