

Information about Bill 11 and School Board Governance

What are the major concerns about Bill 11 regarding the governance of school boards?

- The bill gives the Minister of Education broad new powers over elected school boards.
- The minister has power to issue administrative directives to school boards, if she or he believes the board is failing to meet obligations, or “it is in the public interest to do so.”
- Administrative directives can be on any matter, including any “matter specified by the Minister.” Other legislation can be overridden to achieve the objectives of directives.
- The Minister can force school boards to find administrative savings through shared services agreements. Some boards could gain authority over others.
- Failure of a board to comply with an administrative directive is grounds to replace the democratically elected trustees by appointing an “official trustee” to run the district.

Trustees at the recent BCSTA Annual General Meeting passed a motion demanding changes to those parts of Bill 11 that allow the Minister to override their powers.

How has the role of school boards changed in BC?

Over recent decades, BC’s school boards have faced reductions of their powers:

- the loss of local taxation powers
- the move from local to provincial bargaining
- amalgamations of districts
- BC Public School Employers’ Association (BCPSEA) made employer bargaining agent
- chronic underfunding and downloading of costs onto school districts.

What related challenges are school boards facing?

- Budgets are subject to government underfunding and imposed additional costs every year. For the next two years, boards will also be required to find \$54 million in administrative savings.
- For years it’s been suggested that government might create a regional board model for education. Bill 11’s power grab and emphasis on shared services increase that possibility.
- The “co-governance model” agreement between government and trustees has not improved the relationship, as seen in recent surprise government announcements on cuts to adult education, the administrative cuts requirement, and Bill 11 itself.

Why do school boards still matter?

Trustee loss of control over most budget decisions, and the inability to speak with a united voice to defend public education has weakened the relevance of school boards. Ideally, trustees will focus on the areas where they can make a difference, and reinvigorate their role.

- Trustees live in their communities, and are best equipped to determine how resources should be allocated locally to address the increasingly diverse needs of their students.
- The ability of parents and other community members to have direct conversations with their elected trustees means that both concerns and opportunities get a fair hearing.
- Trustees can make decisions that protect neighbourhood schools from closure and strengthen their role as community hubs. They can provide programs communities want, and safeguard students and parents from ongoing attempts to privatize education in BC.
- Ultimately, Bill 11’s power transfer can only be reversed by trustee advocacy and action.