



# Recommendations

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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.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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; Jaspardo, 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.