

# Why Should School Boards Research Leadership?

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**What**

**Do**

**You**

**Mean by**



**Influence**

**You**

**Do**

**How**

**Student Learning?**

# Public Expectations of Schools



## Two overarching goals:

- **That each student feels safe in the school environment**
- **That each student learns at the level of her/his potential...**

- **Some perceive school boards to be traditional hierarchies that are wasteful of public resources and inhibit meaningful educational reforms that would improve student learning.**
- **School districts matter a great deal, but...**

# School Boards/Districts Matter: Our Journey of Discovery



1. School principals as instructional leaders
2. Shared/Team Leadership
3. A huge challenge to the development of teacher leadership was the pervasiveness of the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy and the inability or unwillingness of principals to share power.
4. We pondered... ***“If we were able to assist schools to develop stronger teacher leadership teams, could these teams be an effective counterbalance to barriers presented by the hierarchy...?”***
5. Once again, it was not long before we realized the fallacy of that assumption..

# Further...



- As we began to better understand the challenges posed to schools by the existing overarching acceptance of the bureaucratic hierarchy, we realized that any fundamental sustainable change toward teacher leadership at the school level was unlikely.
- Most schools lack the capacity to lead the complex transformation to collaborative leadership
- Without the pressure and support of an effective school district/board, most schools will continue to function as isolated bureaucratic hierarchies that are controlled by regulations and the legal authority of formal administrators.

# School Board Leadership



**Following a five year research project, we have concluded that**

Ignoring the potential leadership role of school boards and the districts they govern in bringing about meaningful continuous improvement of teaching and learning or eliminating them all together as has been the case in a number of jurisdictions is simply wrongheaded!

- A more constructive long-term approach must include a focus on determining the attributes of effective school boards, and how they can be replicated in all school districts.

- **So what makes effective school districts?**
- **Our findings: Recognitions**

# Recognition One: Leadership



A school district superintendent who has an in-depth understanding of the emerging research evidence and developing theories related to educational administration, leadership, and organizational change can facilitate collaborative leadership and organizational learning in a school district.

# Recognition Two: Risk, Respect, & Trust



- Leading a shift to collaborative leadership involves considerable risk and is dependent upon the existence of mutual respect and trust between the school board and the Superintendent/CEO.

# Recognition Three: Support



Structural changes, when combined with clearly defined rules of engagement, facilitate cultural change.

# Recognition Four: Moral Commitment



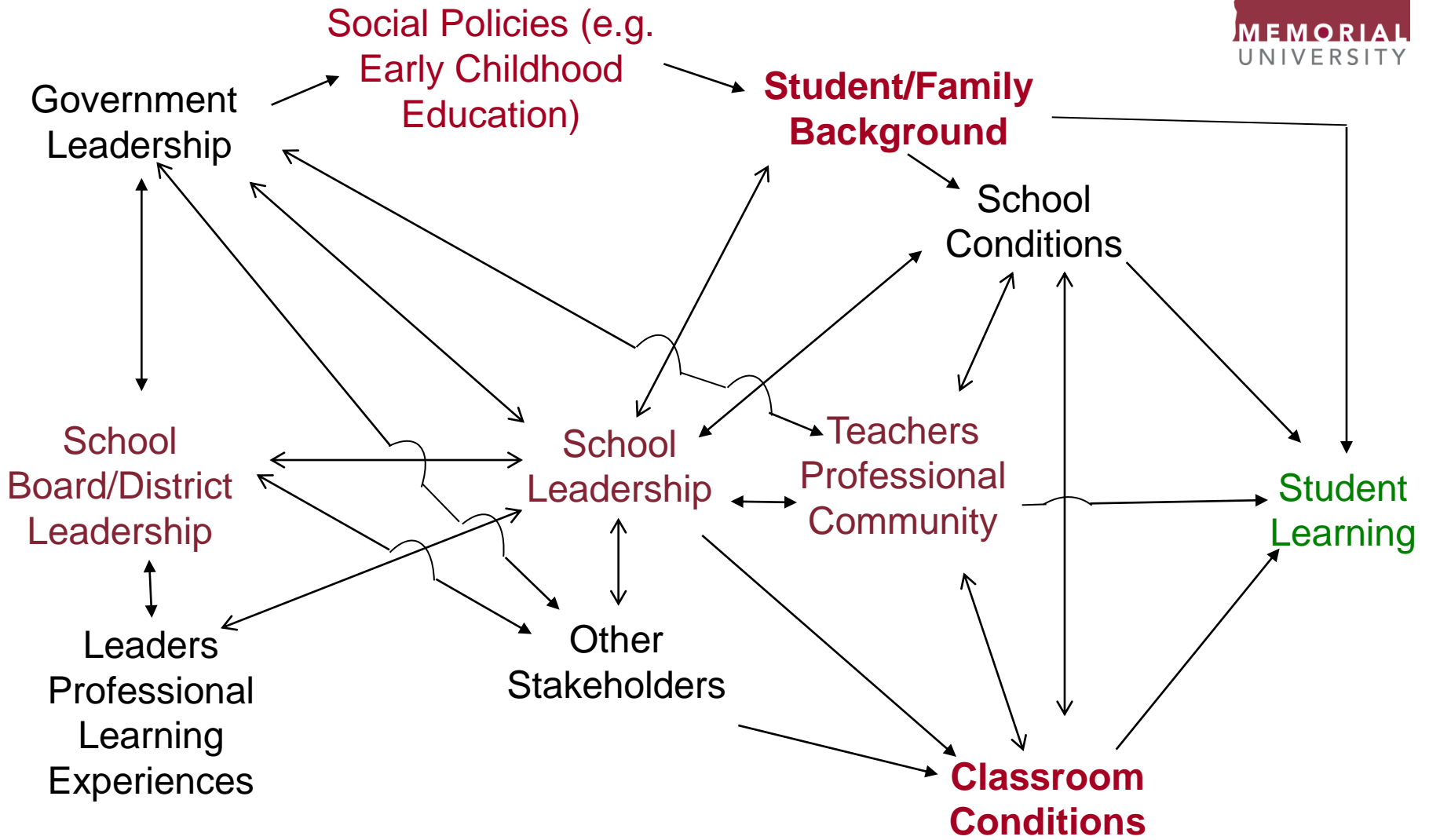
[Each school board/district] must share a collective moral commitment to each child's learning success and must share a common vision of teaching and learning that will help achieve that commitment.

# Recognition Five; Strategic Thinking and Adaptive Learning



School district/board leaders must think systemically and strategically and enlist leaders from multiple sources to collaboratively engage in strategic thinking and adaptive learning

# Linking Leadership to Learning



Adapted from Leithwood et al. (2004)

# The Challenge to School Boards: Government Intervention



- In several provinces, school boards have been restructured by their provincial governments to be responsible for huge geographical regions and/or expansive and diverse populations.
- Historically, school boards have been free to make educational decisions independent of provincial politics... providing they act within boundaries specified in the legislation that governs them.

# Recent Government Interventions: British Columbia & Nova Scotia



## British Columbia (1985)

- ❖ Exercised its jurisdiction to dismiss the Vancouver School Board trustees and appoint an official trustee to administer the affairs of the school board

## Nova Scotia (2006)

- ❖ Minister of Education dismissed all 13 elected members of the Halifax Regional School Board due to interpersonal conflicts and failure to comply with the their Code of Ethics

# Recent Government Interventions: Ontario



- ❖ Progressive Conservative government took over Toronto District School Board, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and Ottawa-Carlton District School Board in August of 2002.
- ❖ In 2006 the Liberal government sent in a supervisor to manage a budget deficit in Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.
- ❖ In a more recent case, the Minister of Education in Ontario appointed a supervisor to oversee the “financial management and administration of the Toronto Catholic District School Board.”

# Recent Government Interventions: Newfoundland & Labrador



In the midst of an election campaign, the Premier stepped in and stated openly to the people of Bishops Falls that a school in their community, that had been scheduled for closure by the Nova Central School Board, was the wrong thing to do and that it would not close.

# **Government Interventions: Other Examples?**



**To what extent do these circumstances exist in your school district?**

**Are there other examples of government interventions that you can share?**

# Is There Need for More Research? A Proposed Study



Pan-Canadian project – potential partner: CSBA

Participants: School board trustees and senior school board executives

Goals:

- To examine educational governance in school boards – who are the principal actors and what are their governance roles?
- To examine policy decision making in school boards – what factors and influences drive the policy making and the policy agenda?

# Preliminary Research Questions



**Your feedback to our preliminary research questions in the slides that follow is invited.**

- **Are you, as a trustee, frustrated or encouraged by government interventions?**
- **If Board decisions can be overturned by governments, how relevant are boards?**

# **Are School Boards Needed?**



- **Why are you sitting on a school board?**
- **What do school boards contribute to the educational process?**

# Trustees: Appointed or Elected?



- **British Columbia**
- **Alberta**
- **Saskatchewan**
- **Manitoba**
- **Ontario**
- **Quebec**
- **New Brunswick (DEC's)**
- **Prince Edward Island**
- **Nova Scotia**
- **Newfoundland & Labrador**

# Voter Turnout: High or Low?



- **British Columbia**
- **Alberta**
- **Saskatchewan**
- **Manitoba**
- **Ontario**
- **Quebec**
- **New Brunswick (DEC's)**
- **Prince Edward Island**
- **Nova Scotia**
- **Newfoundland & Labrador**

# The Role of CSBA



- **Should CSBA be concerned about low turnout of voters?**
- **Should CSBA be doing something about it?**
- **What could CSBA be doing?**

# School Board Decision-Making



- **How are school board policies informed and influenced?**
- **What factors and what kinds of evidence are used for decision-making by trustees?**

# Research Evidence



- How important is research and other forms of evidence in the Board's policy-making process?
- How can CSBA facilitate greater use of research in policy-making at the Board level?

# What Have We Not Asked?



- **Are there other relevant questions or points that need to be examined?**

# As we conclude...



- We **thank you** for your attendance and active engagement in this session.
- We encourage you to discuss our questions within your own school boards and within your respective provincial school board associations...
- Address Feedback to:

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