

The Superintendent-School Board Relationship

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Questionnaires were sent to 619 school board trustees throughout Canada in an attempt to gather information on the superintendent – trustee relationship. The study acknowledges that these two parties generally operate in a non-adversarial manner. However, at times, the superintendent and board may have some differences of opinion. In the latter instances, the party that controls the *power sources* generally has its opinion prevail. This study first examined several of these sources identified through previous research studies and then focused on the three areas of finance, personnel and communications. With 55% of the boards which were surveyed responding, the study found that even though the trustees possess the potential to control these areas, it is actually the senior administrative officers of the board who currently wield power over these three categories, and hence dominate the educational environment.

On a envoyé des questionnaires à 619 commissaires d'école à travers tout le Canada afin d'essayer de trouver des renseignements sur les relations entre les superintendants et les commissaires d'école. L'étude a montré que, d'une manière générale, ces deux groupes fonctionnent ensemble harmonieusement. Il y a toujours, toutefois, quelques divergences d'opinion entre la commission scolaire et le superintendant et dans ce cas, le groupe qui contrôle les "sources du pouvoir" a en général raison. On examine dans cette étude certaines des "sources" qui avaient déjà été identifiées dans certaines recherches, et on se concentre sur trois points importants: la finance, le personnel et les communications. La réponse des commissions scolaires a atteint 55% et a permis de conclure que même si les commissaires ont les moyens de contrôler ces trois facteurs, ce sont en fait les administrateurs de la commission scolaire qui ont le plus d'ancienneté qui ont le contrôle, dominant ainsi l'environnement scolaire.

One truism about today's educational environment is that the success of a school system depends upon the joint effort by a school board and its superintendents¹ toward a set of common goals. As W. J. McCordic (1974) states:

the body corporate encompasses both elected and professional elements and both are essential to all aspects of the administrative process and to the orderly conduct of board business Trustee goals, trustee policies, often flow from reasoned positions advanced by professionals Conversely administrative styles, techniques and principles must be consistent with a board's policy thrust. (pp. 46 and 49)

Sources of Power

Board Sources

- (1) legal authority
- (2) support of electorate
- (3) knowledge of educational system
- (4) personal prestige and social status

Superintendent Sources

- (1) professional expertise
- (2) public opinion
- (3) ties with influentials
- (4) access to *power tools*

Ambiguous Sources

- (1) control of finances
 - (2) control of personnel
 - (3) control of communication
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NOTE: The Board and the Superintendent sources are adapted from *Governing American Schools* by L. H. Zeigler and M. K. Jennings, 1974, North Scituate, Mass: Duxbury Press.

Despite the fact that the *overall* health of the educational enterprise, obviously, depends upon the co-operation of both of these parties, "it is [also] likely true that representation [trustees] and administration [superintendents] are inherently at odds in regard to *some* issues" (Coleman, 1977, p. 83).

This paper attempts to examine the superintendent – school board relationship in light of such potential conflict.² It suggests that within the present Canadian educational environment both the board and the superintendent have access to various well-defined sources of power. Some sources are apparently more available to the board; others to the superintendent. There is a third set of power sources of which the ownership – board's or superintendent's – is less clear. The examination of these factors (see the following chart) was the major focus of this research.

METHODOLOGY

After numerous preliminary interviews with trustees and a detailed literature search, a questionnaire was developed by the author to elicit demo-

TABLE 1
Survey Responses By Province

<i>Province</i>	<i>Number of boards surveyed</i>	<i>Boards responding (%)</i>	<i>Total responses (%)</i>
Alberta	52	40.4	5.6
British Columbia	75	52.0	13.4
Manitoba	54	66.7	7.5
New Brunswick	33	48.5	5.9
Newfoundland	35	45.7	3.7
Nova Scotia	40	37.5	3.7
Ontario	125	73.6	29.5
Prince Edward Island	5	80.0	3.7
Quebec	83	53.0	19.0
Saskatchewan	54	42.6	7.5
Total	557	55.0	99.5

graphic information about trustees, as well as data on the operations, functions, and goals of school boards. The draft version of this instrument was pre-tested on 72 trustees from seven different board areas. These individuals represented jurisdictions that were geographically and numerically amongst the smallest and largest of our total population. After weighing this group's responses, comments, and suggestions a final version of the instrument was prepared. It was then distributed (in English or French, as appropriate) to 557 jurisdictions across all 10 provinces of Canada. Within each province, the school jurisdictions to be examined were selected on a random sample basis. Detailed distribution and response data are indicated in Table 1.

Thorough discussions of the history of education in Canada are available elsewhere. A review of that literature illustrates that titles, positions, and postures of superintendents and trustees vary from place to place and time to time.³ Despite this diversity, it is possible to develop some general propositions about the *present* state of superintendent – school board relationships in Canada.

THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

In his article "Power and Politics in Education," Friesen (1975) suggests that, within the contemporary educational environment, various *power*

resources are present. "Those who wish to influence others during a political process use most of these at one time or another" (p. 2). The board's bank of such sources includes factors such as legal authority, the support of the electorate, some knowledge of the educational system, and finally personal prestige and social status. On the other hand, the superintendent may call upon professional expertise, public opinion, ties with local *power people*, and access to and knowledge of various *power tools* such as educational legislation, administrative precedents, information flow and so on (Zeigler and Jennings, 1974). Moving beyond these factors, however, this author postulates that there are three additional sources of power – the ownership for which is not immediately clear. These are control of finances, personnel, and communication.

Each of these three groups, board sources, superintendent sources, and ambiguous sources will now be examined.

BOARD SOURCES

Legal Authority

The first source available to the board is the formal authority given to it by the respective Provincial legislature. Such power has been formally codified in various provincial acts. It enables the board to control the employment or dismissal of the superintendent, or to recommend the same to higher provincial authorities. At first glance, such firmly rooted power would appear to settle any question about the relative power of the superintendent and school board very quickly. However, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that there are several factors which mitigate against the actual use of this source.

One such factor is that boards vary in size and are collective entities. Therefore, an individual trustee must "act as a corporate member of a school board while maintaining an informed individual position He or she derives his/her authority through the corporate entity of the board" (*Ontario Ministry of Education Report*, 1981, p. 9). Hence, unless one can marshal substantial collective support, it is virtually impossible to exercise this power to any great extent.

A second factor evolves around the fact that, while general statements regarding board responsibilities are indeed incorporated in provincial legislation, their actual operational role is not all that clear (Martin and Macdonell, 1978, pp. 128–130). In fact, Hickcox (1974) points out that "unless there is a sharper delineation of the function of trustees ... and a clear statement of the power of local boards, it will be extremely difficult to

develop a relationship of mutual trust and confidence between trustees and administration" (p. 35).

A quick perusal of provincial educational documents such as the *Education Act of Ontario, 1974* and the more recently revised *1983 Act* suggest that little has been done to define in a more specific manner the board's operational role during the intervening period. This confusion surrounding the specific role and responsibilities of both the board and its members was expressed during interviews with several Canadian trustees. Perhaps the frustration inherent in such a situation was expressed best by one trustee as follows:

When I first came to the board two years ago I thought they had what they called orientation night or something to introduce you. I thought this was when we got the tour of the education center and got to meet everyone that worked there. Do you know that to this day I still don't know my way around the education center? We have never been shown. We have never been formally introduced to anyone other than the other trustees. We got a booklet called *Organizational Structure of the Board of Education* and in there it describes the Director's jobs, the Superintendents' jobs, but just a very broad outline. It took me several months to figure out who these various people were that fit into these jobs. We really were not told about it ... The administration doesn't like you nosing around an awful lot. If you have questions and go into the board office and ask "What's this?" or "Why do we do that?" you either get a little pat on the head and are told to be a "good girl" or they say "We'll answer you, but you realize that this answer to you means nothing." Sometimes if you want to get nasty you can bring it as a notice of motion to the whole board and then you bring it out publicly and they (the administration) don't like that! (Trustee, Province of Ontario, personal communication, June 25, 1982)

Responses such as this indicate a need for more knowledge of the basic duties, human and physical facilities, limitations, and other intricacies related to a trustee's position. Without such knowledge, the board member is less likely to exercise the legal power afforded him/her, and more likely to acquiesce to the more experienced and knowledgeable superintendent.

Support of the Electorate

A second board source stems from the elected representative position of the board members. There is considerable evidence in a *Canadian Educational Association Task Force Report* (1979) that a substantial portion of the Canadian public feels that local control over education is essential. To the extent that such a feeling is present, it provides appreciable support to board members. Certainly one may raise the counter-argument that unless board elections are held in conjunction with elections for other public office or unless a controversial issue is present, one expression of

TABLE 2
Sources of Encouragement To Stand For Board Positions

<i>Source</i>	<i>Trustees Encouraged (%)</i>
Citizens groups	18.5
Friends and neighbours	36.2
Other board members	34.1
Professional school personnel	8.2
Government and higher political figures	3.1

NOTE: *N* = 552

local control, voter turnout, demonstrates a greater citizen disinterest (*Windsor Star*, December 7, 1967; November 9, 1982). However, if one suggested that local control over education be abolished, it is almost certain that the public outcry would be heard long and far. The extent of such an outcry again might indicate the degree of popular support for the representative role, and hence the power base upon which the trustee may draw (Cistone, 1975; Mann, 1976). Other factors also enable board members to draw upon this resource. Zeigler and Jennings identify them as "the manner in which board members are recruited, the visibility of the board to the public, and the overall salience of educational issues to the community" (p. 148).

From the responses of the Canadian trustees questioned about this matter (see Table 2), it is apparent that the general public does play a role in encouraging individuals to seek school board positions, and hence some trustees may indeed develop a source of power from their constituency.

Looking at the data more closely, however, one is struck by the fact that the percentage of trustees receiving electoral support from organized public groups is rather limited. Only when one also considers active support from friends and neighbours can the claim be made that links, which translate into power tools, exist between a majority of board members and the representative public, and that this resource then is available to the trustee in dealings with appointed officials.

Another source available to board members who wish to draw upon popular support as a base of power is their visibility vis-à-vis the public. There is little doubt that, as costs increase and curriculum issues become more complex and controversial, media coverage of board meetings provides a forum for the board member to lobby for increased public support. The extent to which such an opportunity develops into a positive

or negative factor will depend, of course, upon the trustee's ability to utilize this source effectively.

A final factor that enables a trustee to draw upon popular support as a base of power is the overall importance of the educational issues to the community. A *Canadian Educational Association Task Force Report* (1979) suggests that, if aroused, the general public is quite capable of transmitting its dissatisfaction with the educational system to its trustee(s), and of supporting the latter in conveying such concern to the administrators. Hence, the emergence of salient issues apparently broadens the base of trustee power.

This type of public concern and support, however, does not automatically translate into *constant* success for the trustee. Rather the effectiveness of this factor as a power source for trustees seems to depend upon *board type* (Zeigler and Jennings, 1974, pp. 175–178). Apparently, the probability of a board victory over the superintendent decreases as one moves through a continuum from *city* to *suburban* to *small town* board. Hence, one might conclude that the salience of educational issues to the community is a basis of board power vis-à-vis the superintendent for trustees in more highly urbanized areas. However, as the degree of urbanization decreases, this source of power apparently diminishes.

Knowledge of the System

A study by Awender (1980) suggested that some board members may have another source of power upon which to draw. This is derived from a member's knowledge of the educational system. The latter can be attributed to the following:

slightly over half of the current Ontario board members have a relative employed in education, and of these, approximately 30 percent are spouses of board members. While well over 80 percent of the trustees identified their "education relative" as a teacher, almost 10 percent indicated that another member of their immediate family was also serving or had served as a trustee. Approximately 2 percent indicated that they had school administrators in their families Over 45 percent of Ontario trustees claimed that they held or had held, other jobs in education. Of these, over 60 percent are, or have been, employed in the teaching force; slightly over 7 percent have served previously as board members; and almost 10 percent have been administrators within a school system. (p. 10)

An individual trustee possessing familial ties and previous experience of this nature would obviously develop some knowledge of the educational environment. Such information could be used to offset partially the superintendent's use of expertise as a power source.

Personal Prestige and Social Status

Finally, Zeigler and Jennings (1974) examined personal prestige and social status (measured in terms of occupation, income and education) and their effect on the board – superintendent relationship. They surmised that although “higher status boards, themselves possessors of expertise, are more likely to assert the decision-making authority of the board, they are also more easily overcome” (p. 187) due to their perception of the superintendent as a professional.

Given this argument, one might initially question whether status could be listed as a power tool available to a trustee in his/her relationship with the superintendent. However, Zeigler and Jennings’ data simply match status variables and the probability of board victory over the superintendent. They do not measure whether status is *used* as a power tool, but rather whether it *exists*. Hence, one may postulate that status may indeed serve as a source of power for the board member *if the trustee wishes to use it as one*. As Boyd (1975) suggests, it is doubtful that their study “unambiguously taps the attitudes of board members regarding the proper division of labour and authority in board – superintendent relations” (p. 111).

Zeigler and Jennings themselves add to this argument as they state:

Boards, like all decision-making units, have informal (as well as formal) leaders. Such opinion leaders assume a major role in swinging a decision in a desired direction [These] opinion leaders are usually those with long tenure, *high socioeconomic status*, and important board positions It is likely that opinion leaders are at least respected (feared) by administrators. (p. 207)

The potential for the use of status as a power tool appears to exist. However, its successful deployment depends upon several factors – not the least of which is the type of status employed and the superintendent’s perception of it.

SUPERINTENDENT SOURCES

The superintendent also has a number of potential sources upon which he/she can draw. These include professional expertise, the ability to mold and use public opinion, ties with *local influentials*, and access to various power tools.

Professional Expertise

First and foremost among these power sources is the professional expertise the administrator possesses about educational matters. As indicated

previously in this article, many trustees cannot discuss issues about various textbooks or school curriculum matters without considerable preliminary study. On the other hand, the superintendent with his/her control (real or perceived) of educational terminology and the use of the other office staff as resource personnel has the ability to deal with matters such as books, programs, and technology in a more informed manner (Scully, 1973; Greenhill, 1977). The extent to which the superintendent can convince the board to trust and value such expertise will determine how important this source actually can be.

Public Opinion

A second source available to the superintendent is public opinion. Through the appropriate use of the media (as long as he/she is not muffled by the board), individual speaking engagements, memberships in organizations, and so on, a superintendent can obviously do a great deal to build support for the system, its programs, and himself or herself. Efforts of this nature, however, must be tempered with a certain degree of caution. A superintendent still must contend with the belief that there should be a separation between the policy formation and the administrative elements of the school governing process. Hence, the use of this resource must not appear to be overtly political but rather based upon factors considered to be pragmatic and necessary for the betterment of the system.

Ties With Local Influentials and Power Tools

Zeigler and Jennings (1974, p. 153) point out that there are also other resources available to the superintendent. Among these are the development of a fairly strong liaison with local influentials who do not serve on the board, and the "access to the tools by which decisions are made and organizations controlled" (Minar, 1966, p. 93). More will be said about these two factors later – particularly the latter. Meanwhile, it is relatively safe to conclude that both the superintendent and the school board have several different sources of power to draw upon. For the trustees, these are their legal authority, the elected representative nature of their position, their knowledge of the educational system, and their use of social status. For the superintendent, these are professional expertise, the use of public opinion, ties with influential individuals, and access to various power tools. The degree to which each party commits itself to utilizing them will determine to a great extent what the final balance of power between these two parties will be.

AMBIGUOUS SOURCES

There is yet another way that one might examine the relative positions of the board and its superintendent. It is based upon the premise that, within any organization or system, power is derived from three major sources. Once such source is *financial* in nature, a second centres around the *personnel* within an organization, and a third is *communication*. If individuals within an organization can control one of these, they have a share of the power within the group. If they can control two, they are in fairly firm control of the direction of the organization; if they can control all three, they can become virtual dictators. Throughout the remainder of this paper, an effort will be made to examine the board – superintendent relationship from such a perspective.

Finances

Initially, one might assume that the board has a virtual monopoly over finances. After all, most boards do have the legal right to raise money on a local level. They also have the final approval over the manner in which money is spent locally. In fact, in many cases they actually negotiate and pay the salaries of both the teaching and administrative staffs.

Upon closer examination, however, we see that the situation is not quite so clearly defined. There are several factors that inhibit the board from using this source of power very often. Primary among these is simply the lack of understanding most trustees have about the actual finances of the board, and the “web of fiscal restraints and provincial strategies” surrounding them (McCordic, 1974, p. 48). This web is so complex that the Canadian School Trustees’ Association commissioned a study in 1955 to look into the matter. As expected, the report concluded that the “present grant regulations were too numerous and complex” for most trustees to understand adequately, and suggested simplifications (Lazerte, 1955, p. 217). Cameron’s (1972) later work suggests that the complexity has not yet disappeared despite efforts in that direction.

Certainly, trustees can read the accounts payable sheets handed to them at a board meeting and decide whether to vote for or against paying the amounts indicated. However, it is not equally clear that board members understand the complex nature of the provincial grant structures that provide them with the money in the first place. If one accepts the premise that the latter affects or could be affected by those items considered as part of the accounts payable process, then it is a short step to the point where one discerns the virtual dependence of the trustee on their administrative staff for advice in almost any area of expenditure. Greenfield et

TABLE 3
Educational and Economic Comparisons Between Canadian Board Members and the Canadian Public (%)

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Canadian Public</i>	<i>Canadian Board Member</i>
<i>Education</i>		
<High School	20.7	1.5
High School	43.6	39.8
University or college	34.1	29.0
Graduate & Professional school	1.5	29.7
<i>Annual Taxable Income</i>		
<10,000	57.0	12.0
10,000–14,999	14.0	14.9
15,000–19,999	10.6	21.5
20,000–24,999	7.8	18.6
25,000+	10.6	33.0

NOTE: These figures are from the Canadian Census 1981, and percentages should be read down the columns.

al. (1969) preparing a blue-print for larger units of school government in Ontario suggested that “superintendent involvement in this area should not be viewed in a completely negative manner.” Rather, they recommend that “in the interests of organizational effectiveness, substantial responsibility for financial matters could [indeed] be delegated to administrators and professional staff” (p. 96).

Hickcox (1974) seems to agree with this point of view, and hence, he advises board members to look for administrative officials who have “knowledge and training in financial management” so that the board might adequately discharge its responsibility in this area (p. 36). Unfortunately, it appears that school boards may have gone overboard in implementing these suggestions. A former trustee aware of how acute the dependency factor has become claimed in an interview that “trustees don’t get a clear picture of spending from administration – it’s reported only in a very general way” (Halberstadt, 1984, p. A6).

Thus, while the school board legally controls financial matters, a closer examination of the situation reveals that trustees are highly dependent upon superintendents for direction in these matters, and, perhaps more significantly, that the superintendents realize it. However, one must temper this very general conclusion somewhat, for the overall socio-economic data from a study by Awender (1980), which is presented in Tables 3 and

TABLE 4
*Occupation of Canadian School Board
 Members*

<i>Occupations</i>	<i>Board Members (%)</i>
Professionals	16.1
Management	12.2
Business	9.2
Housewife	16.8
Farmer	10.2
Labourer	23.7
Clergy	3.6
Retired	5.8
No Response	2.4

4, suggest that, indeed, there may be some trustees who possess the educational and occupational background necessary to make appropriate judgments in this area (pp. 9–10).

Personnel

Control over personnel within the organization presents an equally perplexing picture. Again, it would appear that the board has the upper hand here. In most instances, the trustees have final approval, in a legal sense, over those hired and fired, both for the instructional administrative staff. Moreover, subject to some provincial constraints, the board also has the right to place and promote people throughout the organization as it sees fit. The Canadian trustees in this study recognized these rights. They indicated that they should act as the *primary* hiring agent for most of the major categories under consideration here. As Table 5 indicates, only the hiring of teachers and custodians appears an exception to this rule. However, one must offer a caution. There does appear to be a difference between what the board wishes the situation to be and what the situation actually is. More often than not, trustees delegate their hiring, firing, placement and promotion functions to the superintendent and other central office staff (Hickcox, 1974, p. 35). One may attribute this primarily to tradition, reputation, seniority, time, and expertise, all of which tend to tip the balance of power toward the superintendent.

Contrary to these data, one might speculate that certain emerging factors may alter this process somewhat in the future, particularly in the

TABLE 5
Desirable Hiring Responsibilities As Perceived By Board Members (%)

Board Member's Perception of Hiring Agent	Personnel to be Hired						
	Superintendents	Consultants Supervisors	Principals	Maintenance Supervisor	Business Administrator & Staff	Teachers	School Custodians
School Board Member	74.2	52.4	59.9	67.4	68.2	29.3	46.3
Other	25.8	47.6	30.1	32.6	32.8	70.7	53.7
N	527	519	544	494	508	549	476

larger urban areas. As trustees find additional time (e.g., more retirees on boards), discover new resources (e.g., educational level of board members rising), and feel the pinch of political expediency (e.g., increased media coverage and demand for accountability), their activities in the personnel area may become more influential. However, actual involvement in this area was not demonstrated from our present data, only a desire to be involved.

One still hears the argument that the board is involved in the most important personnel decision of all – the appointment and/or approval of the superintendent with whom the board members work. However, in some instances, the superintendent for a board is appointed by the provincial Ministry or Department of Education. Moreover, where the board is entitled to appoint its own superintendent it is usually confined to selecting an individual who has passed *approval procedures* or *exams* established by provincial governments. Furthermore, because of the tenure provisions surrounding many superintendents' positions, boards that do have the right to appoint their own superintendent are often in a position whereby they must work with the superintendent chosen by their predecessor(s).

Not only does it appear that boards really have minimal control over their choice of superintendents, but it actually seems as though, at times, a reverse co-option process occurs. For 8.2% of the trustees indicated that they have been encouraged to run for *their* positions by the superintendent and other professional school personnel. Moreover, if one were to add to this figure those trustees (27.0%) who hold their positions through appointment (appointment suggested or at least influenced by the superintendent), it is obvious that this figure would be much higher. Consequently, one might argue that there is a strong co-option process through which superintendents influence school board membership.

Since it is often assumed that one of the basic ways of maintaining control over personnel is through supervision, it may be appropriate here to examine the trustee – superintendent relationship from this standpoint. As Table 6 indicates, when asked to rate six different aspects of their role, 51.2% of the Canadian board members indicated that the supervision of the superintendent was the least important of the functions listed.⁴ Those rated more important were developing a general understanding and support for educational concerns, and dealing with parental concerns. In fact, only 9% indicated that they regarded this type of supervision as the most important aspect of their role as a board member. Thus, it would appear that while trustees do wish to have control over the choice of superintendent(s) with whom they will work, once they select such an individual, a great percentage of the board members do not place the supervision of him/her as one of their higher priorities.

TABLE 6
Trustees Perception of Their Role

<i>Role Description</i>	<i>Perceiving Role as Most Important (%)</i>	<i>Perceiving Role as Least Important (%)</i>
To develop a general understanding & support for education	70.3	3.9
To deal with parental concerns	9.0	5.9
To supervise the superintendent	7.4	51.2
To reduce educational expenditures	6.0	14.9
To develop financial support for schools	5.3	14.2
To deal with teacher concerns	2.0	9.9

NOTE: *N* = 522

In summary then, one might conclude that while the boards legally could and would like to control personnel, the general lack of expertise and time, and the tradition discussed prevent them from using such control as an effective power source.

Communications

A final basis of power is the control of communications. Hickcox (1982) commented on the central place this factor has in the entire power relationship between board and superintendent:

In any political or hierarchical situation information is a *prime* source of power and influence. The individual or group possessing information that others do not have is in a position to exert leadership. One might argue in fact, that the effective administrator is one who controls the release of information in ways that will help objectives be achieved. (p. 26)

There is little question that the superintendent is the central communications cog in the organization. It is he/she who generally processes information for both board members and the rank-and-file of the organization. The former depend upon the superintendent to help prepare board meeting agendas and hence bring issues to them for consideration,

and then to disseminate their decisions to those individuals affected throughout the organization. The latter depend upon the superintendent to carry and interpret their needs and desires to the board for consideration, and to provide them with an accurate indication of the feelings and directions the board wishes to convey throughout the system.

The superintendent often has a share in, if not the entire responsibility for, the preparation of the agenda for the school board meeting. This permits him/her to influence the outcome of votes merely by purposeful scheduling of both the type and sequence of items to be considered. Generally speaking, most boards spend much more time on items presented earlier in a meeting than they do on those that have to be dealt with shortly before adjournment. Moreover, immediately placing a *hot public item* on the agenda will, in all likelihood, get it more play and discussion than if it were deferred for a few weeks.

Pois (1964) points out that the superintendent can channel the board's deliberations quite effectively "by the practice of having the agenda for board meetings consist almost exclusively of reports" (p. 429) prepared and given to the board for the latter's consideration by the central administrative staff. While the board may certainly modify and/or amend the report, the chance of the trustees changing it totally, obviously, is minimized significantly. Hence, an astute superintendent, by controlling these factors can influence the intent and outcome of many a motion.

In summary then it is the superintendent who determines to a large extent what appears on the agenda, at what date it is brought forward, and in what order items are considered. As a former trustee stated:

Administration controls the agenda; it controls all the information the trustees get. When administration wants something, that information (coming to the trustees) is one-sided. If you don't ask questions, it's a very biased influence. (Halberstadt, 1984, p. A6)

Because of such control over this particular aspect of the communication process, then, the superintendent is able to exert a great deal of influence over the directions and activities that the board ultimately pursues. According to information uncovered by this study, 86.5% ($N = 614$) of Canadian trustees do receive an agenda prior to their board meetings. However, looking at Table 7, one sees that these agendas are seldom sent out more than five days in advance of a board meeting. Some people might argue that such a time frame does not give the trustee sufficient opportunity to examine and prepare for board meetings adequately. If this is the case, it would undoubtedly make the board member even more dependent upon the superintendent and the latter's recommendations concerning agenda items, and hence tip the balance of power even more

TABLE 7
Distribution of Agendas to Trustees Prior to School Board Meetings

<i>Days</i>	<i>Absolute frequency of trustees</i>	<i>Relative frequency of trustees (%)</i>
1-6	432	81.4
6-10	92	17.3
11-15	5	0.9
16+	2	0.4
		100.0

NOTE: $N = 531$

in his/her direction. Conversely, it could be argued that the advance time of the agenda is not that important if one has fairly easy and consistent access to the superintendent and/or other sources of educational information. Such access allows one to be adequately prepared to deal with the issues on a more informed basis.

Examining Tables 8, 9, and 10 we get an indication of the time board members spend interacting with the superintendent and/or principals outside the regular board meeting times. Focusing only on Table 8, one might conclude that there is a fair amount of interaction between superintendents and trustees outside of the board room. However, looking at Table 8 in conjunction with Table 9, we get a much different perspective. It would appear that while almost 70% of the trustees see the superintendents (outside of board meetings) between two to five times throughout the year, such meetings are very brief. Therefore, one is led to speculate that such sessions serve more as an opportunity for the superintendent to provide the board members with quick, advice, or for the trustees to provide the superintendent with information about a concern they have than as an opportunity to pursue any issues in any great detail.

Perhaps the importance of superintendent-trustee contact as a source of board member information might be diminished if the latter could gather information from another administrative source such as the principal. However, it does not appear that trustees use their principals in such a capacity, for, as Table 10 indicates, over 60% responded that they meet with principals only on a few occasions each year.

Besides controlling the communication flow, the superintendent also appears to be much more in control of the *informational base*. There is little doubt that the entire educational environment has become increasingly

TABLE 8
Frequency of Communication Between Superintendent and Board Members Outside of Board Meetings

<i>Contacts per month</i>	<i>Frequency of trustees (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative frequency of trustees (%)</i>
Fewer than 1	10.4	10.4
1	18.1	28.5
2-5	41.2	69.7
5	30.3	100.0
Total	100.0	

NOTE: $N = 614$

TABLE 9
Number of Hours Board Members Communicate With Superintendent Outside of Board Meetings Each Month

<i>Hourly contact</i>	<i>Frequency trustees (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative frequency of trustees (%)</i>
0	8.2	8.2
1-3	71.7	79.9
4-6	14.5	94.4
7-9	1.3	95.7
10-12	3.2	98.9
13-15	0.4	99.4
20+	0.6	100.0

NOTE: $N = 463$

complex during the past several years. Accompanying this complexity has been a tendency on the part of the professional educators to create a new language for their craft (Awender, 1978, p. 40). By dressing communications in such jargon, the superintendent essentially maintains control over it. Such an approach places the trustee in a position where he/she either must set aside an adequate amount of time (and patience) for translation purposes or muster an equal degree of courage if he/she wishes to take a position contrary to the advice of the professionals. Rather than risk this, very often the trustees will simply bury themselves in more mundane matters, and acquiesce in the superintendent's control over the communication factor.

TABLE 10
*Frequency of Communication Between Principal and Board Members
 Outside of Board Meetings*

<i>Contacts</i>	<i>Frequency of trustees (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative frequency of trustees (%)</i>
Rarely	14.3	14.3
Few times a year	46.6	60.9
Monthly	22.7	83.6
Weekly	16.4	100.0

NOTE: $N = 461$

SUMMARY

This paper began with the suggestion that a successful educational enterprise involves co-operation between trustees and superintendents. However, it also recognizes that there are some issues about which these two principal parties disagree. Consequently, it seeks to examine the relative *power positions* of the superintendent and school board within such situations.

A view that both the board and the superintendent have access to various sources of power is offered. Those of the board are legal authority, the support of the electorate, some knowledge of the educational system, and personal prestige and social status. Those of the superintendent are professional expertise, public opinion, ties with local power brokers, and access to various power tools. Finally, it is suggested that there are three additional sources of power. These are finances, personnel and communication.

To facilitate the discussion surrounding these variables, a survey of 557 Canadian school boards was undertaken. Approximately 55% of the boards responded, with trustees from all of the provinces participating in the study.

Briefly, the findings concerning these three primary variables are as follows:

- (1) Finances: The initial conclusion one might reach here is that the board members appear to control this factor; however, a closer examination reveals that, generally speaking, trustees really depend upon their superintendents for direction in this area.
- (2) Personnel: the board has the legal right to control this factor; however the trustees' lack of expertise and time, as well as the tradition of past

practices, preclude them from utilizing this as an effective power source. (3) Communication: The board acquiesces to the superintendent's control over both the communication flow and the information base.

In effect, then, the superintendent has been handed the opportunity to become the dominant partner in this relationship essentially because of his/her control of the three factors under discussion here. Obviously, it does not follow that a superintendent will automatically assume that position. Nevertheless, the opportunity does exist.

Given this potentially powerful position occupied by the superintendent vis-à-vis the board, one must reconsider the *openess* of such a system. As reported earlier (Awender, 1980), a great deal of *in-breeding* occurs amongst trustees in Canada. Not only is there little incumbent *vote-out* but over half of the individuals serving on school boards either have relatives employed in education or possess some other type of educational connection. Without additional research, one can only speculate that such a situation might provide a forum whereby board members are socialized into appropriate operating modes so that they share values regarding appropriate role behaviour in their dealings with the superintendent. If this is the case, they could become even less critical of and more acquiescent to the superintendent's advice and expertise. Unless the latter build administrative mechanisms into the system providing opportunities for *true* self criticism, such a posture on the part of the trustees could effectively close the system to the general public.

Finally, several words of caution should be offered. While this article has dealt with universal propositions and conclusions which apply to boards generally, other factors may exist which could colour and flavour the superintendent-trustee relationship. Indeed, one purpose of the discussion offered herein was to germinate additional research on the topic. In addition to dealing with the identification of other factors, such research might also examine the basic concepts of *responsiveness*, *openness*, and *differentiation* as these apply to the system described in this study. Only through additional research into these questions, as well as others that will undoubtedly arise in future studies, will we begin to unravel more information about superintendent-school board relationships.

NOTES

¹ Throughout this paper, the term *superintendent* is used to refer to the chief administrative officer employed by a school board. In some geographical areas, this individual is referred to as a superintendent, and in others, the director of education.

² Much of the current literature in this area suggests that superintendents are only one of a number of pressure groups with which the board must deal. In fact, in many cases, the

superintendent actually performs a mediator role for the various interests (Downey, 1977; Wright, 1977; Ingram, 1978). Nevertheless, this study suggests that there still are times when the superintendent and school board have differing opinions about various issues. In such instances, the relative power sources available to each become critical. It is the latter that this study examines.

³ A high quality source of the early history of education in Canada is *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (1978). For more recent information relevant to this topic, Hodgson et al., *The Organization and Administration of Education in Canada* (1980). As well provincial acts and regulations, available from the various provincial education departments, would serve as excellent sources.

⁴ The notations on the questionnaires and the verbal responses from the trustees interviewed suggest that the respondents viewed supervision and evaluation synonymously. It is acknowledged that a more precise conceptualization of the trustee's role might have been elicited if additional differentiation of these terms had been provided.

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Se enviaron cuestionarios a 619 miembros de comisiones escolares en todo el Canadá para tratar de recoger información acerca de la relación entre miembros de tales comisiones y los superintendentes escolares. El estudio reconoce que estas dos partes generalmente cooperan de una forma no adversarial. Sin embargo, a veces el Superintendente y la Comisión pueden tener diferencias de opinión. En estos casos, la opinión de la parte que controla las "fuentes del poder" generalmente prevalece. Este estudio examinó primero varias "fuentes" identificadas por medio de investigaciones anteriores y luego se centró sobre las tres áreas de finanzas, personal y comunicaciones. Cincuenta y cinco por ciento de las comisiones encuestadas respondieron, y el estudio encontró que si bien los miembros tienen potencialmente control de estas áreas, es en realidad el personal administrativo superior de la comisión el que en la actualidad tiene el poder sobre estas tres categorías, y por lo tanto domina el ambiente educacional.

Fragebögen wurden an 619 Schulbehörden in ganz Kanada geschickt, in einem Versuch Information über das Vorsteher-Behörden-Verhältnis zu sammeln. Diese Untersuchung erkennt an, daß diese beiden Parteien im allgemeinen auf einer harmonischen Basis fungieren. Es könnten jedoch gelegentlich zwischen dem Vorsteher und den Behörden einige Meinungsverschiedenheiten auftreten. Im letzteren Fall herrscht meistens die Meinung der Partei, die die "Machtquellen" kontrolliert. Zunächst untersuchte diese Arbeit mehrere von den "Quellen", die von vorhergehenden Forschungsstudien identifiziert worden sind, und konzentrierte sich dann auf die drei Gebiete von Finanz, Personal und Kommunikation. Bei dieser von 55% der Behörden beantworteten Umfrage stellte die Untersuchung fest, daß, obwohl die Behörden die Möglichkeit haben, diese Gebiete zu kontrollieren, es eigentlich die höheren Verwaltungsbeamten der Schulbehörde sind, die zur Zeit Macht über diese drei Kategorien ausüben und infolgedessen das Bildungsmilieu dominieren.

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