



ANGLOPHONE WEST SCHOOL DISTRICT

DISTRICT EDUCATION COUNCIL
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June 3, 2022

Hon. Blaine Higgs
Premier of New Brunswick
Chancery Place
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1
Canada

Dear Premier Higgs:

The four Anglophone District Education Councils (DECs) are writing to you today to express our deep concern over the Education Governance Reform Initiative being conducted by the Minister and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The current governance structure, created and implemented by the government of the day in 2012, has been working for the past 10 years and should remain in effect. While the Minister may dispute that 'it is working', and while we freely acknowledge that it can be improved upon, the point is that we sincerely believe that improvements to it are far better than creating and implementing a new model, particularly the model that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) has proposed to date. We can also state that our Francophone counterparts are absolutely in agreement with our point of view.

This reform initiative has unfortunately only focused on establishing a new governance model and has not considered, to our knowledge, any other options, certainly not improving the current structure. While the Minister stated that "*Stakeholders across the education system will work together over the coming months to change decision-making processes*", we do not feel that we have been included in these detailed discussions despite being one of the most prominent 'stakeholders'. Equally, the largest parent group (Parent School Support Committees – PSSCs) were largely kept in the dark until DEC members started to advise them of the EECD proposal at PSSC meetings and then latterly the EECD did engage with the PSSC Chairs via 'virtual engagement sessions' in early April and May. The Minister has also been emphatic in stating during discussions that the DECs will no longer exist which resulted in some short-term media coverage of proposed changes. Thus, we find it very troubling to have a conversation with a closed mind.

While not being told exactly what problems exist in the current governance model, we have been 'drip-fed' information through a series of short discussion periods, 'virtual engagement sessions', press releases and periodic 'update sheets' of the EECD areas of concern, particularly at the tail end of a Minister's Forum in late November where the following 'overall governance themes' were presented:

- Previous amalgamations have made it difficult for DEC's to maintain close contact with schools;
- Reporting structure of the superintendent inhibits full accountability;
- Public participation in serving on DEC's is waning;
- DEC's are being used for escalation purposes without an effective process at school;
- The DEC is elected without prescribed standards making it difficult for them to assess performance in some cases; and
- The DEC's role and value is not well understood.

We very much dispute some of these statements. We believe there is accountability through the regular reporting of Superintendents to their respective Councils on the established policies and to EECD as mandated by the Education Act.

The DEC Councillors are elected through an established election process at the same time as hospital board members and municipal officials. If there is only one candidate, they are acclaimed; if there are no candidates, as defined by the Act, members may be appointed. This process has worked for some time; however, in the most recent election, during the COVID-19 pandemic saw fewer people volunteering at the time of the election and thus, in ASD-West particularly, the Council proceeded to canvass and collect names for submission to the Minister for his appointment. He chose not to make those appointments in May of 2021 and thus delayed the installment of new members until the Fall. It should be noted that while the Minister and EECD point to this 'lack of candidates', we would again make mention that the election was delayed by a year, we were in a pandemic which restricted canvassing and that there were a significant number of municipal officials acclaimed at the same time. We would argue that because at times there are fewer candidates than at other times does not mean that our process is less democratic.

We are also troubled by the apparent concern by the Minister and EECD regarding the 'standards for elected DEC members'. We would ask - what are the standards required for municipal officials, for MLAs or even the Premier? In a public system, it is the right of each individual to seek elected office – that is the essence of democracy.

The genesis of this reform appears to be based on the preconceived notions, by Minister Cardy, about a requirement for change, developed just after taking office and then promulgated in the Green Paper in October 2019. The ramped-up timeline that is being used, leaning heavily on the interpretation of the responses to the survey sent out to the ill-defined stakeholders, has 'options', of which there seems to be only one, being presented to the Legislature this spring. The first real sight of what lies ahead was only delivered to DEC Chairs via six-slides in a presentation package on 8 December 2021, coincidentally timed with the Minister's press release on governance reform. It should be noted that the Council of DEC Chairs (CDC) had asked for information on the EECD thinking on this topic as early as August 2021.

We are now in early June and although the EECD may think that there has been good engagement and thorough discussion about this impending reform, our view is the opposite. The late engagement with the bottom of the pyramid (the PSSCs), the trickle flow of documents and information to the DECs only outlining structures in broad terms and the absolute lack of detail on what EECD sees as the roles, responsibilities, support arrangements and linkages between organizations in their model is not what one could term as 'open discussion' or 'working together'.

In contrast to the EECD way of doing business, the Anglophone and Francophone sectors have been in constant discussions and collaborations to examine the perceived weaknesses of the current governance structure. We have briefed PSSCs on the 'proposal' and have solicited their inputs. Noting the concerns expressed in the 2021 survey results, we have recently conducted a 'Special Meeting' of the four Anglophone DECs in lieu of the cancelled DEC symposium and spent our entire time looking at our current model and the proposed EECD model. We wish to share this information with you in the attached two annexes – the first is a list of recommendations on adjusting and improving our current model. The second annex lists recommendations on improving the proposed EECD model. It is easy to criticize but more useful to propose ideas that could assist us in ensuring the New Brunswick education system has a governance system that is effective and efficient with the aim of enhancing the education of our youth.

In closing, we are firmly convinced that a new governance model is not required. Adjustments and improvements to the current system would be less disruptive, more cost effective and provide the stability the education system deserves. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Geburt for". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joe Petersen, Chairperson Anglophone North District Education Council
Sheila Rogers, Vice Chairperson Anglophone North District Education Council
Harry Doyle, Chairperson Anglophone East District Education Council
Ian Hebblethwaite, Vice Chairperson Anglophone East District Education Council
Roger Nesbitt, Chairperson Anglophone South District Education Council
Heather Gillis, Vice Chairperson Anglophone South District Education Council
Thomas Geburt, Chairperson Anglophone West District Education Council
Wallace Carr, Vice Chairperson Anglophone West District Education Council

Annex A: Recommendation to Improve the Current Education Governance System

Annex B - 1: Recommendation to Improve the Proposed EECD Education Governance System:
Provincial Body

Annex B – 2: Recommendation to Improve the Proposed EECD Education Governance System:
Regional Council

Possible Improvements to Current Governance Structure

Key Elements / General Comments:

- The DEC's realize that a key element to improving the current system is better communication between the various elements involved in the governance structure.
- Equally, all members of the Anglophone DEC's and Francophone DEC's believe that there should be no difference between the two linguistic groups governance structures.

Organization / DEC's:

- Formalize the Council of DEC Chairs (CDC);
- Create and publish the Terms of Reference for the CDC;
- Consider setting term lengths for DEC Chairs in balance with ensuring continuity and stability of achieving set goals. Likewise consider revisions for term lengths for all Councillors;
- Create more Councillor positions for large sub-districts (amendment to Act);
- Align DEC policies across Districts (a CDC Task);
- Align District Policies provincially (a joint CDC - Superintendent task);
- Review the Policy 409 process to ensure more/better local government/community input;
- The responsibility and authority for the establishment, operation and closure of schools as indicated in the Education Act should be reviewed with the intent of delegating the final authority to the DEC's;
- Institute Sub-District forums with parent/communities;
- Create consistency across Districts with regard to the number and type of DEC meetings. Each DEC should hold Working Meetings and Public Meetings with in-camera sessions occurring prior to public meetings;
- Create standing committees within the DEC's to dig deeper into items, complex items or items of concern, i.e. budgets;
- Formalize the communications/meeting structure between CDC & EECD that is respected and upheld;
- Institute yearly EECD, DEC, PSSC forum/symposium;
- Institute CDC/DEC/Local Government forum ... different for urban vs rural;
- Institute quarterly CDC – Superintendent conferences;
- Institute biannual meeting between DEC's and PSSC Chairs;
- Prioritize completion and review of DEC and PSSC Handbooks. These should better defined roles and responsibilities of all including clear expectations on measuring success. (DEC Chairs, DEC Members, PSSC Chairs, Principals etc.);
- Mandate DEC Councillor attendance at assigned PSSC meetings (DEC Policy);

- Mandate school principals to advise DEC of PSSC meeting schedule (District Policy);
- Mandate a joint governance review process between the CDC and EECD ... interval to be determined.

PSSCs:

- Actively seek greater parent and community (newcomer/immigrant) involvement in PSSCs through better advertisement/communications including social media. An active 'branding' campaign should be considered;
- Recognize that smaller schools cannot always meet the size requirements for PSSC and thus amend the criteria accordingly, thus be more welcoming to all participation;
- Promulgate parent guidance on complaint / concern resolution steps (i.e. East web site);
- Ensure there is a timely response to concerns / complaints (via a telephone call or email);
- Promote role of the PSSC in the scheduling and conduct of meetings;
- Promote / encourage greater role of parents in development of SIPs;
- Provide opportunities for PSSC (and DEC members) to provide feedback to/on principals;
- Consider succession planning of leadership at PSSCs i.e. Vice to move to Chair in subsequent years?

Communications:

- More aggressive advertisement of DEC public meetings, possibly using 'Town Hall' approach. Consider holding public meetings in more communities to allow for public attendance;
- DEC's to make greater effort to have public / media attendance at meetings and report results through improved communications efforts.

Training:

- Institute training for new PSSC and DEC members (similar to DEC training in summer 2021). This training should have mandatory modules for PSSC members and DEC members with clear expectations.

First Nations:

- Create additional First Nation (FN) Councillor positions as appropriate and after consultation with FN communities (amendment to Act). First Nation Councillors should be elected or appointed by the applicable First Nation community rather than by the Minister;
- Consider creating First Nation Education Committees within DEC's to represent FN communities.

Student Voice:

- Responsibility for student appointments to DECs should be delegated to the respective DECs;
- To increase student voice and involvement, PSSCs should actively seek student representation on committees.

Remuneration:

- Review remuneration aspects of the governance structure in light of other suggested changes i.e. if more involvement and time is being requested of DEC and PSSC members, should there be an increase / inclusion in remuneration?
- Consider remuneration for PSSC Chairs with accompanying accountability for meeting recruiting, training and retaining goals.

Possible Improvements to EECD Provincial Body Model

Key Elements / General Comments:

- In earlier versions of the proposed governance model, it was suggested that the work of the Provincial Curriculum and Evaluation Advisory Committee (PCEAC) should be rolled into the responsibilities of the Provincial Board (PB). We believe that the work of this committee is too specialized and that it should remain a separate entity from the PB.
- We have concerns over the method for connecting, monitoring, and reporting between the Regional Councils, whether there are 26 as suggested by EECD or up to 41 as we have suggested in our comments on the Regional Councils. This requires much further examination to ensure there is a logical and efficient means of communication between the two entities.
- We believe strongly that all elections to public office should be overseen by a properly constituted organization to do so, namely Elections New Brunswick.
- The organizational models that have been presented seem to indicate two separate structures – operational and governance. There needs to be a clearer explanation on the connectivity between the two elements and respective responsibilities.
- We do not believe that there should be a skills matrix for election to the Provincial Board much the same as there is not a stated skills requirement to hold public office such as a MLA or even Premier.
- We would point out that the proposed Provincial Board, which would make significant policy decisions regarding the education of the youth of our province, appears to be quite distant from the ‘front line’ of delivery at the school, parent and student level. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that policy decisions made at the PB level are grounded in the reality of the delivery level.

Composition of the PB:

- The Provincial Board composition should initially be based upon the current Council of DEC Chairs (CDC) for transition purposes. This would see eight elected members from each district (Chairs and Vice Chairs of DEC) who would be equal in status.
- The four district superintendents should be non-voting members of the board. They would provide the corporate knowledge and technical expertise to the PB as well as draw on their district staff for additional support and reporting purposes. Superintendents would be employees of the PB. This would maintain the elected official – employee relationship currently in place in the current DEC structure and ensure no political interference in appointments and hirings.

- There should be at least two or three First Nations members on the PB. The representation should be decided in consultation with the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy communities and elections or appointments decided upon by those First Nations.
- A dedicated administrative assistant (PB Manager) should be assigned to the PB. This individual, while being an employee of the EECD, would report to the Chairperson of the PB. The PB would have a role to play in selection of this individual.
- Should there be a requirement for appointed members to the PB, this would be the purview of the elected body.
- Our view is that the Deputy Minister should not be a member of the PB but should be invited to attend meetings as and when required.
- Once transition to the PB model has occurred (timeline to be determined), elections for the PB should align with municipal elections as much as possible.
- The term length for PB members should be four years after an election. During transition from CDC members to the new model, half of the district members should be offset by two years, i.e. 2024 elect 4 members to replace DEC pers; 2026 replace remaining initial DEC pers.
- PB members should remain on the board, (if re-elected) for only two consecutive terms.

Possible Hybrid Model:

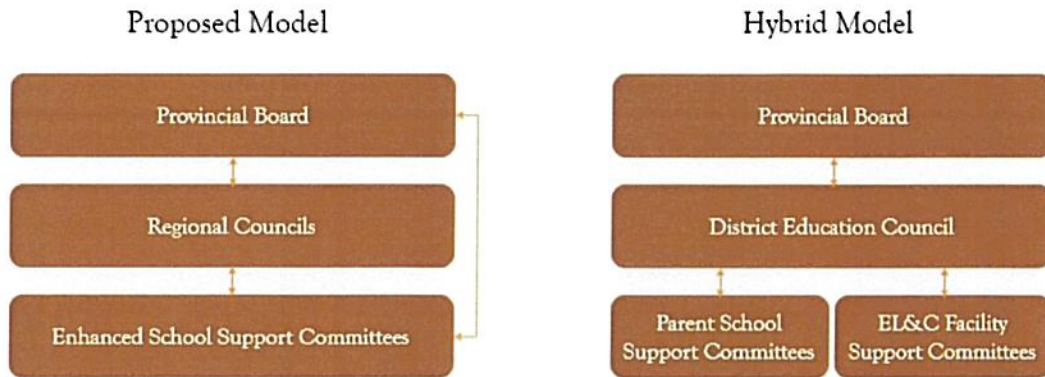
While we have suggested retention of the current governance system would best meet the continuing need of the education system, and have proposed amendments to the EECD model, a third option that should be considered is a 'hybrid governance model'.

For example, in ASD-South there are 69 schools. The EECD model suggests that there should be eight Regional Councils (RC). If this model were adopted, it would require the two PB members to maintain connection with four RCs each and each RC would need to maintain relations with 34/35 schools each. Thus, we suggest a 'hybrid' of the current system and the new model might be worth investigating. The essence of this model would be the following:

- The PB would deal with provincial policies and alignment of district policies. It would be composed of the current DEC Chairs and Vice Chairs. Members could be appointed to meet the perceived requirement for certain skills or as suggested above, this requirement could be met by the Superintendents being non-voting members. There should be elected community members and First Nation members.
- The current DEC's would remain but would 'report' to the PB. The 'new DEC' would include a member for Early Childhood Development. The focus of this organization would be on district policies and district improvement plans (DIPs).
- PSSCs would continue but will also include a PSSC type of organization for early childcare entities. The PSSC would focus on school improvement plans (SIPs).
- In this model, we suggest that there is not a requirement for term limits.

A graphic of this hybrid proposal is included below:

How does the Hybrid Model address layers of complexity?



While there are the same number of levels in each model, the linkages are more clearly laid out in the Hybrid Model

Possible Improvements to EECD Regional Council Model

Key Elements/ General Comments:

- A key element in our democracy is the freedom of speech and the ability to select our public leadership in free and fair elections. In the proposed EECD governance model, there are numerous references to elected persons. We believe that as the education system affects our entire population that all individuals 18 years of age and older, regardless of family status, should have the right to vote for representatives based only on habitation criteria. We also believe that all elections to public office should be overseen by a properly constituted organization to do so, namely Elections New Brunswick.
- The EECD proposal indicated that there would be 26 Regional Councils (RCs) to cover the entire four Anglophone districts. These RCs are based upon a concept of 'family of schools' where a parent would follow their child from birth through to grade 12. While the concept may seem like a good idea in certain circumstances, given the differences between rural and urban communities in this province, the significant geographic distances between communities and the diversity of communities within the urban population, we believe that the 26 RCs would not adequately service the needs of our communities. Thus, we are suggesting that the RCs be based upon our current sub-district structure which would mean increasing the number of RCs to 41 across the Anglophone sector.
- The base line for our education system is the school. The PSSCs have been instrumental in connecting the school and families and building a relationship to better serve our youth. **We therefore are strongly recommending that PSSCs remain a part of any new governance structure.**
- **It is paramount that each and every school be represented on the respective RC.** It is impossible to have parental voice/school voice for a school community at a RC meeting other than having a member from that school attend meetings and present that viewpoint. As an example, in ASD-West, the proposed EECD model of seven RCs with a total of 42 'parent' voices cannot compare with the current 504 parent voices at PSSCs. Adopting this approach, would ensure that as a minimum, there would be input from all 207 schools/parents in the sector. To assist in the transition from our current model to the EECD model, we suggest that the Chairperson of the current PSSC be that school voice until such time as elections are held within the school community.
- It is our opinion that by creating more RCs (41?), we would maintain a better connection to the school communities as well as reduce the size of RCs making them more manageable and perhaps improve the efficiency of meetings.
- We believe that the RCs do not need to be necessarily the same size or composition. The RCs need to mirror the population they are representing. This is particularly important when considering rural areas as well as urban areas with perhaps denser, more diverse

ethnic composition as well as economic diversity in all areas. A smaller number of schools (family of schools) could result in more than one school representative on the RC. The 'family of schools' grouping as presented is not supported.

- Administrative support to the RCs need serious consideration. In our current model, DECs are supported by the district offices and PSSCs by the school administration. We can only assume that there is a plan for support for the operations of RCs. We think that tasking Education Centres (EC) is a possible option if meetings are held central to the new RC area. If RCs were to hold meetings in a variety of areas within the RC boundaries, then school administrations might also be tasked for support, coordinated through ECs or Districts. A dedicated support person should also be considered for each RC.
- There needs to be a linkage between the operational side of the education system and the governance side. Currently, this exists via the DECs and Superintendent and at the PSSC level with the school principal. In the RC structure, the Director of Schools could fill this linkage requirement noting that it would add significantly to their workload.

Early Childhood

- If an early childhood centre is housed on the school property, their voice should be included in the RC.
- Early childcare representative should be separate from school representation, not part of the proposed three parent voices for 'birth to grade 5'.
- The early childhood representative should come from the Early Childhood Education Council
- There needs to be a unified voice from the early childhood community. Consideration should be given to creating a special committee within the RC for this purpose

First Nations

- First Nation representation on RCs should be based upon dialogue with First Nation communities.
- First Nation representatives should be elected. If no one steps forward as a candidate, then the First Nation community governing body could appoint a representative.

Student Voice

- There should be a broader discussion regarding the appropriateness and method of including the voice of students in the governance system, perhaps a Council of Councils?
- Should there be one student from each high school on the RC?
- Student representatives on a RC should have a specific role/duty and not be a secondary duty for a student council president.
- The rotation of student representatives, if there are multiple high schools in the RC area, should be considered. Students could apply for the position or recommendation from the principal could be considered.