



# Your Board of Education Q&A

## Q: Why do we have locally elected boards of education?

A: As members of your communities, locally elected school trustees know the strengths, needs, possibilities and challenges of their school district. Local boards of education make decisions close to the schools and students affected, adjusting and customizing their plans as needed. In contrast, centralized systems tend to implement one-size-fits-all solutions.

There is an integral connection between public education and democracy.

For those who have had the good fortune to live and grow up in an open and democratic society, it is easy to take the essentials for granted:

- Rule of law;
- Security of the person;
- Representative institutions and democratic procedures;
- Freedom of the press; and
- Protection of basic rights and freedoms.

In modern democracies, public education is the great equalizer. It is the means by which people of diverse languages, cultures, and socio-economic circumstances come together as a society. In Canada, our commitment to public education – open and available to all – is a key element in shaping the way our society has evolved and will continue to evolve.

Our success as a democracy rests on the foundation of an educated citizenry, capable of making informed choices and accepting the obligations and consequences that go with such choices. As our democracy rests on public education, a significant part of the

governance of public education rests with local citizens, democratically elected to boards of education.

## Q: What do boards of education do?

A: The key work of boards of education is improving student achievement through community engagement.

Locally elected boards of education are the public's voice in public education. They connect with their communities and ensure that local values and priorities are reflected in public school programs, policies and operations. The board of education represents all citizens in its communities and makes decisions to support all district students in reaching their educational goals. Ultimately, the board of education is accountable to the public for achieving these goals, with the public deciding on election day whether or not the sitting board of education has been successful.

The specific duties of boards of education are described in British Columbia's *School Act*. They include:

- preparing accountability contracts on improving student achievement.
- approving annual school plans.
- preparing and approving the school district's operating budgets and capital plans.
- setting local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools.
- employing the staff necessary for school district operations, such as teachers, principals, senior staff, clerical staff, custodians, bus drivers, etc.
- establishing conditions of employment for employees.

- approving local courses and resource materials for use in the school district.
- Hearing appeals from parents and students where a staff decision significantly affects a student.

## Q: Who are school trustees?

A: School trustees are members of your community who have chosen to stand for election to their local board of education. School trustees come from all walks of life. Chances are you've lined up with them at the grocery store, or shared a bus seat with them. Most are parents or grandparents. All are Canadian citizens who care deeply about students and public education.

## Did you know?

**Total number of BC boards of education in BC: 60**

**Total number of BC school trustees: 420**

**Percentage of BC school trustees who have served more than one term: 62**

**Percentage of BC school trustees who are women: 55**

**Percentage of Canadian Members of Parliament who are women: 21**

**Percentage of BC Members of the Legislature who are women: 22**

**Average school trustee remuneration as of March 2007: \$11,723 per annum**

**Typical school trustee weekly time commitment: 10 to 20 hours**

**Q: What is the connection between boards of education and the Ministry of Education?**

A: Boards of education are the only level of government in Canada with a single focus of responsibility – the public school system. They share this governance role with the provincial government.

Canada's provinces have overall constitutional responsibility for education. Through the *School Act*, the Legislature delegates responsibility to the minister of education and boards of education.

In broad terms, the Ministry of Education is responsible for setting the provincial curriculum and performance standards, and establishing the legal framework within which boards of education operate. Boards of education attend to local delivery of public education in accordance with the *School Act*. Specific duties are listed above. Through this co-governance model, BC has developed one of the finest public education systems in the world.

**Q: What are the responsibilities of the board of education as an employer?**

A: As the employer of all school district staff, the board of education sets the tone for the working environment – through its vision and mission, its goals and plans, and interaction with employees and the public. As a result, each school district in BC has a unique organizational structure and culture.

The terms and conditions of employment for public school teachers are established through collective bargaining conducted by the accredited bargaining agent for public boards of education in the province, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), and the bargaining agent for public school teachers, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

Collective bargaining with unionized support staff is done at the local level,

between the board of education and union locals. However, all collective agreements must be ratified by the BCPSEA board of directors.

Principals/vice-principals and other exempt and executive staff are covered by a variety of individual arrangements, such as term or continuing employment contracts and letters of appointment, which must be consistent with the provisions of the BCPSEA K-12 exempt compensation management plan.

For more information on the board of education as employer visit: [www.bcpsea.bc.ca](http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca).

**Q: How does my board of education's work affect teachers?**

A: A board of education establishes policies and regulations that teachers and other school district employees are required to implement and adhere to. From student codes of conduct to emergency response procedures, your board of education is elected to decide how important matters will be managed in public schools.

Boards of education create opportunities for teachers by supporting the development of local courses and programs that reflect the unique circumstances and needs of the community and its students. As a community member you can directly contact your school trustees to share any ideas, concerns or questions.

**Q: When might I have contact with school trustees in my work?**

A: Boards of education host a wide range of events that the public is welcome to attend. Regular public board of education meetings, public consultation meetings, open houses and information sessions are held and publicized on an ongoing basis. Watch school district publications and community newspapers for dates and times.

School district committees often include school trustees and teachers. In addition, many boards of education assign individual trustees to liaise with schools. These trustees visit classrooms, staffrooms, school events and parent meetings, observing the school system in action and listening to concerns.

**Q: When do board of education elections take place?**

A: Board of education elections are held in conjunction with municipal elections every three years. The next election will take place on November 15, 2008.

## About BCSTA

The BC School Trustees Association was founded in 1905. Twenty school trustees representing eight boards of education met at the Vancouver School Board office to discuss common problems and ways to improve public education. They made a commitment to work together on matters of shared concern and formed the BC School Trustees Association, the first school trustees' association in Canada. To this day, BCSTA is a strong, collaborative voice advocating on behalf of BC boards of education, and providing resources and support to its membership.

BC's 60 boards of education are all members of BCSTA. They look to their Association to serve as a strong provincial voice and to influence government by representing the membership on matters affecting public education. In addition to advocacy, BCSTA provides its membership with timely information on issues, educational programs for school trustees and their staff, legal and legislative services and in-district consultation services.

For more information on BCSTA and its services, visit us at [www.bcsta.org](http://www.bcsta.org).