

# Let's Discuss

## Public Education Governance...



New  Brunswick  
EDUCATION

January, 2000

Ce document est également offert en français. S'adresser à :

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Assemblée législative  
C. P. 6000  
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# AN INVITATION TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW BRUNSWICK

January, 2000

Education is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of New Brunswick. The goal must be to provide the tools and skills for our children to develop as good citizens, thinkers and workers.

Education affects more than students. Parents, teachers, and local communities all have a contribution to make. Restoring the cooperative, community approach to education decision-making with real responsibility and accountability is at the heart of the government's vision for education. That is why we are committed to restoring parents and other community members to the centre of the decision making process while at the same time ensuring provincial standards.

We would like to hear your suggestions as to what this new structure might look like. You have an opportunity, through the Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on Education, to make your voice heard. The Committee has been asked to seek your input and present recommendations to the Legislature. As a next step, we will be formulating a response for government review and decision, and introducing a legislative proposal in the fall of 2000. This will allow time for the election of individuals to the councils in the spring of 2001, with a view to having the new structure in place for the start of the school year in September 2001.

In our province's public education system we are fortunate to have highly qualified and committed teachers and other staff, strong leadership at the school and district levels, and a student body with diverse talents capable of competing with the best in the world. Our challenge, now, is to create a new and effective framework to govern education that will enhance learning, respond to provincial expectations and local and linguistic community needs, and be functional across the system. In designing this framework, we must also be mindful of the fiscal imperative we face, and the fact that ours is a small province with a rapidly declining student population.

We look forward to receiving the input and advice of New Brunswickers as we work together to achieve our goals for education.

Yours truly,

Bernard Lord  
Premier

Elvy Robichaud  
Minister of Education

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# Let's Discuss Public Education Governance...

## WHY THIS DISCUSSION PAPER?

New Brunswickers know that what happens in our education system is important for the future of our province and our country. We all benefit from the quality and relevance of the education provided to our citizens.

Education must have as its aim the enrichment of society through the development of individual potential that will result in highly educated and productive men and women.

To help fulfill this responsibility, we need an effective decision-making -- or governance -- structure for education; a structure that is sensitive to the goals and aspirations

of parents and the community. This governance structure must be defined through a number of *guiding principles*:

- Appropriate decision-making at the local level, such that decisions are made closer to those most affected by them;
- More community involvement;
- A balance between local needs and provincial expectations; and,
- A focus on broad educational issues and standards.

The Government of New Brunswick has committed to developing such a structure, and: "*restoring the cooperative, community approach to education decision-making by creating publicly and locally elected Education Councils with real responsibility and accountability within the context of provincial standards.*" (New Vision - New Brunswick - 1999).

In line with this commitment, and mindful of the principles previously stated, the objective is to create a structure that will:

- Ensure a high quality education, with a view to enriching society and enabling New Brunswickers to compete nationally and internationally



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- Provide a safe and positive environment in which to learn and work
- Ensure equality of education throughout the province
- Meet our constitutional obligations
- Be responsive to local needs within the context of provincial standards
- Be accountable to the public
- Be open and democratic
- Be fiscally responsible

The purpose of this discussion paper is to ask New Brunswickers to help us define the shape of this new governance framework. Whatever structure is developed, it must be well-thought out, respect the guiding principles, and meet all of our objectives. We believe that the issues raised in this paper, the questions posed, and the discussions that will follow, will all help us in achieving our goal.



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## **A** BRIEF HISTORY OF GOVERNANCE CHANGES IN NEW BRUNSWICK

In the early 1960's, the New Brunswick government commissioned a report to evaluate all aspects of municipal government. The Byrne Report recommended sweeping changes in the areas of education, health, justice and social services. In introducing many of the reforms recommended in the Byrne Report, the government's watchwords were "equal opportunity". Subsequent governments have continued to adhere to this principle. The report emphasized the great variation in educational standards throughout the province, and in burdens of property taxation. The poor results of public education were blamed on the division of responsibilities between the more than 400 local boards and provincial officials.

Perhaps the most far reaching education reform that followed the Byrne report was the abolition of local taxation for education, and the introduction of 100 percent provincial funding. This move resulted in a much more equitable distribution of resources among all school districts,

and the provision of the same quality of education for all New Brunswick children.

Over the next 20 years, the most significant changes to the structure of public education were the introduction of duality within the Department of Education, and legislation to organize school districts on a language basis, French or English.

By 1992, there were 42 school districts in New Brunswick, which that year were amalgamated into 18 (12 English and 6 French). Also in 1992, government received the report of the Commission on Excellence in Education. This report contained 42 recommendations, almost all of which were adopted.

In 1996, as part of its restructuring plan, the government of the day dissolved corporate school boards, replacing them with a three-tiered structure of governance, comprising elected parents at the school, district and provincial levels. The idea was for parents to focus on broad educational, rather than administrative issues.

The current structure was intended to improve accountability, more clearly define lines of responsibility, and increase parental involvement.



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However, a number of criticisms have been levied at this system, centering around the following areas: decision-making being too far removed from the local level and concentrated in the hands of the minister; an exclusionary election process; constitutionality questions; an increased administrative burden on school staff; a lack of clarity surrounding roles and responsibilities; and difficulties with communication.

In response to the stated concerns, the Government of New Brunswick has committed to establishing publicly and locally elected education councils which will operate at the district level, within the context of provincial standards.





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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*Notes*

### 1. Taking the best...

In order to chart a course for the future, it is important to know where we have been. History and experience have shown us that no system is perfect, or likely to meet with the complete support of all its constituents. In designing a new system, however, we must set our sights high, drawing on the positive characteristics of previous structures, while avoiding their difficulties and negative aspects.

With this in mind, we would like to know your thoughts on how well you consider the current and previous systems of governance to have worked. *For example, what would you say are the strengths of the current or previous board system that should be carried forward into a new structure? What would you identify as the weaknesses, or negative elements of either the current, or previous systems, that should be avoided in a new structure?*

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## 2. Elements of a New Structure

The Government has committed to creating district-level bodies. In light of this, we would like your thoughts on what other elements are needed in a new structure to help us meet the objectives and guiding principles. In creating any new system, it is useful to look at what is happening elsewhere.

In Canada, the various elements of governance structures are fairly similar from one province to the next. For instance, school councils or committees now exist in all provinces of Canada as well as in the Yukon. Parents usually hold majority membership, with the principal, a teacher and a member of the non-teaching staff often having non-voting membership. Sometimes, community representatives are also appointed. Even in jurisdictions where there is still local taxation for education, these bodies are almost all advisory in nature. In addition to school committees, provinces also have district-level boards, while the Northwest Territories has created divisional education councils.

In New Brunswick, we currently have a three-tiered parental governance structure at the school, district and provincial board levels. *Given that we will soon have district-level bodies with increased decision-making responsibilities, do we still need a three-tiered structure?*

Some people say that the School Parent Advisory Committees (SPACs) play an important role in advising the principal on such matters as school improvement planning and school-level policy. Others contend that the SPACs' role is unclear and duplicates efforts of home and school associations.

We would like your thoughts on community/parent participation at the school level. *For example, should there continue to be a body at the school level other than the home and school association? If so, what format should it take? What role and responsibilities should it have? Who would, or would not, be eligible to participate? And by what means should this body be formed?*

*You may also wish to consider whether there would be any value in having a committee formed for a cluster of schools, rather than having a committee at every school.*



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Such a cluster could be based on flow of students, geography or other considerations. For example, a cluster might be formed to represent, say, four elementary schools and the secondary schools into which they feed. This could mean that a district council might only have, say, eight committees under its umbrella instead of the 25 it would have if there were a committee at each school.

In looking at elements of a new structure that will help us meet our objectives, we must also consider what should happen at the provincial board level. *As district-level bodies will assume greater responsibilities, what role might the provincial board now play? If provincial boards no longer existed, would there be a void to fill? If so, who should fill it?*

*Should a mechanism be created whereby the chairs of each of the district education councils can communicate with one another and with the minister?*



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## 4. Authority/Roles/Responsibilities

In designing a new governance structure for education, it is important to strike the right balance between the need for provincial standards and the call for local autonomy. Some would say that as the minister is accountable for the performance of the education system, then he or she must have sufficient authority to make the decisions that affect that performance. Others would argue that some authority must rest exclusively with the local community. Finding the right balance will require thoughtful and careful deliberation.

As a starting point for a discussion of roles and responsibilities, a possible distribution of authority has been set out below. We believe this model will help us meet our objectives and the guiding principles of good governance. We would like your thoughts on whether this is an appropriate distribution of roles and authorities. If not, please comment on what changes you think should be made.

Traditionally, the Minister of Education has had the authority to establish provincial curriculum and education standards, make provincial

policy, operate a system of teacher education and certification, build and dispose of school buildings, monitor school district performance and conduct pupil evaluations. Since the late 1960's, the province has also been responsible for school district funding and provincial collective bargaining. It is likely that the province would retain these responsibilities. It is proposed that the province could also continue to provide administrative support services to complement the district's educational programs and services.

### Possible Responsibilities of the Minister

- Provincial policy
- Allocation of budget to districts
- Education and service standards
- Curriculum standards
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Teacher education and certification
- Construction and disposal of school buildings / major capital repairs
- Administrative support services (accounting, transportation, maintenance and information systems)



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As suggested in the listing below, the district education councils would be given more say in the quality of education provided to their children. This would occur by granting them the authority to establish the educational plans, policies, and budgets that guide

Following the principles of good governance, as discussed in the previous section, the district's administrator would continue to be responsible for day-to-day operations of the local school district and its schools. Regardless of the reporting

## Possible Responsibilities of the District Education Councils

- District policy
- District budget
- District education planning (vision, goals, objectives, district standards)
- Pupil appeals for suspensions etc.
- Utilisation of school buildings / minor capital repairs



Respecting functions identified below as the responsibility of district superintendent

the activities assigned to the district's administrator, i.e. superintendent or director of education. For example, if the superintendent is responsible for staffing, pupil attendance or pupil placement, the council would be responsible for establishing the district-level policies, plans, guidelines and budgets respecting staffing, attendance and placement issues.

One significant role that requires careful deliberation is the hiring and direction of superintendents and/or directors of education. *In your view, to whom should these staff report?*

structure, each superintendent and / or director of education would retain responsibility for such functions as staffing of educational personnel, delivery of the curriculum and services, organization and day-to-day operation of schools, pupil attendance, admissions and placement, special needs, order and discipline, suspensions and student records. These functions would be carried out within the framework of the educational plans, policies and budgets established by the district education councils.

*What are your views on these issues?*



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## 6. Accountability

In an earlier section of this paper we discussed how district councils would assume more responsibility. With increased responsibility, however, usually comes a demand for increased accountability, i.e. the obligation to be answerable for actions and results.

Accountability is an increasingly important principle within the education system. As far back as the Byrne Report in the 1960's and as recently as the creation of the existing governance structure, greater accountability to the public has been one of the catalysts for changes to governance models. The prevalence of new technologies, by which people have faster and easier access to information than ever before, has helped raise expectations in this regard.

Today, stakeholders insist that education, like all other government services, must be accountable to the public and answerable for its results.

In May 2001, locally elected representatives will take their seats in the new governance structure, ready to make decisions about the future of education in New Brunswick. We need to consider how best they

can be held accountable for those decisions. The Minister of Education is accountable to the New Brunswick Legislature for all aspects of education in this province. *Given that the district education councils will be assuming more responsibility, what accountability link should there be to parents, students, the community, the government or the Legislature? For example, should the district education councils be required to report on how they have expended public funds? If so, to whom and how should they report?*



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## CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is clear that the rapid pace of change we have experienced over the last couple of decades in Canada, as around the globe, is not about to slow. As our world changes, the knowledge and skills we need to ensure our future prosperity will also change -- and we expect our educational system to respond in kind.

Back in the 1960's we needed to change the standards of education from a local, to a provincial perspective. Today, our standards must match up nationally and internationally, so that our students can compete with the best in the world.

Thus, the new governance structure that we develop must help ensure consistent and high standards throughout the province, allow enough flexibility to satisfy the demands of a changing world, and be responsive enough to meet local needs. Above all, it must support and enhance learning - - such that each New Brunswick student is able to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to achieve personal fulfilment and to

reach their full potential in contributing to society.

We invite you to share your opinions on the changes you believe should occur to the governance structure for public education.

The questions posed in this paper are designed to stimulate thinking about education governance, and provide advice to government. Your answers to these questions, together with any other advice and suggestions you may have, will be invaluable in helping us create a new, more effective governance structure -- a structure that will help shape the future of education in this province as we enter the third millennium.

*Your comments should be forwarded to:*

*Select Committee on Education  
Office of the Clerk  
Legislative Assembly  
P. O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, N.B.  
E3B 5H1  
Tel: (506) 453-2506*



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## APPENDIX A PROFILE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

School Districts	Enrolment		Educators <sup>1</sup> (full-time equivalent)		Pupil Educator Ratio <sup>2</sup>		Enrolment Projections <sup>3</sup>		
	Sept. 1998	Sept. 1999	Sept. 1998	Sept. 1999	Sept. 1998	Sept. 1999	Sept. 2001	Sept. 2005	Sept. 2011
<b>Anglophone Districts</b>									
02	14,219	14,140	839.5	833.5	16.9	17.0	13,878	13,043	11,480
04	5,940	5,873	342.0	346.7	17.4	16.9	5,779	5,400	4,732
06	8,135	8,054	462.8	468.0	17.6	17.2	7,845	7,240	6,465
08	14,725	14,571	871.1	880.2	16.9	16.6	14,284	13,272	11,566
10	4,657	4,603	288.0	290.7	16.2	15.8	4,452	4,158	3,689
12	4,640	4,548	275.5	274.9	16.8	16.5	4,368	3,875	3,317
13	4,916	4,855	307.2	302.2	16.0	16.1	4,655	4,391	3,836
14	2,524	2,502	168.7	169.2	15.0	14.8	2,283	1,985	1,766
15	2,430	2,317	151.7	149.9	16.0	15.5	2,337	2,252	1,964
16	7,111	7,030	445.4	448.5	16.0	15.7	6,530	6,017	5,302
17	6,062	6,081	356.3	364.8	17.0	16.7	5,914	5,699	5,053
18	12,897	12,919	751.1	756.5	17.2	17.1	12,611	11,849	10,572
<b>Francophone Districts</b>									
01	9,618	9,433	543.0	544.8	17.7	17.3	9,161	8,490	7,508
03	7,725	7,391	459.4	461.7	16.8	16.0	7,041	6,286	5,445
05	4,558	4,431	288.1	279.9	15.8	15.8	4,331	4,088	3,661
07	4,333	4,194	247.7	256.5	17.5	16.4	4,045	3,740	3,286
09	9,714	9,272	579.2	577.9	16.8	16.0	8,901	8,106	7,214
11	4,927	4,789	310.8	311.1	15.9	15.4	4,440	3,871	3,304
<b>Anglophone Province</b>	88,256	87,493	5,259.2	5,285.1	16.8	16.6	84,936	79,181	69,742
<b>Francophone Province</b>	40,875	39,510	2,428.2	2,431.8	16.8	16.2	37,919	34,581	30,418
<b>Province</b>	129,131	127,003	7,687.4	7,716.9	16.8	16.5	122,855	113,762	100,160

<sup>1</sup> Educators are employees, including those at the school districts, who deliver educational and/or pupil personnel services in a professional capacity. Excludes positions vacant on September 30, 1999 and includes positions funded through Excellence in Education.

<sup>2</sup> This ratio is defined as the total student enrolment divided by the number of full-time equivalent educators.

<sup>3</sup> The methodology for the enrolment projections is based on Department of Education enrolment statistics by year, grade and school district (September 30, 1991 - September 30, 1998), and Statistics Canada age 5 and 6 year old population estimates by year (July 1, 1991 - July 1, 2011).



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## Financial Profile - Education - 1998/99 (Actual)

Total Government Expenditure for Public Education (Actual - 1998-99)	\$844,971,029
Pupil Enrolment (K-12) September 30, 1998	129,131
Per Pupil Cost of Public Education	\$6,543
Total Provincial Government Expenditure	\$4,214,760,421
Expenditure on Education as % of Total Government	20.0%

