

**INFLUENCING  
PUBLIC  
EDUCATION**

**A Strategic Plan  
by the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association  
to Influence the Future of Public Education  
in the Province of British Columbia**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1. THE PROJECT	
2. THE FRAMEWORK	
<b>II. RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1. RECOMMENDATION – Expand the Circles of Influence	
2. RECOMMENDATION – Communications / Media Relations Plan	
3. RECOMMENDATION – Tighter Alignment for BCSSA Representatives	
4. RECOMMENDATION – Review the Resources of the BCSSA to Support these Recommendations	
<b>III. THE FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1. INDIVIDUAL	
1.1 Stephen Covey’s <i>Seven Habits of Highly Effective People</i>	
1.2 Key Learnings	
2. THE SCHOOL DISTRICT	
2.1 The Organizers for the Case Studies	
2.2 The Case Studies	
2.3 Key Learnings	
3. THE B.C. SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS’ ASSOCIATION	
3.1 Statement of Beliefs	
3.2 The Dimensions of Practice	
3.3 BCSSA Programs and Activities	
3.4 Key Learnings	
4. THE PROVINCE	
4.1 Current Practice – Committee Participation	
4.2 Key Learnings	
<b>IV. APPENDIX – FIVE CASE STUDIES</b>	

# INFLUENCING PUBLIC EDUCATION

*A strategic plan by the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association to influence the future of Public Education in the Province of British Columbia.*

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. THE PROJECT

One of the goals of the Executive of the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association (BCSSA) for 1999-2000 was to clarify and improve how the Association communicates with, relates to and influences government, ministries, members, partner groups and the greater community. In order to accomplish this goal, the Executive committed to the development of an Influence Strategic Plan.

### 2. THE FRAMEWORK – SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

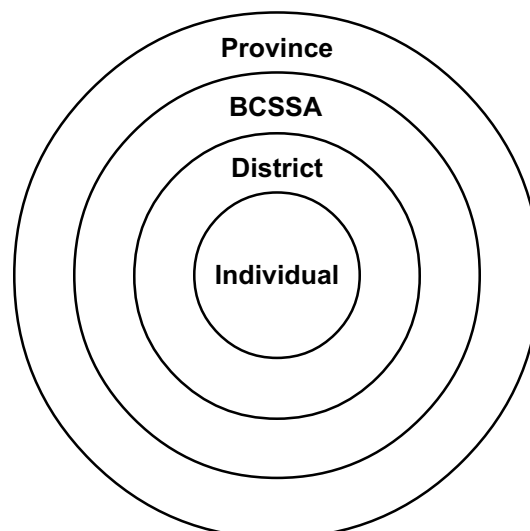
An analysis was conducted of the current methods of exerting influence at the individual, district, association and provincial levels.

**The Individual:** The starting reference was the work of Stephen Covey in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The main theses are that the proactive individual works from “Circles of Influence” and is principle-centred.

**The School District:** Five case studies were conducted of influence strategies Superintendents use at the district level. These analyzed how each of the five members work within their own spheres of influence.

**The Association:** The references were to the “Statement of Beliefs in Public Education” (1999) and the *Dimensions of Practice for Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents and Directors of Instruction or Equivalent* (1998). As well, the support of members through Professional Development activities, Membership Services and internal communications was identified.

**The Province:** The current involvement in a number of provincial committees and stakeholder groups was reviewed.



## **II. THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a result of these analyses, a number of key learnings were identified. These led to the recommendations for the Influence Strategic Plan at the provincial level.

### **1. THE NEED TO EXPAND THE CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE**

#### **1.1 Political Influence**

Similar to the work BCSSA members do with local Members of the Legislative Assembly, city/municipal councils and other political jurisdictions within the school district, the BCSSA needs to extend this to the provincial level.

#### **1.2 Stakeholder Influence**

Although there are a number of initiatives currently in place, there needs to be more systematic and ongoing connections to the other stakeholder groups in education. The circles of influence that are so effective through individual connections at the district level need to be extended more systematically to the provincial level.

#### **1.3 Government Influence**

Although there is extensive involvement in committee work, as noted above, much of it is in the area of educational programs and service. The representation needs to be on a broader scale, with more direct involvement in policy development and review. These would not necessarily be limited to strictly educational areas, but may bridge more into related areas such as health, social services, post-secondary, etc.

#### ***RECOMMENDATION #1***

*That the BCSSA implement a strategic relationship plan encompassing the following elements:*

- *a comprehensive list of the organizations, roles, individuals, etc., with whom it should establish ongoing relationships;*
- *an annual plan outlining the purpose and frequency of such contacts;*
- *the assignment of members of the Executive or other appropriate members of the Association to be the contact persons on behalf of the BCSSA;*
- *a system to monitor the progress of the strategic relationships and to identify new relationships that should be developed.*

### **2. THE NEED FOR A COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS PLAN**

#### **2.1 Internal Communications**

The BCSSA has done very well in sharing information with members. Newsletters, list-serves, webpages, etc., have all enhanced the sense of being in touch and current. However, much of the focus has been inward to members.

#### **2.2 External Communications**

The BCSSA has no systematic method to advocate for public education or to influence policy and practice outside the Association. All the case-study districts recognized the need to be proactive and to manage media relations and communications systems.

## **RECOMMENDATION #2**

*That the BCSSA develop a communications / media relations strategic plan which:*

- *utilizes expert advice from a consultant skilled in the development of media plans and who has experience in working directly with a wide range of media. It would be desirable that such a consultant have some experience working in the area of public governance and education.*
- *establishes a systematic method of communication;*
- *provides for a method of monitoring media as related to the BCSSA;*
- *provides support for BCSSA members in working with the media at the provincial level.*

### **3. THE NEED FOR TIGHTER ALIGNMENT FOR BCSSA REPRESENTATIVES**

#### **3.1 Statement of Beliefs and Dimensions of Practice**

The BCSSA Statement of Beliefs and Dimensions of Practice provide direction and focus for all members. There could be greater effort made to ensure that in their advocacy, members are aligned to these.

#### **3.2 Committee Representation**

There is no doubt that the BCSSA representatives ably advocate and influence the mission of public education in all of their committee work. However, there could be a tighter alignment and more effective advocacy through shared discussion about the central messages the BCSSA would like to support. This would be similar to the outcome of the work of district management teams.

#### **3.3 Strategic Relations Assignments**

The same need holds true for Executive and member assignments as contact persons for the strategic relations noted in Recommendation #1.

## **RECOMMENDATION #3**

*That the BCSSA establish methods to work with members on more focused and tighter alignments for representatives of the Association. This includes:*

- *an analysis of means to better utilize the existing structures within the BCSSA such as chapter meetings, professional development activities and other seminars to develop a tighter alignment and more articulate advocacy for expanding the influence of the Association;*
- *a review of new strategies which may be required to try to tighten the alignment.*

### **4. THE NEED TO REVIEW THE RESOURCES OF THE BCSSA TO SUPPORT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1 Budget Allocations**

The above recommendations will require some financial support. It will be necessary to review the current budget

for re-allocations to support more strategic contacts, a communications plan and tighter alignment of member representatives.

#### **4.2 Human Resources Allocation**

If the monitoring of this plan is to occur regularly and a greater emphasis is to be placed on communication and media strategies, then it is timely to review the role descriptions and staff requirements in the BCSSA office. This is particularly true for the communication element of the plan as it will need someone with skills and experience in this area for implementation and monitoring.

#### ***RECOMMENDATION #4***

*That the BCSSA re-allocate the necessary financial resources to support this plan and that a review of the current staffing allocations and roles also be reviewed.*

### **III. THE FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSES**

#### **1. INDIVIDUAL**

##### **1.1 Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People***

In 1998, the British Columbia Superintendents' Association became a licensed agent of the Franklin Covey Company in order to offer members the opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops and training sessions associated with Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* provides an excellent starting point for the individual's role in a strategic plan to influence and shape public education. Covey's work is based on principle-centred leadership where those who seek to influence others must first operate from individual principles and values. His first three habits describe: *the need to be proactive* (Habit 1); *the need to begin with the end in mind* (Habit 2); and *the need to put first things first* (Habit 3).

A proactive person does not blame others or let their actions and dispositions deflect one from making choices based on values, purposes and vision. When people act in a proactive manner, they can effectively move from their circles of influence to their circles of concern. Because they have influence based on personal relationships, they can better address concerns. Those who begin with the end in mind define their course and work to planned destinations. They mentally plan and then create their own positive results. Finally, those who have put their time and energy to worthwhile purposes will find that their mission and high-priority goals are being met. Only when these private victories have been accomplished can the individual move to the public arena.

In moving to public victories, Covey describes in Habit 5 (Seek First To Understand, Then To Be Understood) the challenges of communication and the attitude and skill of empathy and, in Habit 6 (Synergize), the process of synergizing, the valuing of differences, the creation of a third alternative and the perspective of humility.

## 1.2 Key Learnings

These seem to be important elements when one sets out to influence others, either as an individual or as an organization. The intended outcomes of the influence strategic plan must be principle-centred. The stimulus of others' actions must be proactive. The 'circles of influence' must be expanded through ongoing relationships and demonstrated trustworthiness.

## 2. THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

### 2.1 The Organizers for the Case Studies

In the same manner that this strategic plan is comprised of a series of elements, so are the case studies. The elements for the case studies are the spheres of influence in a school district. At the centre is the most direct sphere of influence and as the degree of influence lessens through less regular, direct contact and impact, the spheres move further from the centre.

**First Tier Contact in the District:** board of trustees, management and district staff, employee groups, aboriginal advisory council, students, Ministry of Education

**Second Tier Contact in the District:** district parent advisory council, school parent advisory councils, community agencies, city/municipal councils, local aboriginal communities, colleges and universities, career placement employers

**Third Tier Contact in the Community:** members of the Legislative Assembly, local and provincial media, service clubs and organizations, multicultural representatives, employers and Chamber of Commerce, unions/labour groups, special interest groups

### 2.2 The Case Studies

Interviews were conducted with five Superintendents to learn how each worked to influence public education in their respective districts. The circles of influence and tiers of contact provided the framework. The transcripts of the case studies form Part IV – Appendix of this plan.

### 2.3 Key Learnings

#### i. Board of Trustees

Well informed trustees who can act as advocates with knowledge and confidence are essential. Meaningful involvement and information-sharing is directed and coordinated by the Superintendent.

There is an increased role for an Education Committee of the Board with a reliance on the reporting of school growth plans and their progress as a means to keep a meaningful education agenda before the public.

#### ii. Management Team

The development of a cohesive, well-informed management structure is crucial. The common vision, mission and means influence the Board of Trustees and the areas in the system which each member of the management team directs.

All of the districts in the case studies have moved to a larger management team model which connects

to the school-based administrators and operations of the district. This allows all in the system to be knowledgeable about educational concerns and keeps all district actions student-focused.

### **iii. Administrative Officers**

School-based administrative officers are involved in district-level decisions through representation on district management teams. Their better understanding of the challenges and opportunities increases their ability to be leaders in their own schools and to share a common vision and mission. Every Superintendent indicated that direct contact and working with the administrators was a very high priority.

### **iv. District Employees**

There is recognition and emphasis on ongoing open relationships with all employees, both through the bargaining unit and as individuals. A greater degree of representation and involvement has supported all employees in being better informed and gaining a better understanding of the common purpose. Through involvement in committees, they have a greater degree of ownership in the direction the district takes.

### **v. Parent Councils**

The case studies indicated a similar need for parent empowerment at the district and school levels through increasing liaison with knowledgeable trustees.

### **vi. Student and Community Involvement**

The key is again the importance of mutually respectful and open relationships. When the relationships have been valued and nurtured over time, the connection is at a human level rather than at a nameless and faceless bureaucratic level.

### **vii. Communications / Media Strategy**

Several of the districts employed a management-level person for communications while another had used the services of a consultant for initial design, in-service and ongoing monitoring of information systems.

## **3. THE B.C. SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

Over the past several years, the BCSSA has developed a "Statement of Beliefs in Public Education" (1999), which acts as a guide for the individual as a member of the BCSSA, and has adopted the *Dimensions of Practice for Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents and Directors of Instruction or Equivalent* (1998), which outlines eight dimensions for personal and professional growth. These statements of beliefs and practices move principle-centred leadership from the individual to the organization level.

### **3.1 Statement of Beliefs**

The BCSSA Statement of Beliefs in Public Education is as follows:

*We, the members of the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association, believe that public education is fundamental to our democratic society and is a key institution which provides for the equality of opportunity for all citizens. It is also a key institution sharing responsibility with parents for preparing our young for citizenship. Further, public education enables us to approach the ideal of developing the human potential of each of our students.*

*We believe that the purpose of public education is to:*

- 1. help prepare our young for citizenship;*

2. *serve as an instrument of community will and, as such, create social policy essential to the development of a democratic society and preparation for life within a global context;*
3. *provide processes which will assist society to educate all its citizens to live fulfilling lives;*
4. *optimize opportunities for all students to learn, to realize their potential for the benefit of society;*
5. *assist in developing students to become educated, responsible citizens;*
6. *share responsibility for developing in students a respect for the past, an understanding of the present and a vision for the future;*
7. *provide opportunities for each child to receive a comprehensive, liberal education;*
8. *ensure that all children are able to exercise their rights to quality educational services and programs.*

*We believe that the governance of public education is most effective in serving the needs of children when:*

1. *meaningful, local, lay control of the system is maintained through publicly elected boards of school trustees;*
2. *essential management, leadership, and shared decision-making, are exercised to ensure the coordination and development of educational programs and services at the school, community and provincial levels;*
3. *appropriate balance is maintained between the often competing values of quality, equity, efficiency and choice.*

The Statement of Beliefs compels the BCSSA members, through their association, to take a proactive approach to influencing public education policy and practice if they are to “serve as an instrument of community will.”

### **3.2 The Dimensions of Practice**

The Dimensions of Practice are intended to be used, as a focus for both individual and group development, in maintaining and enhancing the best possible practices in educational leadership. The first three dimensions are particularly pertinent for a strategic plan on influencing public policy.

#### ***Dimension 1: Leadership and District Culture***

BCSSA members will know and be able to develop a collective district vision; shape school culture and climate; demonstrate an understanding of international issues affecting education; formulate strategic plans, goals and change efforts with staff and community; set priorities in the context of community, student and staff needs; serve as an articulate spokesperson for the welfare of all students in a multicultural context of public education.

#### ***Dimension 2: Policy and Governance***

BCSSA members will be able to develop procedures for working with the board of trustees that define mutual expectations, working relationships and strategies for formulating district policy for external and internal

programs; adjust local policy to provincial requirements, and recognize and apply standards involving accountability across the system.

### ***Dimension 3: Communications and Community Relations***

BCSSA members will be able to articulate district purpose and priorities to the community and mass media, request and respond to community feedback, and demonstrate consensus-building and conflict mediation.

They will be able to identify, track and deal with issues; formulate and carry out plans for internal and external communications; exhibit an understanding of school districts as political systems; apply communication skills to strengthen community support of district priorities; build coalitions to gain financial and programmatic support; develop and implement related political initiatives for the wellness of children.

## **3.3 BCSSA Programs and Activities**

### **i. BCSSA Professional Development and Support Services to Members**

The BCSSA has very active and dedicated Professional Development and Membership committees. The work of these committees leads to opportunities for members to share and connect through activities such as three annual provincial conferences, in-service and resources for new members, support for working with new boards, workplace wellness through the Stephen Covey joint project, etc. These activities, to some degree, replicate district-level management meetings, in-service and retreats to develop shared vision and learnings, and common experiences among members.

### **ii. Chapter Meetings**

There are six chapter zones in the province, and at their regular meetings there is another opportunity to enhance shared vision and learnings and common experiences.

### **iii. Communication to Members**

There is a wide variety of communication strategies in place to keep members informed and connected. These range from newsletters to list-serves to websites.

## **3.4 Key Learnings**

The BCSSA has prepared the foundation for an influence strategic plan through development and adoption of the BCSSA “Statement of Beliefs” and *Dimensions of Practice*. These provide the direct link to Stephen Covey’s principle-centred leadership in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Further, the BCSSA already has a number of structures and practices in place to support the influence strategic plan.

## **4. THE PROVINCE**

### **4.1 Current Practice – Committee Participation**

BCSSA members are involved in a large number of committees at the provincial level. All of them provide an opportunity for individual and organizational influence. For 1999-2000, these include:

Ministry of Education – Curriculum Overview Teams  
     Mathematics  
     Science  
     English Language Arts  
     Social Studies  
     Fine Arts  
     Applied Skills  
     International Languages  
 Accreditation Program – Working Committee to Review Revised Program  
 Addressing Student Differences Provincial Working Group  
 Adolescent Health Survey (AHS-McCreary) Working Group  
 Adult Basic Education Advisory Committee  
 B.C. College of Teachers – Supply and Demand Committee  
 B.C. College of Teachers – Teacher Education Forum Planning Committee  
 B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer  
 B.C. Historical Education Museum Committee  
 B.C. Public School Employers’ Association Board of Directors  
 B.C. Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association – UBC Short Course Planning  
 BCSDCEDA Advisory Committee on Continuing Education  
 B.C. School Sports Board of Directors  
 B.C. School Trustees – Education Committee  
 B.C. Teachers’ Federation – Pension Advisory Committee  
 CANCOPY Working Committee  
 CASA Representation  
 Deputy Minister’s K-12 Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee  
 Education Advisory Council (EAC)  
 Education Finance and Facilities Advisory Council  
 Education Week Planning  
 Educators as Adult Learners (EALP) Committee  
 Inter-ministry Committee on the Prevention of Youth Violence  
 Ministry for Children and Families / Education Partners Committee  
 Ministry / Orca Bay *Champions in Learning* Advisory Committee  
 Provincial Assessment Advisory Committee  
 Provincial Education Committee (PEC)  
 Provincial Learning Network (PLNet) K-12 Steering Committee  
 School-Based Child Care Working Group  
 School Protection Program / Risk Management Advisory Committee  
 School Psychology Partners  
 Secondary to Post-Secondary Transition Review Team  
 Small School Districts Advisory Committee  
 Southern Interior Child and Youth Advisory Committee  
 Tripartite Education Committee

## 4.2 Key Learnings

In analyzing the purpose and function of these committees, they generally seem to be focused on educational services and programs rather than policy with some notable exceptions such as the Education Advisory Council. A more systematic and coordinated approach could be taken at the provincial level.