

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

**A Report Prepared for the
Canadian School Boards Association**

Dr. Katina Pollock

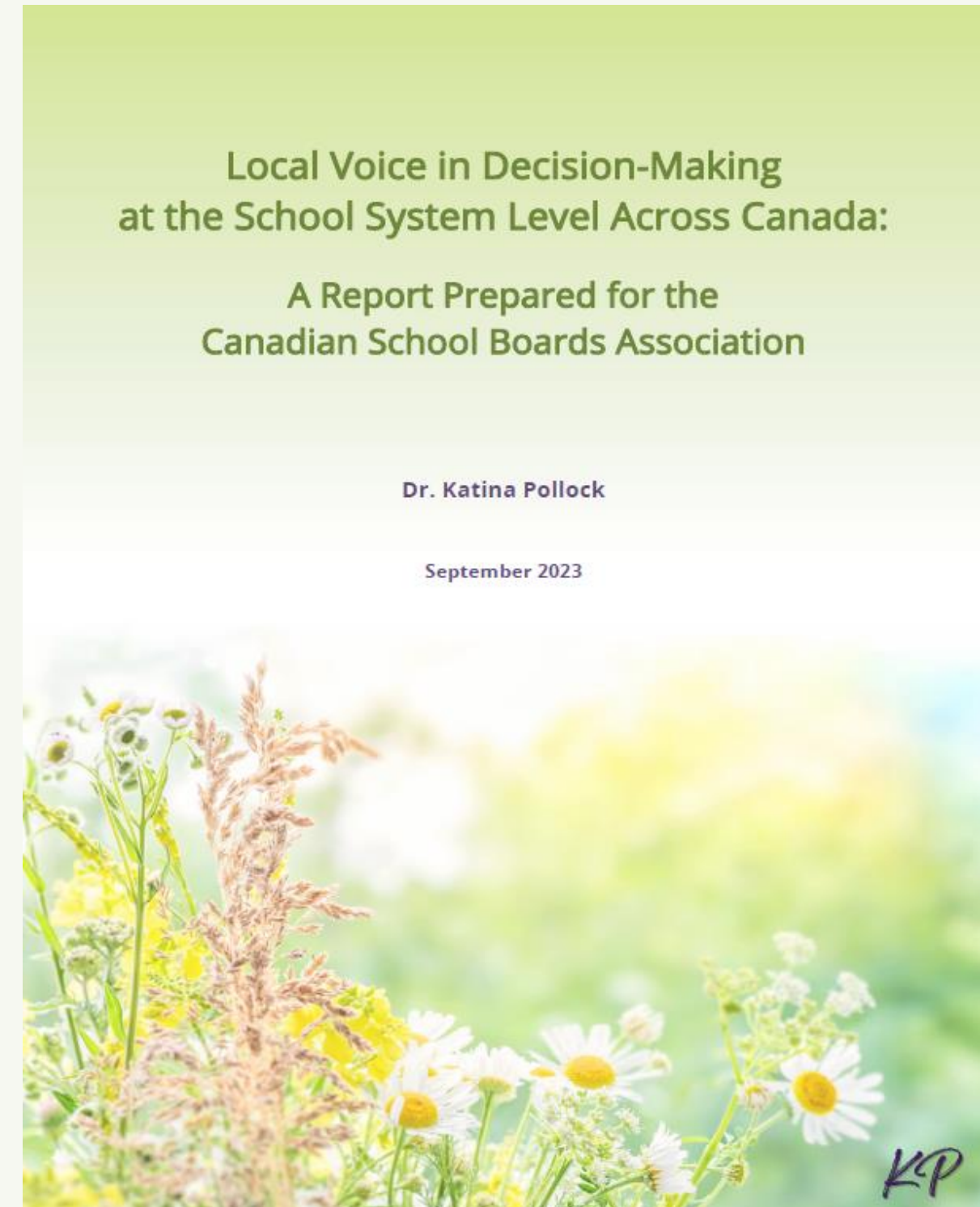
September 2023



KP

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Have you read the report?

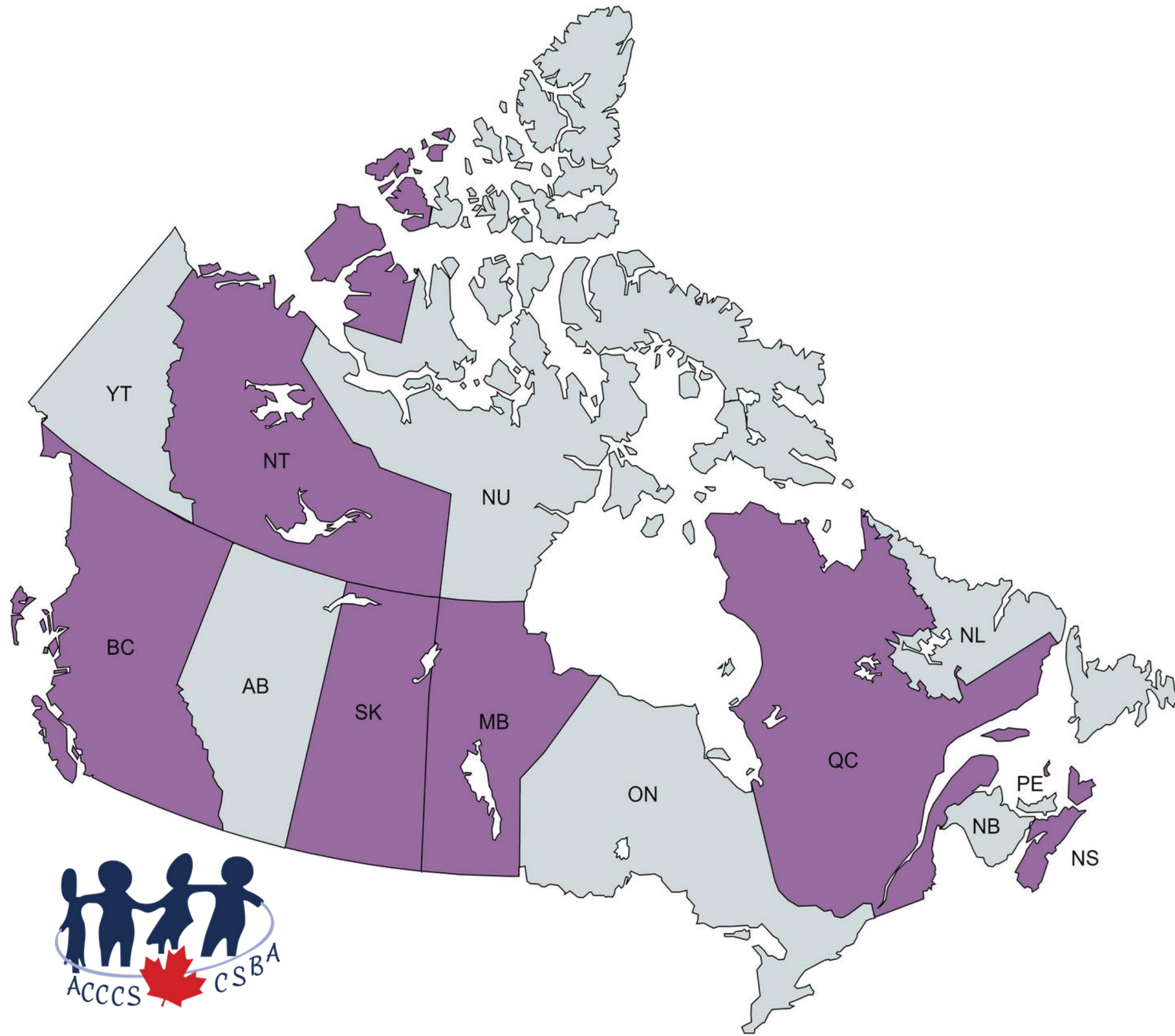


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Have you read the report?

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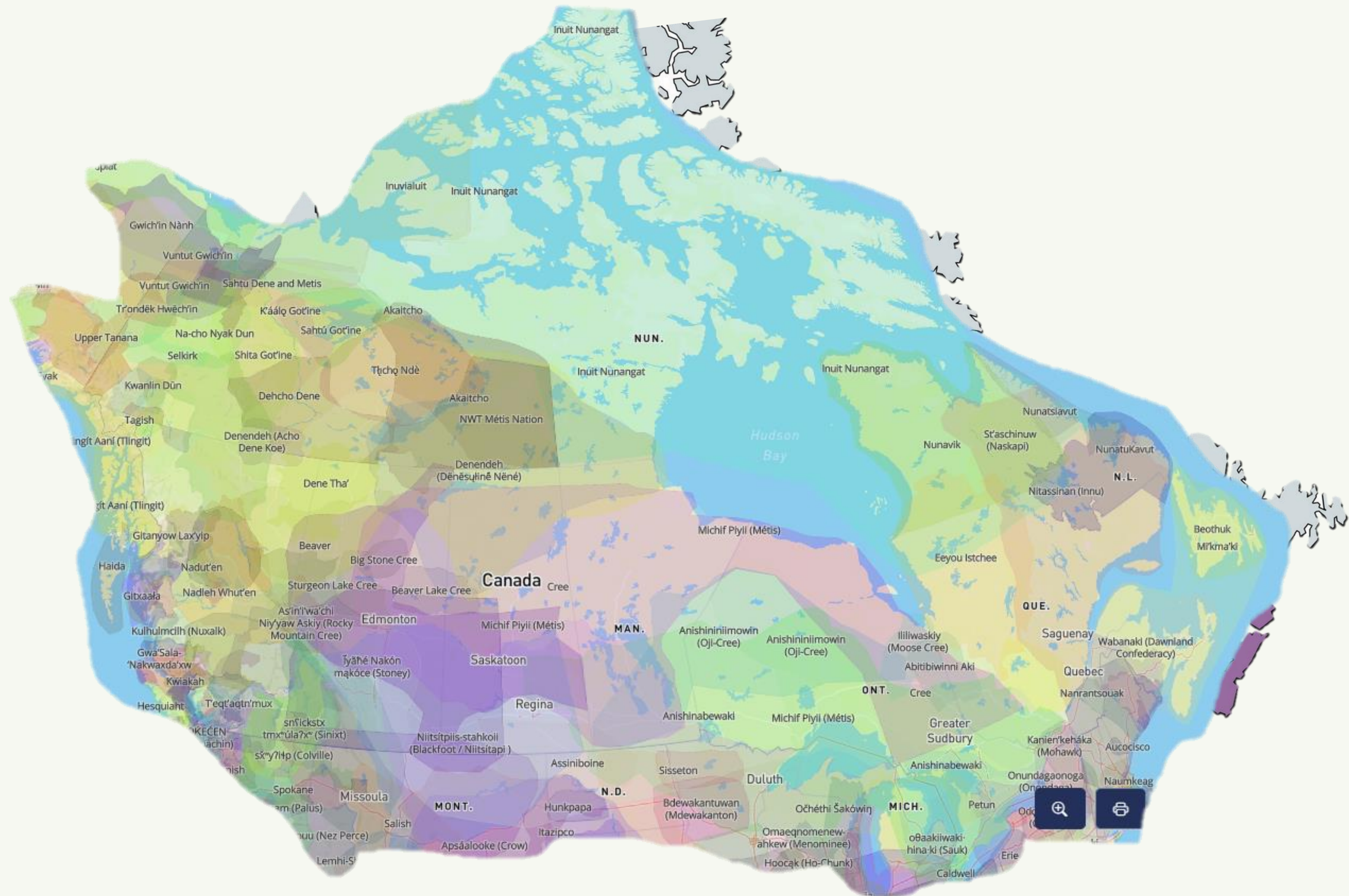


Investigating local voice in K-12 school system decision-making

Dr. Katina Pollock, Western University and
Ruth Nielsen, Western University
Wednesday, July 3rd, 2024

Page
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Acknowledgements

Participants

Interviews
Focus groups
Public consultation

CSBA

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Staff who reviewed drafts
Trustees & administrators
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interjurisdictional scan

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Study objectives

- Document the structure (and processes) for participation in school system-level decision-making.
- Describe stakeholders' experiences.
- Explore the challenges experienced by key stakeholders.
- Report strategies stakeholders used to overcome identified challenges.

Overall participation

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Overall Participation

Jurisdiction	# of Participants
British Columbia	138
Saskatchewan	127
Manitoba	389
Québec	75
Nova Scotia	66
Northwest Territories	67
Total	862

**What is the purpose of
public education?**

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What is the purpose of public education?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Purposes of education

- Critical
- Religious
- Democratic
- Neoliberal
- Neoconservative
- Minority language rights

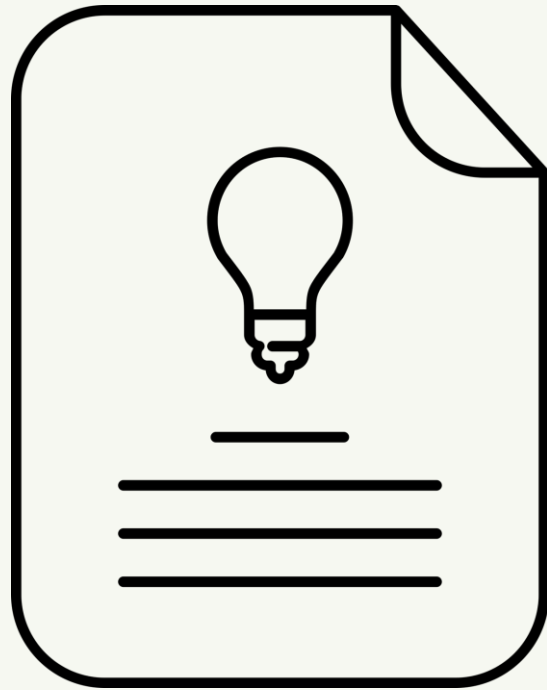


Methodology

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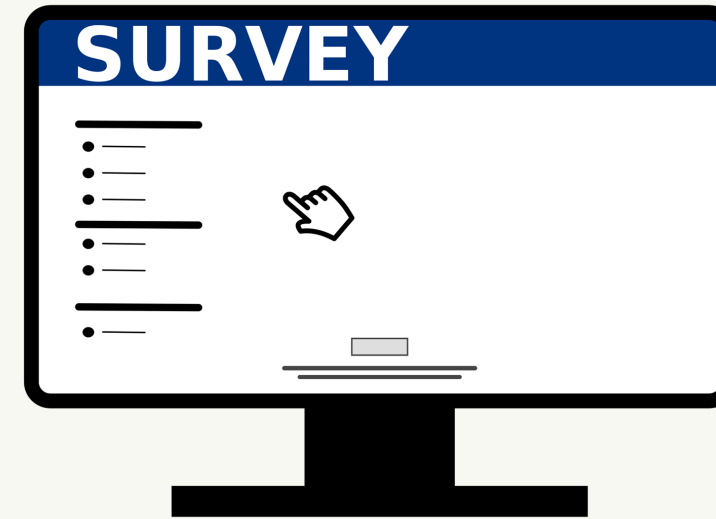
Methodology

1



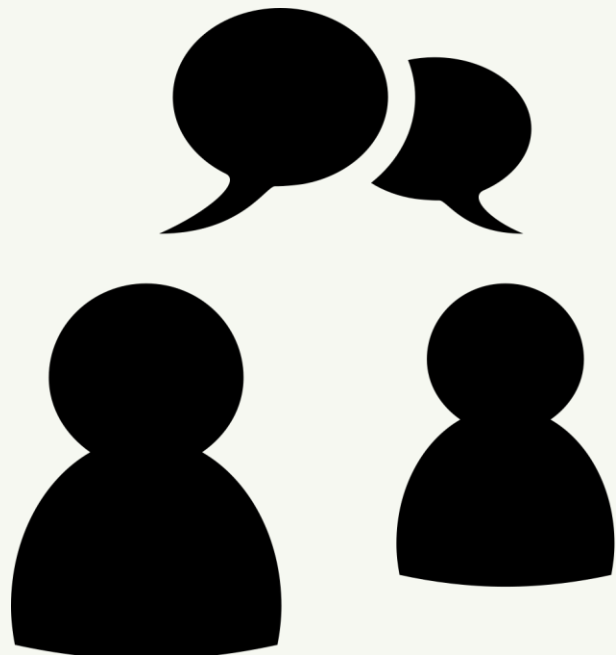
**Interjurisdictional
Scan**

4



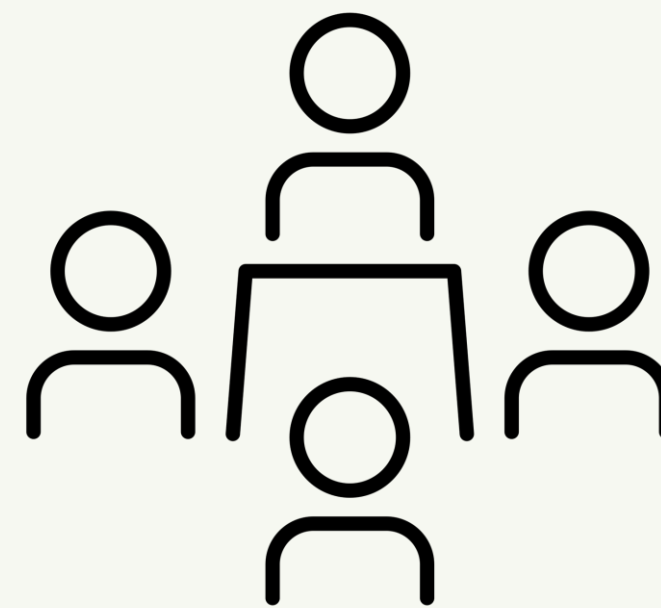
**Public
consultation
743**

2



**Interviews
99**

3



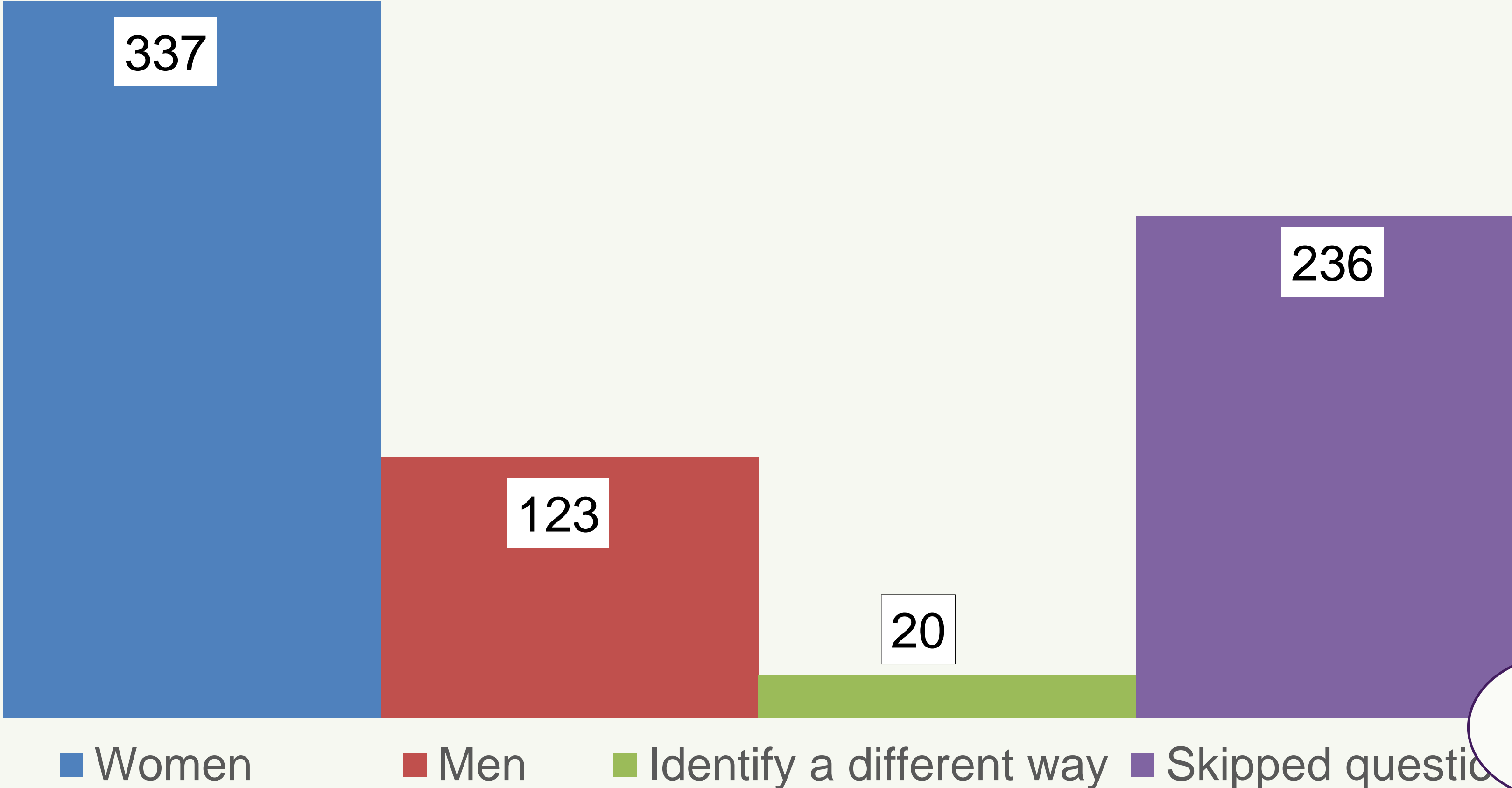
**Focus Groups
22**

Public consultation findings

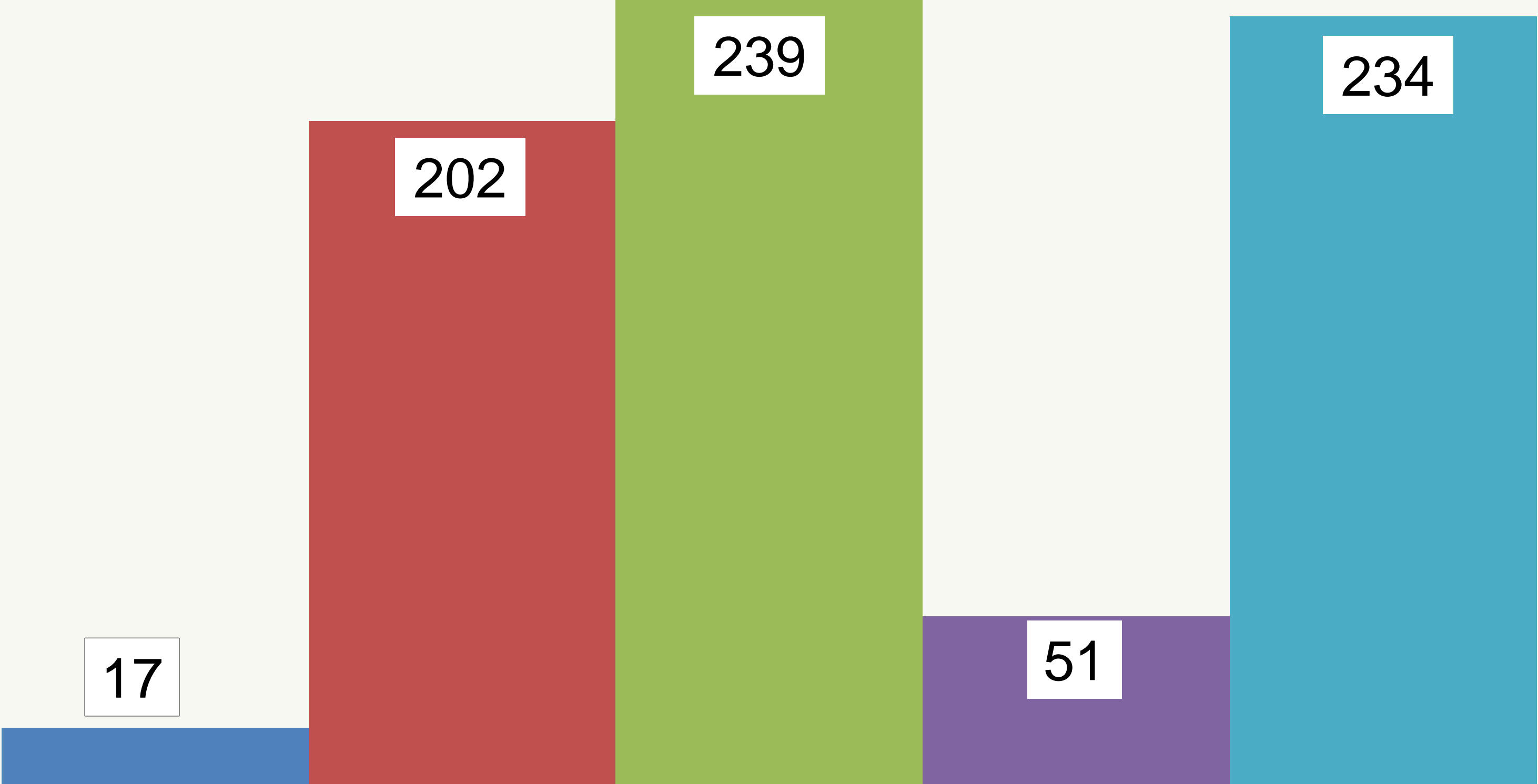
Public consultation: Role

Role	# of Respondents
Parent	296
Educator	231
Community member	214
School system leader	88
Trustee	74
Other	108

Public consultation: Sex or gender



Public consultation: Age



■ 18-29 ■ 30-49 ■ 50-69 ■ 70+ ■ Skipped question

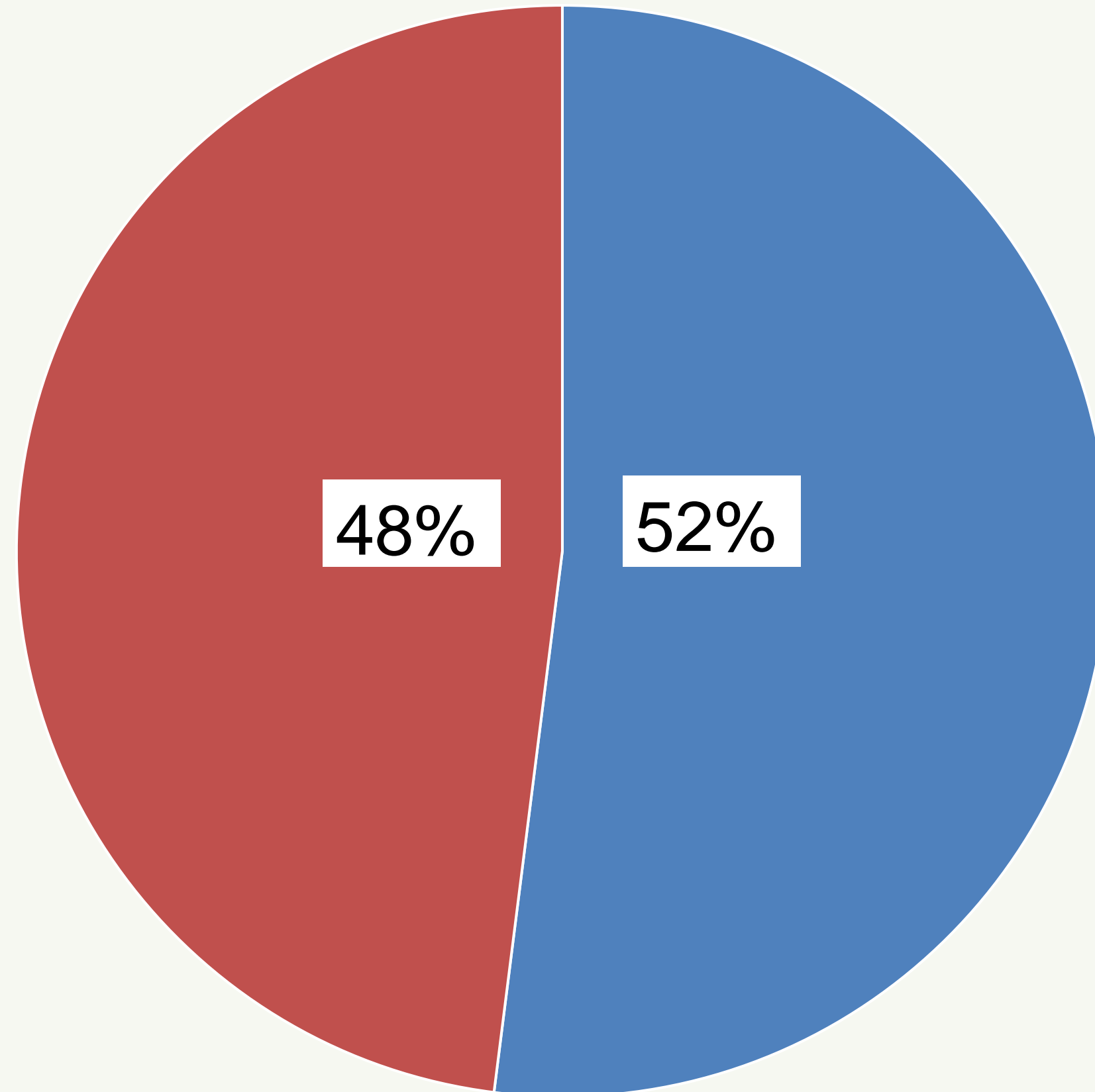
Public consultation: Ethnoracial identity

Ethnoracial identity	# of Respondents
White	354
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit	44
Black	9
South Asian	6
Prefer not to say	57
Skipped question	236

Community representation

Yes, because

- Decision-makers are elected / appointed by my community
- I know my community has a voice in decisions that are made
- There are clear systems for my community be involved



No, because

- My community does not have a voice in decisions
- My community does not have a relationship with the governing body
- There are no clear systems for involvement

Who should or should not be involved?

Who should be involved

- Educators
- Parents
- Students
- Community representatives
- Indigenous representatives

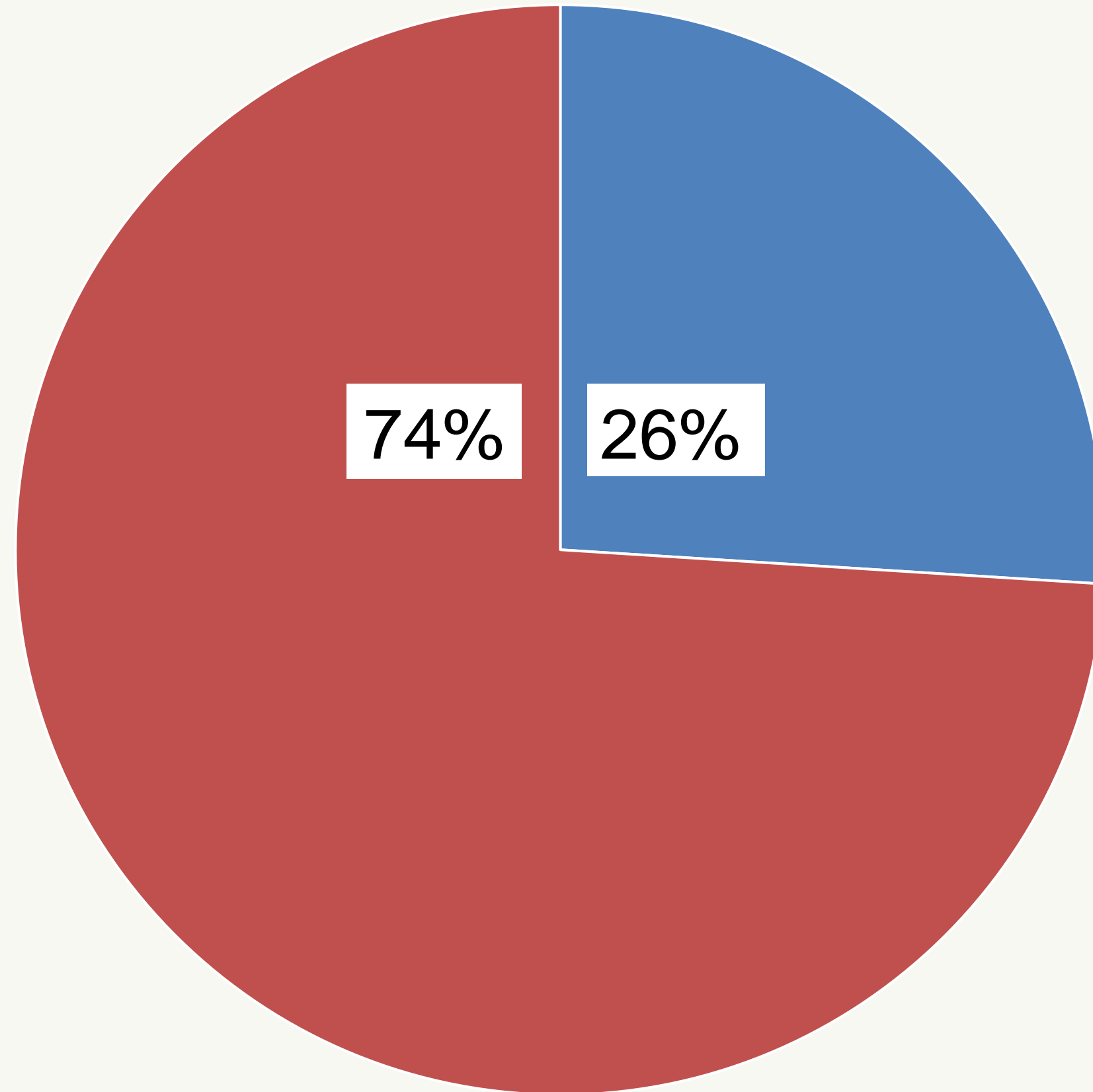
Who should not be involved

- Politicians
- Anyone not directly connected to education as parent or educator

Would anything be lost without elected boards?

Yes,

- Avenue for local voice / participation
- Recognition of local differences and specific needs
- Ability to have a say in decision-making



No,

- Trustees on the board for personal gain
- Board doesn't work effectively / efficiently
- Don't believe the board is responsible for meaningful decision-making

Democracy

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**What does democratic voice
mean to you?**

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What does democratic voice mean to you?

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Value of democracy



Democracy is valued as a key feature of public education



Support for democratically elected school boards of trustees



Loss of school board control was seen as a threat to democracy

Impacts of restricted democratic participation in education – Across jurisdictions

- Less public engagement in education
- Less transparency in decision-making processes
- Less accountability of the education system to the public that it serves
- Less perceived freedom to express opposing views

Recommendations

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1. Plan a public awareness campaign
2. Initiate a public campaign that clarifies the difference between governance and operations
3. Audit current K-12 civic and citizen education curricula learning outcomes
4. Work with the provincial and territorial governments to modify and update K-12 citizenship and social studies curricula
5. Increase clarity of participation processes
6. Implement linguistically diverse communication strategies
7. Conduct accessibility audits across jurisdictions
8. Expand and build partnerships and networks
9. Investigate ways to increase Indigenous involvement
10. Partner with Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) to advocate for voter eligibility
11. Implement a newcomer and refugee engagement strategy
12. Increase parent participation from underrepresented populations
13. Encourage the use of school parent councils
14. Encourage and support paths for parental involvement beyond the school sites to include system-level decision-making
15. Investigate ways to increase student and youth involvement in system-level decision-making
16. Encourage boards to implement a clear strategic plan
17. Implement strategic onboarding plans
18. Increase ongoing professional development
19. Encourage succession planning
20. Review requirements for those in decision-making roles for public education
21. Advocate for limits on number of trustee or commissioner terms
22. Create alternative engagement processes
23. Evaluate the CSBA's communication processes and consider including a knowledge mobilization (KMb) Approach
24. Invest in incorporating effective information communication technology.

Common themes



Increasing awareness



Encouraging involvement



Internal processes

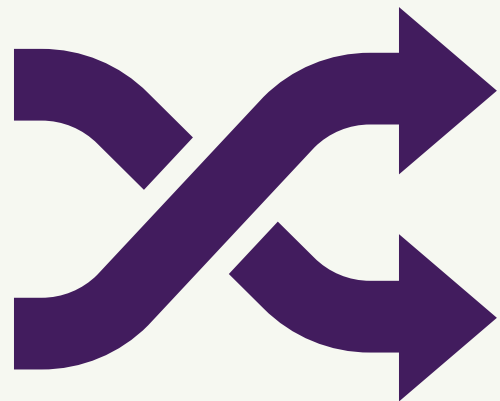
Increasing awareness

Increasing awareness

Challenge / Background



Canada's public education systems are diverse, highly complex, and difficult to navigate

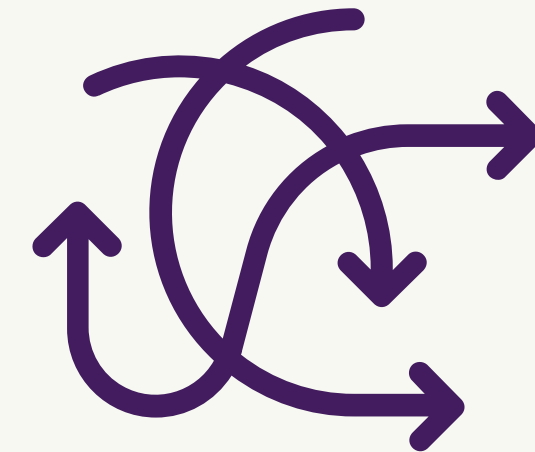


Canada's public may be misinformed about the roles, powers, and operations of public education systems

Public awareness campaign



Most did not know roles, responsibilities, structures, or processes

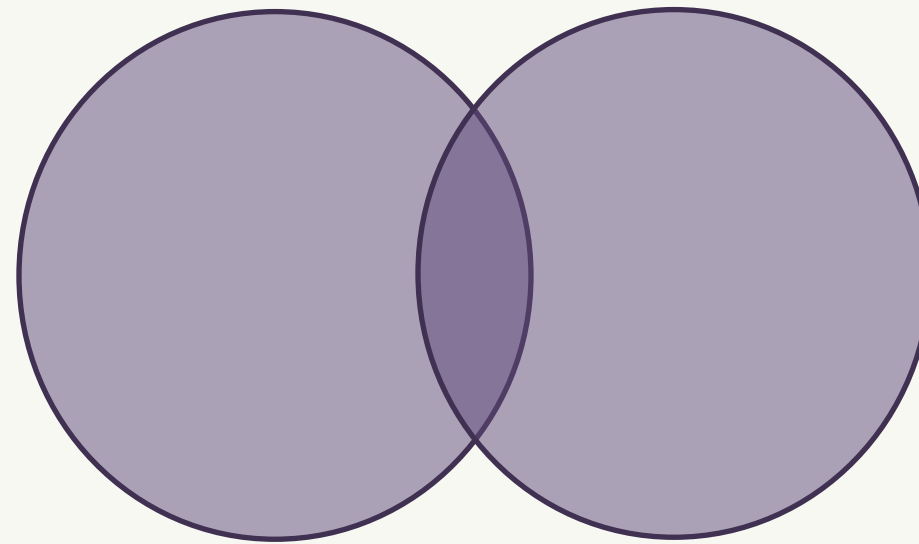


Difficulty explaining decisions and participation to the public



Democratic Deficit: Failure to provide access to the knowledge required to make informed decisions

Governance vs. operations



Overall tension about the role of governance and the role of operations

- Internal disagreement about the best level of separation or overlap
- Tension was higher and more impactful in more rural and remote jurisdictions
- Consensus re: general public's misunderstanding of the differences
- Less disagreement resulted in clearer avenues for participation

Public awareness campaign

Recommendations

- Plan a public awareness campaign (1)
- Initiate a public campaign that clarifies the difference between governance and operations (2)

Review public education

There is little to no mention of any democratic processes associated with K-12 public education governance.

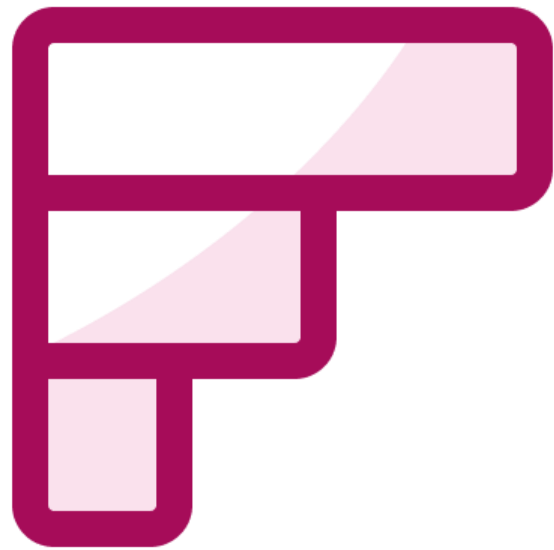
Review public education

Recommendations

- Audit current K-12 civic and citizen education learning outcomes (3)
- Work with provincial and territorial governments to modify and update K-12 citizenship and social studies curricula (4)

**Of these recommendations,
which can your team work
towards?**

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Select the top two that your board can work towards

Encouraging involvement

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Encouraging involvement

Challenge / Background



Disinterest /
apathy



Low diversity



Special interest
groups

Overall involvement

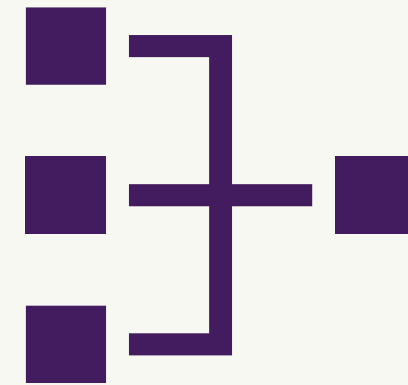
Recommendations

- Increase clarity of participation processes (5)
- Conduct accessibility audits across jurisdictions (7)
- Expand and build partnerships (8)

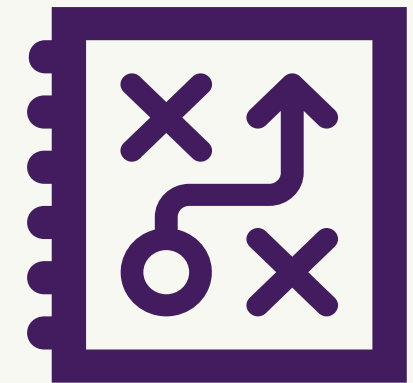
Parent involvement



Parents were involved at the school site



There are opportunities for system-level involvement



Parents did not know how to get involved at the system-level

Parent involvement

Recommendations

- Increase parent participation from underrepresented populations (12)
- Encourage the use of school parent councils (13)
- Encourage and support paths for parental involvement beyond the school sites to include system-level decision-making (14)

Immigrant and new Canadian involvement



Non-Canadian citizens cannot participate



Increasing immigrant and refugee populations, including school-aged children



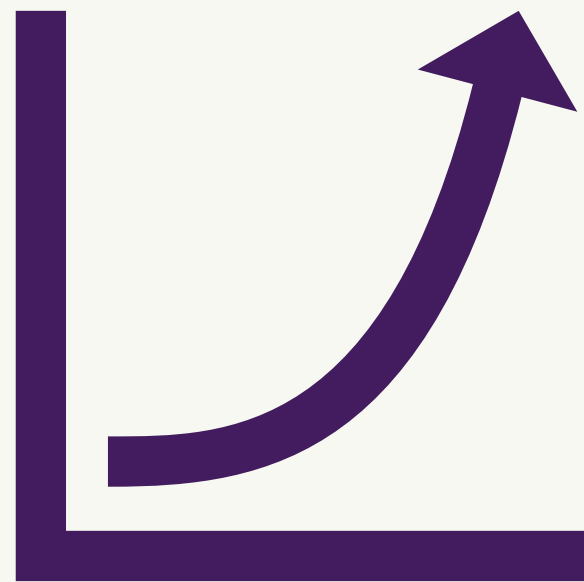
Further exclusion by language, system awareness, and sense of belonging

Immigrant and new Canadian involvement

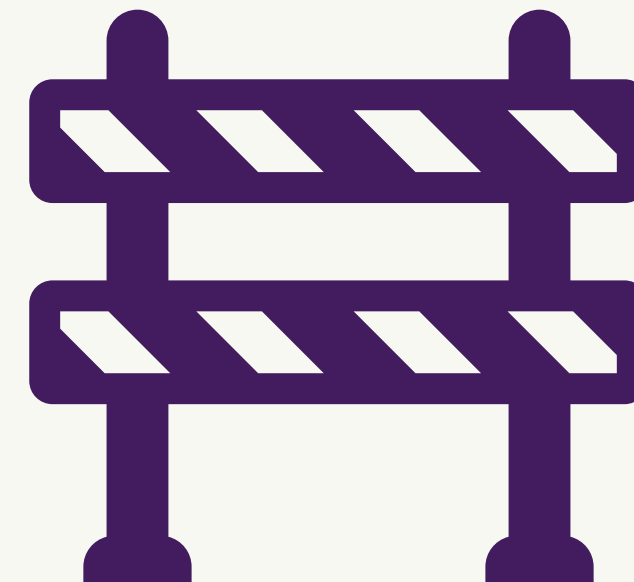
Recommendations

- Implement linguistically diverse communication strategies (6)
- Expand and build partnerships and networks (8)
- Partner with Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) to advocate for voter eligibility (10)
- Implement a newcomer and refugee engagement strategy (11)

Indigenous involvement



- Increasing Indigenous population
- Original peoples and caretakers
- Support TRC Calls to Action



- Geographic barriers
- Legislative barriers
- Social barriers

Indigenous involvement

Recommendations

- Investigate ways to increase Indigenous involvement (9)
 - i.e.: through meaningful relationship and discussion

Student and youth involvement

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.

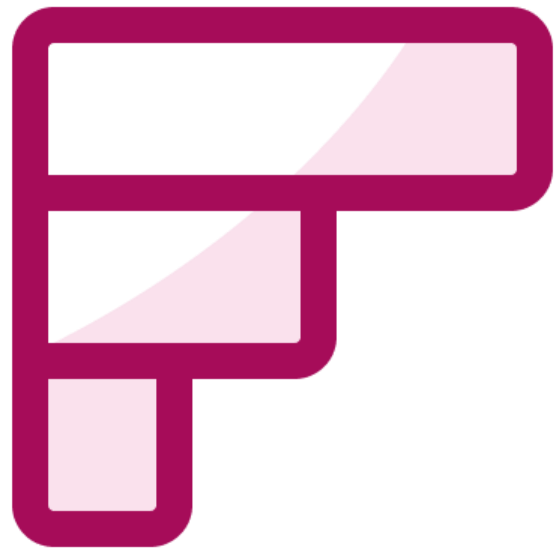
Student and youth involvement

Recommendations

- Investigate ways to increase student and youth involvement in system-level decision-making (15)

**Of these recommendations,
which can your team work
towards?**

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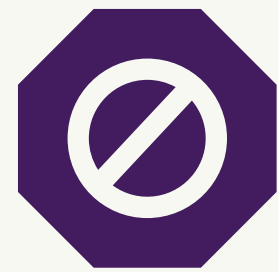
Select the top two that your board can work towards

Internal processes

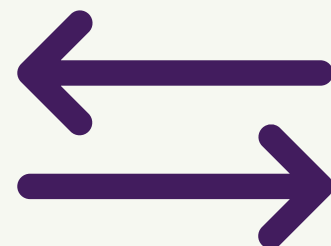
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Internal processes

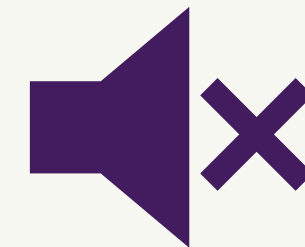
Challenge / Background



Low role mobility in
some jurisdictions



Lack of internal
cohesion on issues



Communication
challenges



Internal
(mis)understanding

Overall processes

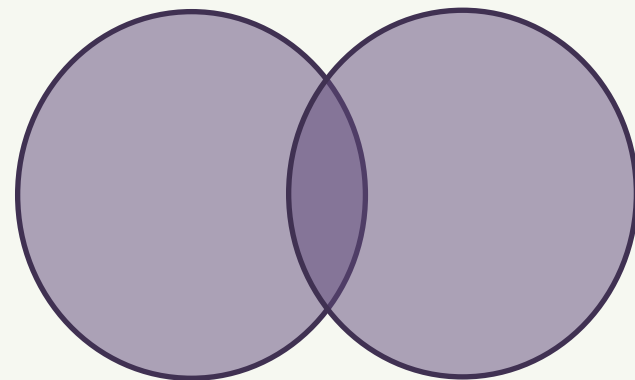
Recommendations

- Review requirements for those in decision-making roles for public education (20)
- Advocate for limits on number of trustee or commissioner terms (21)
- Create alternative engagement processes (22)
- Evaluate CSBA's communication processes and consider including a knowledge mobilization (KMb) approach (23)
- Invest in incorporating effective information communication technology (24)

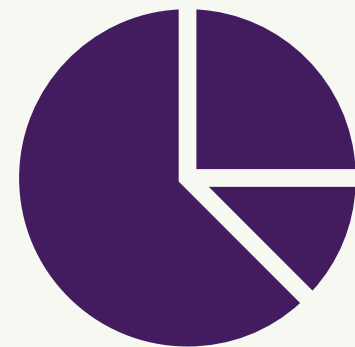
Strategic planning



Effective and efficient decision-making processes



Tension around role of governance and operations



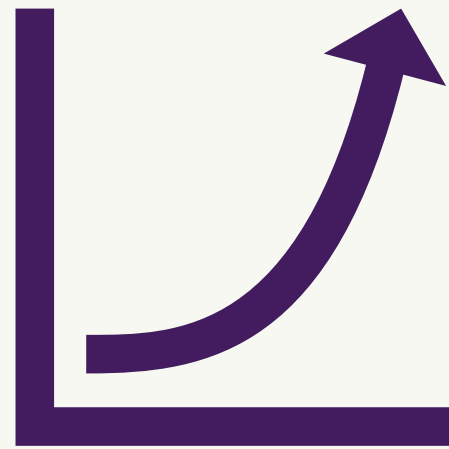
Conflict in balancing individual interest and group responsibility

Strategic planning

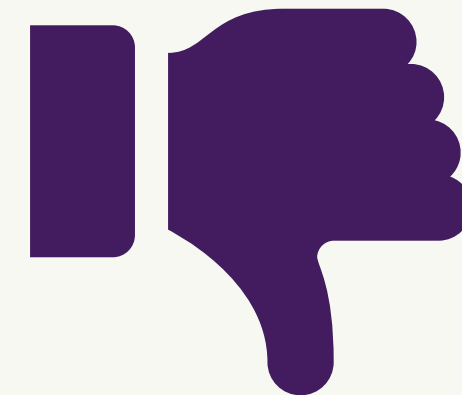
Recommendations

- Encourage boards to implement a clear strategic plan (16)

Trustee professional development



Very high
learning curve



Argument against
publicly elected boards

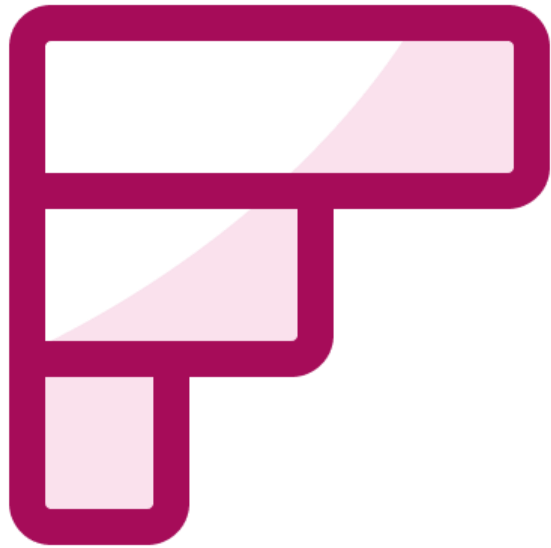
Trustee professional development

Recommendations

- Implement strategic onboarding plans (17)
- Increase ongoing professional development (18)
- Encourage succession planning (19)

**Of these recommendations,
which can your team work
towards?**

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Select the top two that your board can work towards

1. Plan a public awareness campaign
2. Initiate a public campaign that clarifies the difference between governance and operations
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Contact information

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- Rnielse4@uwo.ca
- Project and research inquiries

Questions?

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Unused slides

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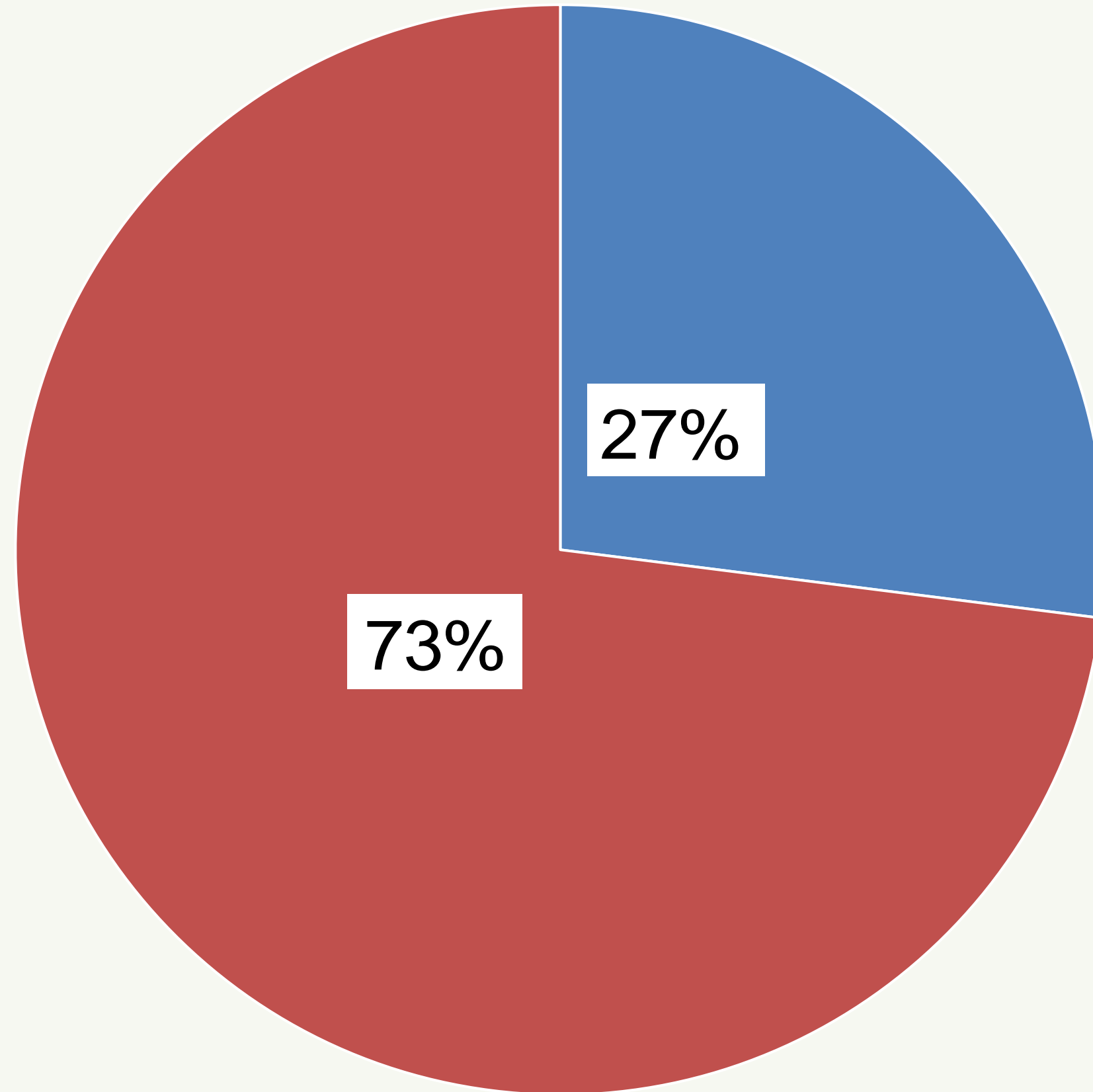
Internal processes

Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase ongoing professional development• Encourage succession planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement strategic onboarding plans• Advocate for limits on number of trustee terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review requirements for those in decision-making roles• Evaluate communication processes and consider a knowledge mobilization approach• Invest in incorporating effective information technology

Did you vote in the last election?

Yes,

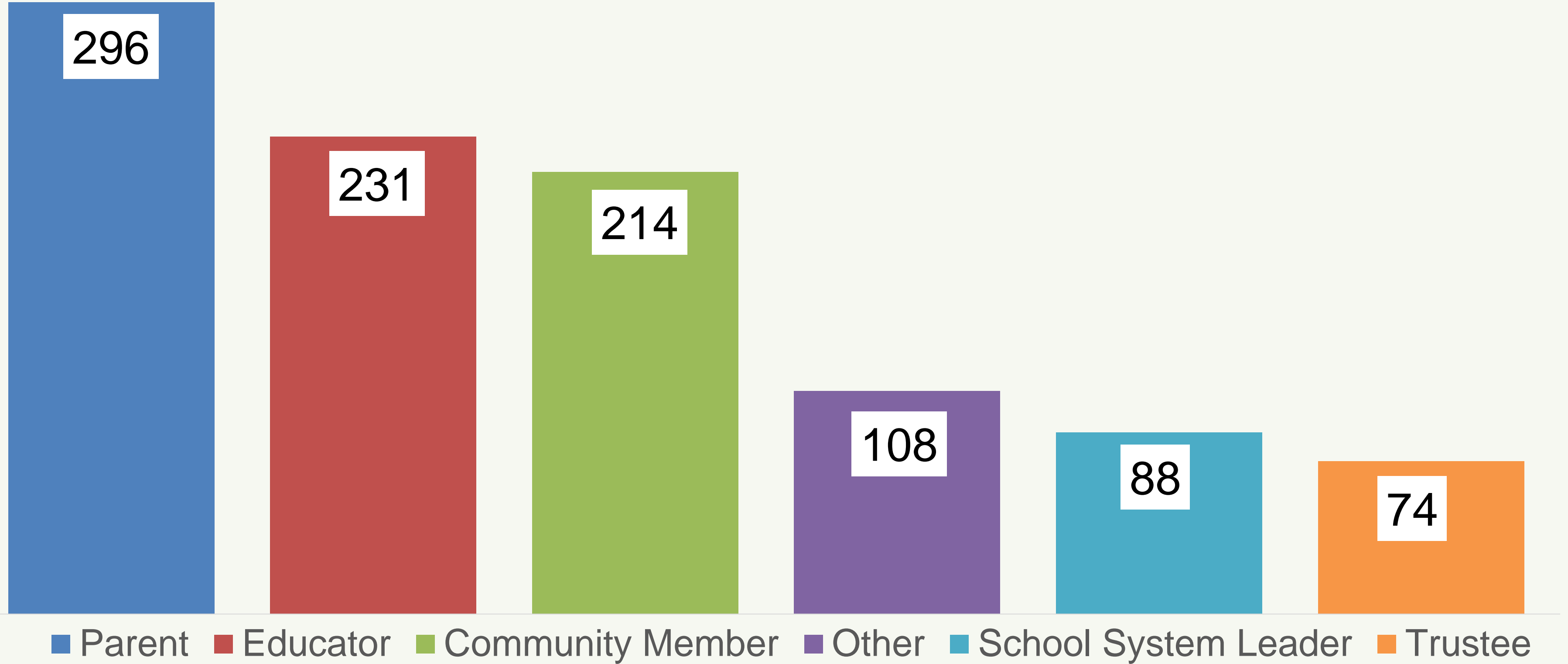
- Wanted have a say in who was elected
- Were interested in school boards
- Knew where and how to vote



No,

- Didn't know the candidates
- Didn't know when the election was or how to vote
- There was no election because candidates were acclaimed

Public consultation demographics



Motivations for participating



To have their voices heard regarding changes in public education



General curiosity in the study

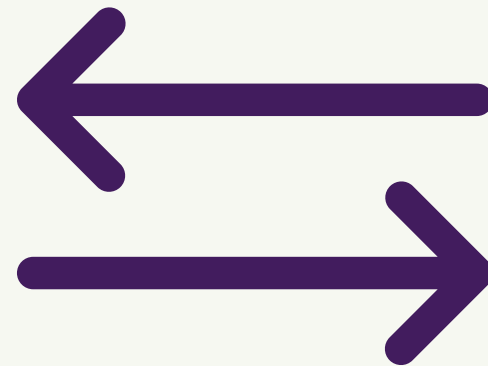


Found process informative and educational

Motivations around change



Resisting change

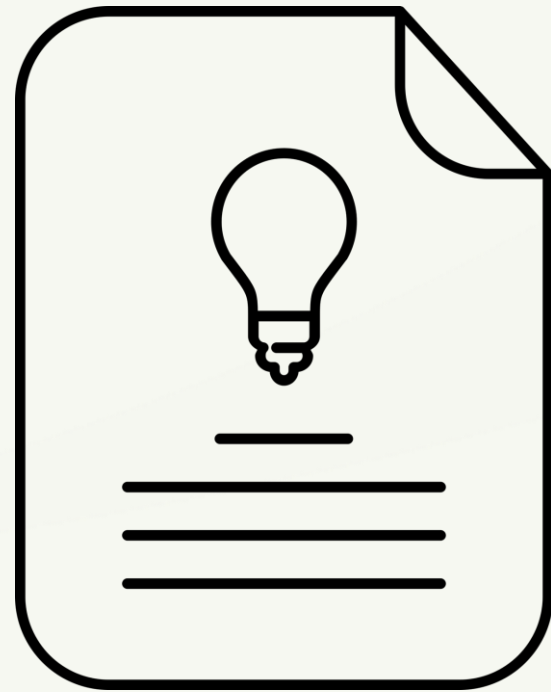


Reacting to change



**Advocating for
change**

Methodology



Interjurisdictional
Scan

Sept. 2021 – Aug. 2022

- Current events, news, etc.
- Provincial and Territorial Education Acts
- School Board Association regulations
- Policies and regulations for English school system, French school system, and Indigenous schooling organizations
- Statistics Canada

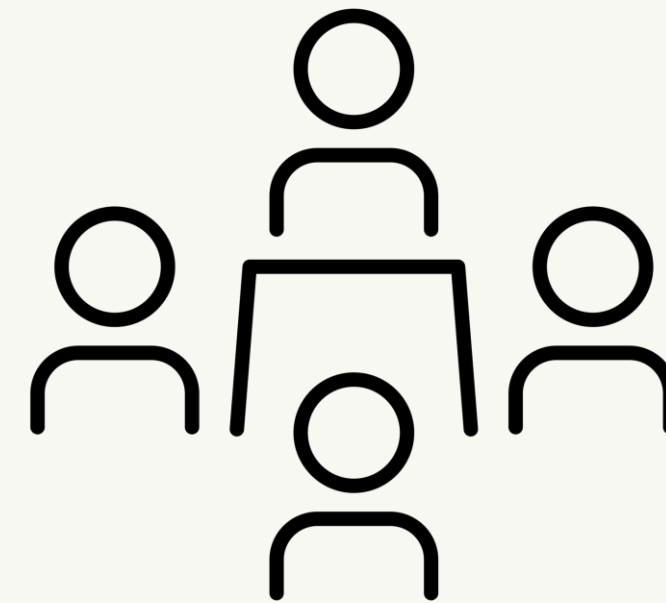
Methodology



Interviews

Jan. 2022 – Mar. 2023

99 participants

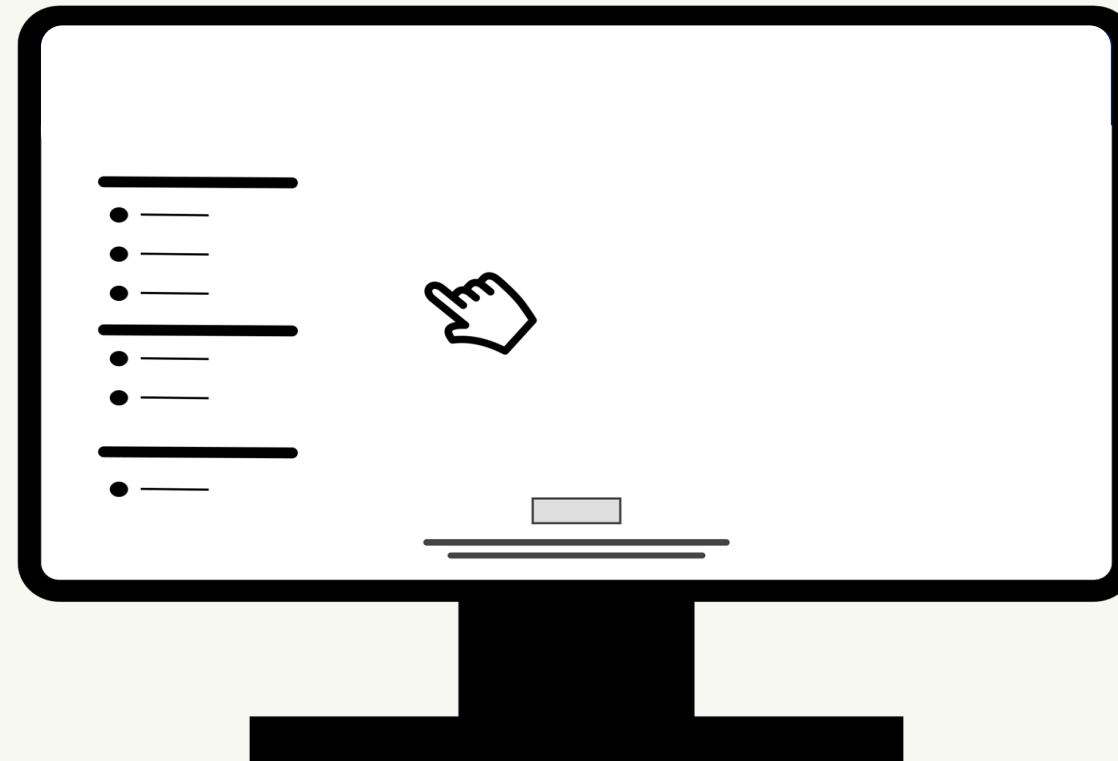


Focus Groups

Oct. 2022 – Feb. 2023

22 participants

Methodology



Public Consultation
Feb. 2023 – Mar. 2023
743 participants