

THE BALANCE OF POWER: A STUDY OF ATTITUDES  
AND PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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RELATED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF  
SCHOOL COUNCILS**

BY  
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## ABSTRACT

The education system in Newfoundland and Labrador, as elsewhere, has been described as a social systems model which depends upon either internal feedback from the organization or external feedback from the environment to modify its structure and functions. In recent years, both internal and external feedback have been impacted by changing educational and social conditions, as well as by financial restraints. In order to determine how the system should be modified so as to accommodate these changes, the government established a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education. A number of modifications were listed in the Royal Commission Report including the recommendation that members of the general community, parents in particular, should have more input into school governance through the establishment of school councils.

The aim of the study is to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of the major stakeholders with regard to the concept of school councils, as presented in the Royal Commission Report, as a means of increasing local involvement in school governance. The study was conducted in a rural area of Newfoundland and relied on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Questionnaires were used to collect data from parents, teachers and students; semi-structured interviews were used with the superintendent, board chairperson, two board members, principal and vice-principal.

A majority of parents and students indicated that they were satisfied with present opportunities for involvement by parents, teachers, students and the principal. Teachers indicated satisfaction with only the principal's input. Of the groups listed, the only two with which at least half of the parents and students did not indicate their satisfaction were representatives of the church and general community.

Most of the parents and teachers agreed with the recommendation that school councils be comprised of the principal, teachers, and parents. Parents also agreed that other community representatives should be included. Neither of the groups agreed with the recommendation to include representatives of the church. Five of the six interviewees agreed that parents and church representatives should be on councils, four agreed that the principal should be present, and the reaction was mixed to the other recommended groups.

Over half of the students and parents concurred with the recommended responsibilities as outlined in the Royal Commission Report. The only responsibility of

councils that teachers disliked was that of sharing in staffing decisions with the school board. Interviewees agreed that school councils should authorize the raising of funds, communicate policy and practice concerns to the school board, and seek ways to involve parents. Neither of the interviewees assented to councils sharing in staffing decisions. The other recommended responsibilities received mixed reactions from both interviewees and questionnaire respondents.

Most interviewees perceived that increased local involvement in school governance would create an atmosphere of greater awareness and ownership, and lead to an improved learning environment. There were, however, a number of potential barriers identified including a scarcity of qualified individuals to sit on school councils and undefined roles for the various stakeholders. Further, concerns were expressed that school councils would add another level of bureaucracy to the present system, be expensive, have too much control over local education, increase the workloads of administrators, and create conflict of interest situations for teachers. It was suggested that these difficulties might be partially overcome by encouraging the participation of informed parents, scheduling regular meetings, re-defining administrative roles, and providing sufficient funding, time and training.

The findings of this study can be better understood when analyzed in terms of the impending power shift that will, in all likelihood, occur with the introduction of school councils. Presently, most control of local education is held by those stakeholders near the top of the traditional pyramid of authority including churches, school boards, and superintendents. With the establishment of school councils, much of this control will shift to those who have traditionally been near the bottom of the pyramid and have had the least amount of input into school governance, namely teachers, parents, and members of the general community. Considering the influential role of principals on these councils and their impending relationship with school boards, school councils may also be viewed as a means of empowerment for principals. Generally, it seems that those individuals who are presently disenfranchised want more control, while those with the power appear reluctant to relinquish it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

The report of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education, *Our Children - Our Future*, states that "to realize any new vision of education, the education system as it now exists in Newfoundland and Labrador must be changed" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1992, p. 203, hereafter cited as the Royal Commission Report). Educational and social imperatives along with financial realities are cited as reasons for this change. In particular the report points to changes in traditional industries, workplaces, technology, population characteristics and family structures which have made the present system outdated. Other significant factors include declining enrolments, decreasing financial resources, non-satisfactory achievement levels, increasing strains on economic resources, new expectations, greater consideration for the rights of all individuals and groups, and demands for access to governance from disenfranchised groups.

The Royal Commission Report states that more direct and significant links are necessary between parents and school to ensure that educators are prepared to meet the increasingly more complex needs of children and the community. Local involvement in school management is seen as the key ingredient in the process:

... to achieve success a new partnership in education must evolve in this province, one which will ensure a more flexible and responsive system at every level. Fundamental to this change is the recognition that participation by parents, teachers, and others at the local level can bring significant improvements, both in academic attainment and in public advocacy for education. Recent studies show that schools flourish when all groups are brought together in the pursuit of a common cause, are given the power to initiate change, and face together the complex forces which influence teaching and learning. (p. 222)

To accomplish the task of increasing local involvement in the governance of schools, the Royal Commission Report recommends, through government legislation, the establishment and maintenance of school councils. These councils would comprise of parents of children registered at the school, teachers, church representatives, other

community members and the school principal as an ex officio member. Parents and teachers would be elected by their respective groups while church representatives would be appointed by the church and the other community members would be appointed by other members of the council.

School councils would be unlike the present Parent-Teacher Associations or the Home and School Associations in that their authority would be much more extensive. For example, the proposed council would have a direct say in school level decisions related to such issues as curriculum, funding and staffing as well as being able to advise other levels of administration, particularly the school board. On matters of concern to them, most notably in the areas of policies and practices of the school. The council would also assume responsibility for seeking ways to further increase parent involvement in school life and assessing and communicating the school's overall performance.

The Royal Commission Report recognizes, however, that there may be difficulties inherent in this collaborative approach. Firstly, considering that many school administrators are not accustomed to public input in school decision making, it is speculated that many will be sceptical about the value of school councils. Secondly, considering that many parents are not accustomed to having an input into school decision making, parents in some areas may not want to participate. In order for the proposed model of governance to be successful, the report claims that these areas will have to be addressed and two major changes in attitudes and expectations will be necessary on behalf of the two major stakeholders, namely administrators and parents. The report states:

First, those who now have the power to make decisions must recognize that others associated with the system can make important and valuable contributions to the learning environment. Administrative resistance to sharing power is, perhaps, the greatest barrier to change in this regard. Second, those who do not at present have decision-making authority or an advisory role will have to recognize the importance of their new rights and the significance of their potential contribution to learning. (p. 233)

The Royal Commission Report states, however, that these difficulties are not insurmountable and offers some suggestions as to how they might be alleviated. For example, to encourage principals, staff and other administrators to become advocates for parental participation, the Royal Commission Report suggests that the various school boards put in place a program of in-service training for these individuals. Further, in case

of lack of parental involvement, it is suggested that the school board appoint an individual whose responsibility would be to work with principals and appointed community representatives to help establish the council.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Restructuring in school governance is not unique to this province. A reformation has been taking place in other Canadian provinces as well as in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, United States and Great Britain (Davies, 1987; Dixon, 1992; Greenwood and Hickman, 1991; Elliott and Marshall, 1992; Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas, 1987). There are several factors that have prompted this change. A primary cause appears to be related to the constant development taking place within education as a result of the ever-expanding growth of knowledge and educational technology. This growth has produced demands for more resources, for re-assessment and, consequently, for re-formulation of existing systems. Also, the relationship of education to employment and leisure activities has changed significantly in recent years and has brought into focus the practical application of learning acquired in school. Generally, public demands include making educational experiences more meaningful for twentieth century lifestyles (Hughes, 1989).

Inherent in these calls for restructuring of the educational system is an appeal by parents for more involvement in school related decision making. In many areas polls have shown that parents want more contact with schools (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie, 1987; Nardine and Morris, 1991). Generally, there is dissatisfaction with the traditional "top-down" authority pyramid in which professionals and bureaucrats control the educational services being delivered to the general public (Davies, 1991, Stouffer, 1992). A key component in the mainstream movement to reform in school management is a reversal of this authority pyramid to a "bottom-up" approach in which a greater portion of the decision making lies with those who have most to gain from the system, that is the students, parents and general community. Many governments now recognize that this type of restructuring is essential and "believe a more decentralized governance structure is needed so that schools, as unique educational entities, can offer their local communities the services, programs, and activities they desire" (Murphy, 1991, p. 63).



This movement toward greater local involvement and control of the school system has been spurred by studies purporting to show that increased parental participation, in a sustained manner, results in a positive effect on their children's educational achievement (Flaxman and Inger, 1992). There is also the recognition and acknowledgement not only by the parents but by administrators and teachers as well that "schools cannot educate children alone and need the support, if not the active collaboration, of parents" (Moles, 1987, p. 137). Education is being increasingly viewed as a family/school partnership. Stouffer (1992) reports that this partnership not only improves the education of students but has some spin-off effects. Among these are an enhanced sense of pride in community and school, a greater willingness to "buy into" rather than sabotage educational decisions, and mutually beneficial support for both parents and educators when dealing with difficult students and situations.

Public involvement in educational decision-making in Newfoundland and Labrador has been minimal in the past but is increasing. A number of school districts have put in place a system of school committees with an established communication channel to the school board so that local concerns can be accommodated. Public input into educational matters also occurs through the various ad hoc groups associated with specific issues such as French Immersion programs, francophone and native schooling (Howse, 1992).

The change in school governance proposed in the Royal Commission Report represents a radical change from that already in place in most school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador. The success or failure of this proposed approach depends in large measure on the potential barriers posed by the existing attitudes and expectations. It is these possible hindrances that provide the impetus for this study. The general purpose of this thesis is to assess the attitudes of the major stakeholders toward the concept of school councils as outlined in the Royal Commission Report. Specifically, these stakeholders include students, parents, teachers, vice-principal and principal, board members, board chairperson and superintendent.

The study will identify the extent to which these various stakeholders perceive the concept of school councils, as presented in the Royal Commission Report, as a useful means of increasing local involvement in school governance. It will also identify and analyze, from the perspective of the various stakeholders, the positive and negative aspects of such involvement as well as any potential barriers to successful implementation of school councils and how these might be overcome. Further, the study will identify and

analyze what the various stakeholders perceive as their role in school governance and how, in their view, the implementation of school councils would impact on current practices.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The magnitude of the recommended changes to educational governance in this province can be better understood if one is cognizant of the structure already in place. That structure is similar, in many respects, to that which exists in other educational jurisdictions in that it contains the usual agencies including the Department of Education, school boards, superintendents and principals. Perhaps its single most distinguishing feature relates to its denominational nature, the inclusion of Denominational Education Councils and the influence possessed by the various religious groups. All of these groups, to varying degrees, share in the responsibility of administering education in Newfoundland.

The education system in this province is also very similar to that elsewhere in the manner in which it interacts with its environment. It possesses a degree of flexibility that is essential if the organization is to prevent itself from becoming obsolete. Hoy and Miskel (1987) and others posit that this is an on-going process and refer to it as a social systems model for schools. The three main components of the model are the environment, the institution and behavioural outcomes. Environmental factors determine the structure and functions of the institution which in turn produces a set of outcomes. The outcomes may produce changes within the institution by either direct, internal feedback to the institution or indirect, external feedback through the environment.

An application of a social systems model to the Newfoundland school system is depicted in Figure 1.1 (Treslan, 1988). The socio-educational system is viewed as a system of governance involving a bureaucratic pyramid that controls organizational structure, curriculum and instruction, staff and pupil management, school-community relations, and, finance and business management. The impact of the various decisions made in each of these areas filters back through the environment to produce either continued support for favourable decisions or demands for new ones.

The pyramid of authority for the Newfoundland system is depicted in Figure 1.2 (Treslan, 1991). Responsibility for education is viewed as a partnership between Government and Church. The former is responsible for enacting laws and regulations

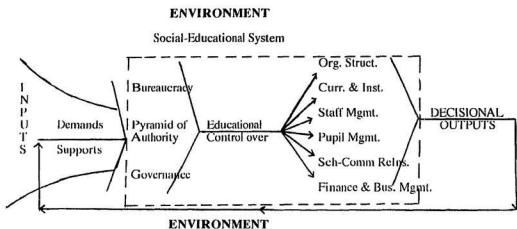


Figure 1.1. Social system conceptualization of education.

governing schools, developing curriculum, setting minimum standards and providing financial support. The responsibilities allocated to the control of the church include determining how and where money will be spent, developing and prescribing programmes in religious and family life education, and making recommendations to government regarding school district boundaries, appointment of school board members and teacher certification.

The roles assigned to the other stakeholders within the pyramid are similar to that found elsewhere. The three primary functions of local school boards include policy development, implementation and evaluation (Treslan, 1991; Enns, 1969). Inherent in these functions are numerous decision making responsibilities some of which pertain to the delivery of education within their jurisdiction, employment of personnel, attendance zones, maintenance of buildings, and pupil transportation. The superintendent, as the chief executive officer of the board, is generally responsible for seeing that the wishes of the board are carried out. The primary responsibilities of the principal relate to staff and personnel development; pupil personnel services; program development; resources procurement and building management; and, school-community relations (Ubben and Hughes, 1987). Teachers are primarily responsible for teaching the prescribed curriculum.

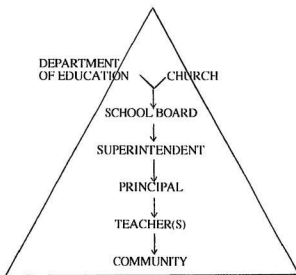


Figure 1.2. Traditional authority pyramid of Newfoundland education.

Community input into educational decision making matters is minimal with involvement normally occurring through either trusteeship positions on school boards, or through such groups as Parent-Teacher Associations, Home and School Associations or Parent Advisory Committees that might operate in some areas. Those elected or appointed to the school board usually have the greater amount of influence over the decision making process. Parent-Teacher Associations, Home and School Associations, and Parent Advisory Committees do not have any legislated power and are often viewed as fund-raising agencies for the schools. The notion that the general community, has the least amount of input of all of the major stakeholders, apart from the students, into educational decision making is substantiated by Treslan (1991). In a study of superintendents and directors of education in the Atlantic Provinces, it was found that these influential individuals perceived, not unexpectedly, that the general community had the least amount of control of all of the agents listed in Figure 2.

The recommendations related to school councils as outlined in the Royal Commission Report would, if implemented, result in a shift of control within this

administrative hierarchy. It is proposed that the general community be given a greater amount of control over the educational system, hence raising its profile in relation to the other agents or agencies within the hierarchy. The result should produce a more balanced distribution of decision making authority.

All of the agents or agencies, from the Department of Education and Denominational Education Councils to principals, will have their control base eroded to some extent by the introduction of school councils. It is undoubtedly the principalship position, however, that will be impacted the most. Although it is recommended that personnel be available at the board and department level to assist in the establishment and maintenance of local councils, it will obviously be principals who will shoulder the greatest portion of the burden to see that these councils are set-up and operate as proposed.

This could pose a dilemma for many principals. On the one hand, these individuals will have the greatest amount of direct involvement with school councils and will obviously play an instrumental role in determining their degree of success. On the other, it could be perceived that they have the most to lose in the process, the loss being an erosion of control over the decision making process or a loss of authority. Presently, these individuals have virtually carte blanche control over school level issues. While some principals may seek input from teachers or parents, through such groups as Parent Advisory Councils, their authority is far-reaching and they are free to run their schools in what might be construed as an autocratic manner in some instances.

To more fully appreciate the loss that some principals may experience, it is necessary to explore the concept of authority as it relates to the position of the principal. Weber defined it as "the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (cited in Hoy and Miskel, 1987, p. 109). Weber further identified three value orientations that were seen to provide legitimacy to the exercise of control. These are charismatic, legal and traditional, commonly referred to as the bases of authority. Others, most notably Simon (1957), Isherwood (1973) and Blau and Scott (1962), have revised and extended Weber's notion to include formal and functional authority. Formal authority is described as being derived from legitimacy and position factors while functional authority is derived from competency and human relation skills (Ryan, 1983 and Hoy and Miskel, 1987). For present purposes, the discussion will focus on Weber's classifications.

Charismatic authority is dependent upon a person's character. It is that authority which is associated with the personality and characteristics of an individual. It relates people's willingness to take direction from a particular individual based on trust and personal appeal of the individual. There is a general feeling of devotion of one to another and a desire to seek the other's approval. Charismatic authority is typically nonrational and emotional in nature. In contrast, legal authority has nothing to do with the person or the position but rather with "the scope of authority vested in the office by law" (Hoy and Miskel, 1987, p. 110) These laws, or contractual agreements, can only be changed through formal, legislative procedures. The third base of authority, traditional, is attributed to the high status which has customarily been afforded certain positions by society in general, or a given community in particular. The individuals who occupy these positions inherit authority which has previously been established.

The establishment of school councils has implications for principals as it relates to these bases of authority. Firstly, considering the empowerment of teachers and the general community through provincial legislation, principals will be exposed to relationships which may not be of the typical staff-line nature with which they are accustomed. As such, authority based on the legal perspective will have less influence than previous. Secondly, given the foregoing circumstances and the general nature of the people, it should soon become evident that one can attract more bees with honey than with vinegar, hence, charismatic authority should take on new importance for principals. Finally, the greatest effect is very likely to be experienced in the area of traditional authority, particularly in rural areas. To fully appreciate the significance of this impact one has to be aware of some of the history and characteristics of rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the status of teachers and principals in these areas.

One of the most difficult tasks encountered when attempting to discuss "rural" communities is that of definition. Although many would profess to understand what it means, the concept is difficult to define precisely. The Department of Education publication, *Education Statistics - Elementary-Secondary (1991-92)*, does not provide a direct definition of the term but it does describe "urban" as including Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA), Census Agglomerations (CA) and other communities 5,000 and over. CMAs and CAs are defined to have at least populations of 100,000 and 10,000 respectively and meet one of the following criteria: "(1) the census subdivisions (CSD) falls completely or partly inside the urbanized core; (2) at least 50% of the employed labour

force living in the CSD works in the urbanized core; and (3) at least 25% of the employed force working in the CSD lives in the urbanized core" (p. 129). Since the report categorizes all communities as either urban or rural, then by default, all areas that do not meet these criteria are classified as rural.

Rural communities are distinguishable from urban on more than simply population statistics. The thousands of kilometres of coastline in Newfoundland and Labrador are dotted with hundreds of communities that traditionally have centred around the fishery. The numbers of these communities were reduced significantly during the 1950s and 1960s under a government resettlement plan and most of the remaining communities are now linked by roads. Despite the improved connections with the outside world, many have maintained a uniqueness stemming from years of isolation. This uniqueness includes the inextricable role played by educators in the many facets of community life.

Although the level of teacher education would pale when compared with present day standards, traditionally, teachers were among the most highly educated in these communities. Up until the 1960s, rural communities that were able to attract teachers who had themselves completed high school and had some teacher training, usually in the form of summer school courses, considered themselves fortunate. These individuals were held in high esteem and were looked upon to provide any number of services within the general community, especially those associated with leadership. For example, it was expected, and common practice, for teachers to conduct regular church services and burials, operate the Sunday school, act as Justices of the Peace and participate in the various community organizations. Teachers were also called upon to assist in private matters such as writing and reading correspondence for those unable to do so themselves and provide advice and guidance on family issues. In communities large enough to need the services of more than one teacher, and fortunate enough to be able to attract more than one, the more senior of the two was usually appointed head master/mistress or principal. These individuals were held in even higher esteem by the general community than ordinary teachers with many of the above mentioned duties falling to that person.

The present day population is generally better educated than previous and the same degree of dependence upon teachers no longer exists. However, the introduction of school councils may have significant impact on the mind-set of both the general public and educators, especially principals, in rural areas. So steeped in tradition are the members of the general community, it is anticipated that there will be difficulty in attracting sufficient

numbers to assume the new and expanded roles that have been allotted them. At the same time, and again due in large part to tradition, it is also anticipated that those who presently hold positions of authority, the school administrators, will strive to hold on to what already exists.

### **Significance of the Study**

The education system in many countries has been criticized by the general public for not functioning as well as it should. Harold (1989), cited in Elliot and Marshall (1992), specifically states "the general perception that governments at all levels [have been] wasteful, inefficient and unresponsive to community needs, and that there [has been] a financial necessity to ensure the public receive more 'value for money' from the tax dollar" (p. 1). In addition to the fervour associated with a generally unresponsive system, the education system in rural areas in particular has also been the target of much criticism.

In order to respond to these issues, many districts have instituted reform leading to the establishment of school councils. Much has been written regarding the implementation of these governing bodies. Most of the research pertains to urban areas and has produced mixed results. There is a dearth of information on this topic as it relates to rural situations. For an extensively rural province such as Newfoundland, this has particular significance since those planning to implement a system of school councils may be doing so on the basis of research conducted in settings dissimilar to this province.

Although there is a lack of specific research on the viability of the concept of school councils in rural areas, there are inferences that can be made on the basis of other studies dealing with small schools, leadership and teachers in rural communities. Some of the studies appear to present evidence which supports public involvement in school governance in rural areas while others do not. Those that appear to support public input should be viewed sceptically. The evidence presented might in fact favour public input, but at an informal level only, not as a formal process as is recommended in the Royal Commission Report.

For example, Lomotey and Swanson (1989) argue that the "climate" of rural communities may make them more conducive to the implementation of these councils than urban centres. These authors state that the "sense of community" is much stronger in



smaller, rural areas and, as a result, there is a much greater "sense of belonging" among its inhabitants. This attitude underscores differences in teaching philosophies such that "the warmth of the personal and familial relationships carries over into the schools, where there is a climate of acceptance, cooperation and mutual support" (p. 441). Lomotey and Swanson (1989) further posit that, as a result of this climate, "many of the innovations of the current educational reform movement have long been standard features of many rural schools" (p. 442). Quite clearly though these arguments are based on observations of an informal rapport and spirit which are often present in smaller communities but are unlike those required for the actual operation of school councils.

Also, Baksh and Singh (1979), in a Newfoundland study, suggest that, on occasion, issues normally not open to public control in urban centres might be in rural areas, depending on the nature of the community and the level of expertise available from the public and administrators. However, these writers observe that this openness appears more likely to occur in rural settings since the same amount of bureaucratic red tape may not be necessary in small, informal settings as in larger, urban areas.

Lomotey and Swanson (1989) also discovered that differences in the quality of educational leadership between the two areas might appear to contribute to greater public input in the rural areas. Rural schools are often viewed as "training grounds" where "professional leadership often has a fleeting quality and tends to be inexperienced" (p. 443). As a result of this lack of consistent leadership from educators, lay people have traditionally been involved in program continuity, school-based decision making and school-based budgeting. However, these researchers suggest that while the decision making process takes "into account the uniqueness of each case" it is not always formal (p. 443).

Other inferences made on the basis of evidence collected from studies conducted in rural settings are more obvious and quite clearly do not favour the successful operation of school councils in these areas. Regarding leadership, for example, another finding of the Baksh and Singh (1979) study indicates that educators are seen as active participants who are "widely involved alongside 'native' residents in the on-going life of the community but that the former are often active as leaders" (p. 39-40). Generally, teachers are expected to belong to the various community organizations and to assume many of the leadership roles.

Another barrier identified as an impediment to community involvement in educational governance, particularly in rural areas, concerns the general public's lack of

willingness to be involved in matters of which they have little knowledge (Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas, 1987). This has been considered more of a hindrance in rural areas than in urban since there is a greater preponderance of professional people in urban areas from other fields, outside of education, who are considered to be more capable of making informed decisions regarding school governance.

Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas (1987) also noted a similar reaction from people of lower socio-economic areas. Principals in these areas report having to expend considerable energy in identifying and encouraging people to participate in school councils. This is not to suggest that all rural Newfoundland and Labrador is in the lower socio-economic strata but merely to acknowledge the current reality. Before mandating school councils, consideration must be given to the social effect of the apparent bleak future of many rural communities in this province.

It would appear then that not only is there a lack of specific research on the implementation of school councils in rural areas but the findings from those of urban areas are inconsistent. Research findings though appear to support the notion that cultural and social factors associated with rural areas are very much different from that of urban areas and therefore concepts that have had some degree of success in the latter may not succeed in the former.

The significance of this study is that it specifically addresses issues and concerns relevant to the establishment of school councils in rural areas of this province. Considering that 352 out of 512 schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, or nearly 70%, are located in rural areas, the findings of this study should have particular relevance for those who may be charged with the responsibility of implementing such councils in these areas (1991-92 Education Statistics: Elementary - Secondary).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study is limited to an examination of the attitudes and perceptions of most of the major stakeholders, with respect to school councils, who are associated with one particular school. These include the board superintendent, two board members, the board chairperson, the school principal, the school vice-principal, teachers, students and parents. Although the Royal Commission Report recommends that representatives of the churches and the general community be included on school councils as well, they have not been

specifically identified for inclusion in this study. It is possible, however, that these individuals might be included as members of other stakeholder groups. Furthermore, the students selected for inclusion have been limited to those enrolled in Levels 1, 2 and 3. Those students registered for the lower grades, kindergarten to grade 9, are omitted.

The research setting chosen is a rural one. It was not chosen on the basis of any sort of random selection. Rather it was chosen because of its accessibility and suitability in meeting the needs of the present researcher. Having stated this however, it is also recognized that there are many similarities between this and other settings in the province. While it is not necessarily the intention of the researcher to generalize these findings, for that will be left to the prerogative of the reader, many meaningful insights may be gleaned from the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The validity and reliability of the findings of this study may be limited by a number of factors. These relate to: (1) time restraints; (2) responses to questionnaires; (3) observer effect; (4) observer bias; and (5) nature of the study.

#### **(1) Time restraints:**

One method of data collection employed in this study involved interviewing. While any arbitrary length of time could be set for this process, one had to be cognizant of time restraints placed on both the interviewer and the interviewee. In an effort to balance these restraints against the needs of the researcher, approximately one to one and a half hours were allotted for each interview.

#### **(2) Responses to questionnaires:**

The use of questionnaires as a method of data collection was also utilized in this study. A disadvantage often associated with these instruments concerns the high number of non-returns. This could be particularly troublesome if the questionnaires were to be completed anonymously, as was the case in this study, therefore limiting the amount of follow-up. There was also the danger that only those individuals who were dissatisfied with the present governance system would respond while the views of the other members of the population would not be represented.

(3) Observer effect:

The presence of an observer or researcher can influence the responses obtained. The informant may possess preconceived notions of what the researcher expects and answer accordingly. While this difficulty is more likely to be associated with interviews, it can also affect responses on questionnaires. For example, the student questionnaires in this study were completed in class, with either the researcher or a teacher present. Even though every reasonable effort was made to make students feel comfortable, some students may have felt intimidated by such a situation and felt compelled to respond in a certain manner, not as they would under normal circumstances.

(4) Observer bias:

An individual perceives any event through his particular value system. In order to avoid tainting research findings, the researcher must remain neutral and strive to gather, report and interpret data as accurately as possible. This is usually a greater problem for those conducting observation studies but can influence the interpretation of data from interviews if caution is not exercised. The researcher was cognizant of this pitfall and made every effort to report the findings accurately.

(5) Nature of the study:

The basis of the data gathered in this study concerns information about peoples' attitudes and perceptions. The information conveyed by the informants was supposedly representative of their personal views and feelings towards the selected topic. Such information was of a personal and confidential nature and was therefore difficult to collaborate.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. The first contains relevant background information to the study, a general statement of the problem to be investigated, a conceptual framework, an outline of the significance of the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to school councils, in particular that which is concerned with barriers to effective school councils. Chapter 3 provides a list of the specific research questions to be answered and outlines the research methodology to be employed in the study. Supporting rationale for the quantitative, qualitative and case study approaches to research are presented as well as a description of

the instrumentation to be used in the collection of data. The findings of the study are analysed and presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 identifies and interprets significant results, lists conclusions, provides a summary and proposes questions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This chapter provides a review of the literature and research related to some aspects of school councils. In particular, information is presented which pertains to the evolution of school councils, their composition, structure and authority, as well as arguments regarding the effectiveness of councils. A number of barriers are identified which are thought to inhibit the success of these governing bodies including the nature of schools as organizations; attitudes and abilities of teachers, administrators and parents; and others. The review is intended to provide background information to better facilitate an understanding of the specific problems with which this study is concerned.

#### Background Information

The notion of passing school governance from the hands of a few administrators to the whole community is not novel. Australia, the United States, England and other western European countries have been involved in setting up local school councils since the 1960s and 1970s (Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas, 1987). Murphy (1991) states that the change became necessary because "many governments believe a more decentralized governance is needed so that schools, as unique educational entities, can offer their local communities the services, programs, and activities they desire" (p. 63).

Gittell (1972) suggests there are other motives for school councils as well:

Those who control the schools have been unable to produce acceptable results; they have excluded the public and the students from a meaningful role in the policy process. The structure of schools must be adjusted to encourage the involvement of all interested parties and to give the community greater control over educational institutions. Participation in itself provides an involvement with the system which can diminish alienation and also serve to stimulate educational change; it is itself an educational experience. This new role for the community is not conceived as an abandonment of professionalism, but rather an effort to achieve a proper balance between professionalism and public participation in the policy process. (pp. 683-684)

Thus the establishment of school councils is generally viewed as a means of producing more acceptable results through the increased involvement of the general community in educational governance.

Most school councils are elected by the parents of children attending a particular school. If, through lack of interest, there are not enough volunteers to hold elections then representatives are usually appointed from the community. Although the structure and make-up of these councils can vary, membership usually includes parents, teachers, the school principal, and other community members. The other members are usually representatives of church, business and/or other prominent organizations within the community. Depending upon the ages of the children attending the school, the students themselves may be on the council. Usually this privilege is reserved for students of intermediate level or higher. Jennings (1989) notes that school support staff should also be included in this group.

Jennings (1989) suggests that an ideal size for a council is nine to eighteen members. Jennings argues that at least nine members are necessary to ensure a good range of opinions while more than eighteen members becomes unwieldy and expensive. The typical roster might include four each of students, parents and staff, one or two members from the general community who are not parents, and the principal as an ex officio member.

The internal structure of school councils and the manner in which they operate is similar to many other organizations. Cistone, Fernandez & Tornillo (1989) report that most of these governing councils entail the formation of a central decision-making body and a number of subcommittees. The subcommittees are usually assigned specific areas of responsibility such as curriculum, student management, scheduling and school community relations which may also be delineated along specific constituent roles such as grade-level, parents, students or teachers. In essence, subcommittees are the working groups of, and report directly to, the main executive body. Generally, the complexity of the governance structure set up within the school councils appears dependent upon the amount of authority they hold. The more extensive the authority, the more intricate the structure.

The role of councils in school governance may either be as an advisory body to the school administration or as the final decision making body on all issues related to the general operation of the school. If it is the former, then the final decision-making authority lies with

the principal, superintendent or school board. But where the role involves direct responsibility, decisions concerning matters such as curriculum, budget and staffing rest with the council itself while the principal maintains responsibility for the daily operation of the school.

### **The Effectiveness of School Councils**

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot states "The presence of parents can transform the culture of a school" (cited in Davies, 1991, p. 378). Very few educators would disagree with this statement and most would encourage parents to participate in their children's education. However, what is brought into question is the level of involvement. There is overwhelming support for the involvement of parents in activities directly related to instruction, but such is not necessarily the case for the involvement of parents in school governance.

The Royal Commission Report (1992) states that "recent studies show that schools flourish when all groups are brought together in the pursuit of a common cause, are given the power to initiate change, and face together the complex forces which influence teaching and learning" (p. 222). A cursory look through the literature would indeed reveal support for parental involvement. Solomon (1991) states "research on parent involvement consistently shows that parents can make a difference in the quality of their children's education if districts and schools enable them to become involved in education in a variety of ways" (p. 360).

Such support is not only espoused by educational theorists but also practitioners in the field. For example, Jennings, a principal in the southwest United States, has established site councils in four different schools and writes "site councils of school staff, parents, other community members, and students can dramatically improve education" (1989, p. 42). This educator also notes "as stakeholders, parents bring essentially one item to the school agenda; they want a good education for their children" (p. 43).

Joyce Epstein, a long time supporter of parental involvement in education, notes that research has shown support for varying degrees of involvement at all grade levels (1987). Dixon (1992) summarizes the position of these and other writers of similar view by stating that studies show parental involvement produces measurable gains in student



achievement. Dixon notes that the converse is also true as well. That is, the schools with the higher levels of achievement reflect the greater amount of involvement by parents.

Despite the foregoing arguments in favour of parental involvement in educational governance, not all writers are of like mind. For instance, Flaxman and Inger (1992) state that "parental involvement is not an educational panacea"(p. 7). Specifically referring to school councils, Taylor and Lewis (1988) note that redesign of governance and accountability reform alone is not successful as a means of turning around an education system. The results of a study by Ogletree and McHenry (1990) lend support to this notion. These researchers surveyed 100 teachers from 10 schools participating in one of the more publicized school reform movements during the 1980s, the Chicago reform movement, and reported that there were very few gains. Specifically, it was reported that local councils had produced no improvements in student achievement, school discipline, teacher morale, collegiality, school climate, teacher involvement in decision making, or job satisfaction. Generally, teachers held a pessimistic view of the councils.

None of these studies is suggesting that there is no place for parental involvement in education. On the contrary, many encourage teachers and administrators to increase their efforts to include parents and other members of the general public. Where these studies disagree with some of those studies previously mentioned is in the degree or level of involvement. Fantini (1980) and Sinclair (1980) reflect the general opinion of this group by noting that citizen participation in governance seems to show less impact on achievement than does citizen involvement in instruction. That is to say, the greatest impact a parent can have on his or her child's education is by becoming directly involved with some aspect of instruction such as helping the child to read and write.

These writers agree though that, although the impact on achievement is insignificant, there are some benefits to being involved in school governance. For example, Sinclair (1980) concludes, following an extensive literature review, that involvement in school governance enhances student self-image. Conway (1984) elaborates further by stating participation increases feelings of self-worth and heightens an individual's self-confidence. Despite these benefits however, Conway (1984) states "citizen participation, whether mandated or voluntary, has not demonstrated higher quality decisions, nor has it resulted in greater support from citizens so involved" (p. 32).

### **Barriers Inhibiting School Council Effectiveness**

Despite what Davies (1987) referred to as the "currently fashionable rhetoric about the topic", resistance to parental involvement remains high. In a review of the American school system, Davies noted that about one-third of the schools studied showed substantial involvement but that it was minimal in the remaining schools. In an attempt to discover why this should be so, the present writer will now outline some of the difficulties identified in the literature as being associated with the restructuring of school governance so as to include school councils. The problems appear to relate to the nature of schools as organizations, attitudes and abilities of teachers, administrators and parents, as well as other barriers.

#### **I. The nature of schools as organizations**

While it is true that schools include teachers, administrators and parents, and each of these components separately has their own agenda, collectively they form a fairly intricate organization. This organization may, in some ways, resemble any other organization such as a business or the post office but at the same time may be very different from them because it is a school. Davies (1987) states that since schools are organizations they tend to exhibit certain characteristics, common in all organizations, which slow down the change rate. The writer states:

(1) organizations perform their functions through routines or standard operating procedures that make possible regular and coordinated activity but make it difficult to respond to crisis or changing external demands (such as a school effectiveness project or a required citizen participation mechanism);

(2) organizations try to avoid uncertainty and seek stable internal and external relationships;

(3) organizational procedures and repertoires of activities usually change only incrementally and new activities typically consist of marginal adaptations of existing programs and activities; and

(4) organizations will usually allow only a limited search for alternative solutions to problems and generally will choose a course of action that "will do" rather than one that might seem to be optimum but would require higher risk or more change in standard operating procedures. (This is the organizational principle of "satisficing".) (p. 158)

In addition to these general characteristics, Davies (1987) also notes that schools exhibit some special characteristics that inhibit change just because they are schools. Those that are particularly pertinent to citizen participation include:

(1) The goals of schools as organizations are diffuse, multifaceted, and subject to widely varied interpretation (as contrasted to the post office whose goal is to deliver mail or a manufacturing firm whose goal is to maximize profit.)

(2) The "technology" of achieving goals is fragmented with responsibilities divided among administrators, counsellors, classroom teachers, teaching specialists, families, and the students themselves, and the connections between a particular activity and a particular desired goal are often uncertain.

(3) The informal norms of school organizations are particularly powerful. The norms and specialized language of teachers as a professional group are buttressed by teachers' training and by their professional associations and unions. One such norm is "professional autonomy" in decision making.

(4) The formal structure of schools is unique. The various levels of decision-making activity - (federal, provincial, district, school and classroom) - operate relatively independently of one another, with limited coordination and control. As many have pointed out, public education is a loosely coupled system. This means that mandates from one level to another are never self-enforcing. (p. 159)

In addition to the bureaucratic nature of schools, the individual characteristics of each of its participants are also important in determining the success or failure of any venture undertaken. The role of educators will now be considered with a view to ascertaining how this group might influence, in a negative manner, the functioning of school councils.

## 2. Attitudes and abilities of teachers and administrators

The school principal is generally viewed as the single most influential person in determining the survival rate of school councils. Foster (1984) notes that the attitude of these people toward what they perceive as outside meddling is not always positive:

... (the) most critical factor in determining effectiveness of council, research has shown, is the principal's attitude toward the group. That attitude is more often than not negative. Privately, some principals with councils in their schools would like nothing better than to send the parents home and keep the decision making among professionals. They find it enough to deal with disgruntled and angry parents every day without having them become a formal presence in school affairs. (p. 27)

Jennings (1989) attributes much of this reluctance to accept parental involvement to entrenched attitudes or practices in the schools. Jenkins (1976) notes that many principals simply do not value community input, let alone community control. "The barrier to more

parent involvement", Dixon (1992) writes, "is not parent apathy but lack of support from educators" (p. 15).

Why do such attitudes exist amongst some educators, in particular administrators? Moles (1987) concluded, following a survey conducted in the southwest United States, that "the elements of confrontation and power sharing are likely to make local educators and school officials uneasy with these forms of parent involvement" (p. 139). In a review of research conducted by educators in a number of states, Foster (1984) reported that teachers felt threatened by such extensive involvement in school governance. Also, principals felt that councils were of little value in the overall management of the school and that they infringed on the administrative function.

Moore (1991) suggests that negative attitudes stem from administrators' views of the level of expertise required for the decision making process. The individuals who occupy these positions of authority generally consider it to be the domain of the highly trained and experienced. The notion of sharing control with inexperienced, untrained or transient parents can be difficult for administrators. For example, in an Australian study, Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas (1987) report that principals view parents, students and teachers as inexperienced in reading budgets and financial statements and in rational decision making, and therefore incapable of making sound decisions.

Comer and Haynes (1991) rationalize the negative attitudes on the part of administrators as either apprehension stemming from doubts about the ability of parents to make sound school-related decisions or from past unpleasant encounters with parents. If this were so, then one would think that the status of individuals in the school's community would have some affect on administrator's receptiveness to outside input. Jenkins (1976), however, reports that the negativism exists regardless of qualifications or socioeconomic background of those available to serve on local councils.

Some writers have questioned the real motives behind parent involvement in education. Flaxman and Inger (1992) state that parents are not seen, nor do they view themselves, as colleagues but rather as watchdogs. And, while their intent is to make schools more accountable to parents, such notions often set up barriers between the school and the home. Further, some principals believe that

[community input] is bad news. It invites in the wrong people .... Control puts pressure on for the development of a power base for things which don't have anything to do with education and are actually anti-educational. It breeds teacher

insecurity, loss of staff morale, and loss of professional integrity. (Jenkins, 1976, p. 28).

Campbell, Fleming, Newell and Bennion (1987) observe that it was, and still is, the view of many educators that school governance should be taken away from private citizens and placed back in the hands of the experts. Members of the general public, unlike school officials, were thought to be especially vulnerable to patronage and other self-interests.

The presence of school councils poses a real dilemma for many administrators. In areas where these bodies have been legislated, the school administrator has little choice but to provide them with opportunities for involvement in the decision making process, yet, many still feel they must protect their turf. In order to do so, these administrators, Murphy (1991) suggests, will have to turn the process into a political game. Murphy explains:

In the future, all school leaders must become more politically astute if they are to survive in a collaborative educational community. The school councils with whom they will have to cooperate will consist of parents with varying political, social, cultural, and economic values. Administrators will have to 'manage' situations so council members perceive the welfare of the groups they represent has not been threatened. (p. 64)

As part of the political game, Foster (1984) reports that some principals "have turned to the subtle art of persuasion, steering the council in the direction they want it to go" (p. 27). Very typically this means that councils, as a matter of regular course, deal with trivial matters while administrators, who continue to sit on any of their recommendations, give the impression of support. Foster cites an *Education U.S.A.* survey which reported some common hazards for school councils. These included:

...turning the council into a rubber-stamp group approving administrative moves; using it as a convenient shock-absorber to fend off community criticism; molding it into a propagandizer to support the school budget, local bond issues, curriculum changes, student discipline, and teacher negotiations; making it into a shield for the school board in trouble with its community or school staff. (p. 27)

Educators have acquired a number of techniques to enable them to manipulate school councils. For example, in a Quebec study, Lucas, Lusthaus and Gibbs (1978) did an analysis of the minutes of a number of different school council meetings which highlighted two common outcomes in such events. The results clearly showed that a major portion of the meeting dealt with trivial matters such as procedural information and

indicated a clear dominance by school authorities in the affairs of the committees. Foster (1984) also noted that teachers and principals tended to dominate meetings or even ignored or neglected councils altogether.

Another mechanism for controlling school councils relates to its dependency upon the school, school board and/or its administrator for resources, funding, staffing and information. Davies, Stanton, Clasby, Zerchykov and Powers (1979) suggest that a principal who can maintain a tight control over these factors can also maintain a tight rein on councils. These researchers also suggest that, in areas where vacancies on the council are filled by appointment, the school administrator can further extend control over the council through his/her influence over the composition of the council. This is particularly relevant in areas of high turnover among council membership.

In summary, not all situations involving school councils are as democratic as one would like to think. Negative attitudes on the part of administrators regarding, in particular, the perceived low level of expertise that citizens bring to the decision making process have caused them to devise schemes to maintain their control. These schemes are usually political in nature and involve manipulating teachers, citizens and agendas.

### 3. Attitudes and abilities of parents

Apart from negative attitudes by administrators, possibly the next greatest concern regarding the establishment of school councils has to do with the attitudes and abilities of parents and/or other citizens. Apathy is a particular concern. Attracting volunteers, in particular suitable volunteers, to sit on these forums is especially difficult in some areas, especially rural areas (Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas, 1987). Jennings (1989) attaches some of the blame for this on past practices of school officials by noting that stakeholders are not accustomed to standing in line to participate since they are so use to being left out.

Many think that if this attitude really does exist, it can be changed and individual citizens can be encouraged to participate in school governance. Gittell (1977), for example, suggests that public perception regarding the amount of control a council has over the affairs of the school is a major factor in determining the number of individuals who step forward to volunteer their time. Gittell notes that attitudinal studies of political effectiveness suggest that, when people feel they can control what goes on, they are more

likely to become involved. Lindquist and Mauriel (1989) predict that council members will become disinterested if decisions are small and unimportant.

Not all writers in this field agree with the notion that all citizens want control, particularly over major decisions. Hoy and Mishel (1987) theorize that participation in decision making is related to a person's 'zone of acceptance'. These writers take the position that

if subordinates have a personal stake (high relevance) in the decision and have the knowledge to make useful contributions (high expertise), then the decision clearly falls outside the zone of acceptance, and subordinates should be involved in the decision-making process. If the issue is not relevant and it falls outside their sphere of competence, however, then the decision clearly falls within the zone of acceptance and involvement should be avoided. Indeed, involvement in the latter case is likely to produce resentment because subordinates typically will not want to be involved. (p. 339)

Following this logic, many of the decisions to be made by school council members might indeed have high relevance for them but if they lack the expertise to deal with the matter then it falls outside their zone of acceptance and, theoretically, they would be willing to relinquish those decisions-making tasks to others. If one accepts this perspective as plausible then it would seem that there are conflicting views regarding the amount of power or authority that will satisfy parents.

Another difficulty associated with parental attitudes and the successful establishment of school councils relates to 'in-servicing' or 'training' of the participants. While the provision of such has been deemed essential by many of those working in the area and, indeed, some districts have attempted to comply, these efforts may not always be appreciated by the recipients. As Miller (1983) reports, "council members are often sensitive to 'being trained' " (p. 73). Some participants view this training as a means of manipulation and resent being told what they should do and how they should act.

Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas (1987) report, from an Australian study, that council size seems to have an affect on the amount of input people are willing to contribute to a given situation. It was noted that people were passive in large group situations thus enabling the principal or staff member to make a motion and then pass it without much discussion. This being so, an observant principal who wishes to maintain control over the council might want to ensure that all council positions are filled to the maximum number

allowable and that all members attend on a regular basis or at least on those occasions when important there are important issues on the table.

Simpkins, Thomas and Thomas (1987) also reported that people often quit serving on school councils due to the politicalness of these bodies. A report from the Institute for Responsive Education (1979) substantiates this difficulty by observing that in some instances community organizations become preoccupied with self-survival while other priorities, such as representation of community interests in school policy, become secondary. This became particularly evident during the Chicago reform movement. According to Rist (1990) "some councils become embroiled in community politics, for example, trying to put Hispanic principals into the schools and attempting to control school jobs through the local councils" (p. 24).

There are other difficulties associated public attitude and the establishment of successful school councils as well. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) identified six more reasons that parents give for lack of involvement in school governance. Some simply admit that they do not value education while others report feeling powerless to influence the school or feel decision making should be 'left up to the experts'. Others believe they do not have the necessary knowledge or social skills, or, they report having had negative experiences with school themselves and do not see school as a 'place of hope'. Still others list work commitments and poor health as reasons for not being able to participate. White and Bonney (1980), in a survey of 24 southeastern United States councils, also noted that poor member attendance, lack of interest, and poor understanding of the council's role were all listed as major hindrances to the effective operation of school councils.

The attitudes and abilities of parents obviously have a significant bearing on the success of any proposed council. This seems inevitable since most populations are very likely to include two extremes. At one end of the spectrum are those who have a complete lack of concern or interest and would rather leave the decision making to the traditional power brokers, while at the other end are those who have highly personalized agendas and who like to have total control. Either of these extremes could prove detrimental to the successful implementation of a school council.



#### 4. Other barriers

Perhaps the single most important factor relating to the success of school councils, which is outside the control of either parents or principals, has to do with the preparation of the participants. While some of these people might indeed be sensitive to 'being trained', practically every writer on the topic from the 1970s to the present agrees that if participants are to be involved in school governance then an in-service program is absolutely necessary (Jenkins, 1976, Milier, 1983, Jennings, 1989, Rothstein, 1990, Dixon, 1992). In particular, these writers point to the need to clarify ambiguous guide-lines so that all members are familiar with their duties and roles. Jennings (1989) suggests council members should be provided an orientation so that they will be better prepared and feel more comfortable about their role and function. Jennings argues that the training program should include information regarding the role and authority of councils, their purpose, the district organization, the value and function of committees, consensus decision making, team building, how to disagree and the value of expressing a different view, expectations of membership, resources, and council structure. Despite this acknowledgement however, Lindquist and Mauriel (1989) state "in general, schools have not been allocated the additional money and training necessary to learn to make the important personnel, budgetary, and curriculum decisions required by the theory of school based management" (p. 414).

In 1977, as school councils were just starting to evolve in some areas, Gittel emphasized the need for these bodies to have direct access to information and be provided with technical assistance. It was obvious from the beginning that the functioning of these councils could be severely limited if the principals were allowed to screen the information reaching them and also control the financial and material resources available to do their intended job. These councils, it would appear, need an information system with direct access to all stakeholders as well as independent facilities equipped with all necessary resources (Lucas, Lusthaus and Gibbs, 1979, Dixon, 1992).

It is obvious as well that the establishment of school councils will require more than just legislative action on the part of any government. Lindquist and Mauriel (1989) acknowledge that the fact of the matter is decentralized decision making does take time, effort, organizational skills, and study. In addition to these factors, Foster (1984) identifies others which have had a negative effect on the success of some councils such as a

poorly trained principal, a lack of real leaders in the community, nightly meetings, insufficient staff support, councils making decisions but not being held accountable, and unreasonable demands being made of staff by council. Baker and Ostertag (1981) agree with many of these and add apathy, non-representativeness, factionalism, inadequate time, faulty scheduling or communication, costs, a tendency to be unwieldy, and, a tendency by councils to exceed their authority.

While most of these reasons were stated in the early 1980s, most still appear to be relevant today. Rist (1990), in reviewing the on-going decentralization process in Chicago schools, noted other obstacles as well that added to the difficulty of operating effective councils. These included ironclad union contracts, often confounding bureaucratic rules, varying leadership abilities of principals, cohesiveness of each council itself and difficulty of eliciting reliable information for making decisions.

### **Summary**

There is growing public concern that the traditional school system is not adequately preparing students for the type of society in which they will have to exist. Many view the system as closed and unresponsive. In order to correct these deficiencies, some communities have attempted to change from the traditional governance structure to a more open system in which members of the general public play a more significant role. These new governing bodies are referred to as school councils and are specifically intended to give the public a direct role in the management of their schools in such matters as establishing educational goals, staffing, allocation of resources and the development of educational options.

However, for those communities which have attempted to implement such a governance system, the reality is often quite different from what was anticipated. Parents most commonly function only as advisers or endorsers of decisions already made and have very little influence over those major decisions affecting them and their children. As a result, recent research shows a clear decline in public satisfaction and involvement after the initial energizing effects wear off.

There appear to be a number of factors that can act against the establishment and operation of effective councils. Firstly, inherent in organizations, and more specifically,

school organizations, is a bureaucratic structure which acts against change, especially if that change is forthcoming from the outside. Secondly, the personalities of the existing power brokers, especially school principals, may be such that any attempts at delegating and distributing authority may be subverted by those individuals. And thirdly, members of the general community with whom decision making is to be shared may not possess the necessary attributes or skills to manage such a task. While there may be other factors acting against public input into school governance, these appear to be the primary ones.

Studies have also failed to show much improvement in the academic performance of students in those communities where school councils have operated. Most studies show unequivocally that improved academic results are a function of direct parental participation in learning activities such as reading with the child and assisting with homework and projects. The quality of decision making has not been shown to be any better, nor has the level of community support increased due to this type of reform. The most positive statement that researchers seem to be able to make with regard to this type of involvement is that it improves the parents' self-concept and self-esteem.

Notwithstanding the foregoing arguments, school councils are viewed as a means of decentralizing school governance by shifting some of the control from professionals to the general public, especially to the parents of children attending school. It is felt that these individuals are more aware of local concerns and needs, and could, therefore, stimulate necessary changes for the improvement of education. The increased public involvement brought about by school councils is also seen as a way of decreasing alienation and bonding people together in search of a better education.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY**

The general problem identified in Chapter I is restated as a set of research questions in this chapter. The chapter also provides a general description of the research methodology employed in the study. Supporting arguments are presented for the underlying research framework which includes both quantitative and qualitative research and a case study design. The methods used to collect data, interviews and questionnaires, are noted to be accepted practices in the research community and are described in detail. Finally, the methods employed in analysing the data are presented.

#### **Research Questions**

Generally, this study will attempt to determine the attitudes of the major stakeholders with respect to the implementation of the proposed school councils. More specifically, the study will address these questions:

1. Do the major stakeholders perceive the concept of school councils, as presented in the Royal Commission Report, as a workable model for local involvement in school governance?
2. What do the various stakeholders perceive as positive and negative aspects of such involvement?
3. What do the major stakeholders perceive as potential barriers to the successful implementation of school councils?
4. How, in the view of the various stakeholders, might these barriers be overcome?
5. What do the various stakeholders perceive as their role in school governance?
6. How, in the view of the various stakeholders, would the implementation of school councils impact on current practices?

### Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Traditional or conventional educational research has centred around "quantitative" or "positivistic" inquiry which emanated from the physical and biological sciences. This approach involves an experimental design in which there are strict variable controls and data collection instruments, such as questionnaires, which allow for precise measurements. Due to the highly statistical nature of the design it was considered to have a high degree of validity. In recent years however, a second approach has been advocated as having a high degree of merit as a research tool for the social sciences. It has commonly been referred to as the "qualitative", "naturalistic", "ethnographic", "subjective" or "postpositivistic" inquiry method (Borg and Gall, 1989). Unlike the quantitative approach, the primary instruments for data collection in qualitative research involve participant observation and interviews by the investigator.

These two approaches have been described as paradigms on opposite extremes of a continuum. Borg and Gall (1989) distinguish between the two by the amount of control the investigator has over the situation and the precision of the measurement units used. Quantitative research, these writers posit, involves a rigorous experimental approach in which the behavior being studied is rigidly controlled and manipulated and precise objective units are employed to measure any behavioral change. In qualitative or naturalistic research the investigator does not influence or manipulate the behavior being studied and does not assign any pre-determined units of measurement on the outcome.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Borg and Gall, 1989), further elaborate on the differences between the two methodologies. Quantitative research is predicated on the assumption that any situation can be broken down such that all variables can be studied independently. Research is designed such that the researcher has little or no effect on the subject, or subjects, being studied and has no influence, value-wise, on the results. Generalization of results to similar contexts is accepted practice and all effects are attributable to some cause. Conversely, qualitative research is based on the premise that complex phenomenon cannot be broken down into independent parts but must be studied holistically. The researcher and subject are viewed as inextricably connected which automatically makes it a value laden situation. The accepted purpose of qualitative research is to build on knowledge of independent cases rather than to generalize.

There has been a growing acceptance of the qualitative or naturalistic approach during the past two decades. Eisner and Peshkin (1990), for example, report that the frequency of publication of qualitative research results in the more respected research journals has increased as has the number of publications of books detailing qualitative research methodology. These researchers also note that there has been a shift by some distinguished scholars from quantitative to qualitative inquiry and an increased emphasis has been placed on teaching qualitative methodology courses at the post-secondary level.

The quantitative versus qualitative debate appears to have subsided somewhat in recognition that both approaches hold merit in certain situations. For example, as early as 1979 Reichardt and Cook stated, with regard to evaluation research:

The solution, of course, is to realize that the debate is inappropriately stated. There is no need to choose a research method on the basis of a traditional paradigmatic stance. Nor is there any reason to pick between two polar-opposite paradigms. Thus, there is no need for a dichotomy between the method-types and there is every reason (at least in logic) to use them together to satisfy the demands of evaluation research in the most efficacious manner possible. (cited in Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 382)

Borg and Gall (1989) note that each model is suited to certain research questions and in some instances a combination of the two approaches could be superior to either. Eisner and Peshkin (1990) state "that future scholars may find that being 'bi-methodological' is the true mark of scholarly sophistication" (p. 7).

This approach appears to have gained increasing acceptance during the past decade. Caracelli and Greene (1993), for example, note that since the formal acknowledgement in the 1984 *Evaluation Studies Review Annual* of the growing practice of multiple methods of research, the literature has rapidly become replete with issues pertinent to the topic. Some of those receiving the most attention include triangulations, multiplism, mixing methods and paradigms, and mixed-method typologies.

In an earlier study by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), 57 mixed-method studies were reviewed with a view to developing a conceptual framework for the design of such research. Five alternative purposes for employing both quantitative and qualitative research strategies were identified and included triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion. Briefly, the primary purpose of the first of these, triangulation, is the verification of results across the different methods, a very common

goal for researchers. Complementarity is defined as the enhancement of results from one method by another. In developmental designs one method is used to develop or inform the other method. Initiation designs are intended to provoke the re-thinking of research questions and results from one method with the contrasting approach. Finally, the emergence of mixed methodologies for expansion occurs when the breadth and range of the study are extended by molding the method types for different inquiry components.

The methodology employed in this thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative aspect of the research includes questionnaires to part of the sample population and the qualitative aspect will be covered by interviews with the remaining members of the sample. The sample population under study are only those individuals connected with one school within one school board in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and, as such, represents an example of a case study.

### **Case Studies**

The general research strategies available to an investigator of the social sciences include experiments, surveys, archival analyses, histories and case studies. The specific strategy chosen is dependent upon the amount of control required over behavioral events, whether or not the event under scrutiny is contemporary and the main focus of the research questions (Yin, 1984). In this particular instance, no control is required, the event is contemporary and the basic categorization of the research questions is "how" and "why". More specifically, the focus of the study is to find out how the various stakeholders each perceive their own role within the educational governance structure, how they perceive the role of the other stakeholders, and why each of these groups of stakeholders holds the particular perception that they do. Under such circumstances, Yin (1984) posits that the case study approach is most appropriate.

The technical definition of a case study as provided by Yin (1984) is:

... an empirical inquiry that:

- (1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- (3) multiple sources of evidence are used. (p. 23)

In the present study, the contemporary phenomenon being investigated is school governance. The relevance, and hence the boundaries, of this issue to the various stakeholders is uncertain at this point in time and data is to be collected using both interviews and questionnaires.

The use of case study as a research strategy has been growing in popularity despite its earlier detractors (Kennedy, 1979; Yin, 1984; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). One of the main drawbacks often cited in using this strategy relates to its limited utility since the findings of such a study were thought not to be generalizable to populations other than the sample population. However, as early as 1979, Kennedy reported that this criticism ought not be viewed as a reason to eliminate case study designs from research methodology. It was noted that on some occasions knowledge of the general case could be used to explain or predict a specific case while in other instances knowledge of a specific case could be extended to other specific segments of a population. Kennedy warned that, regardless of the experimental design being employed, caution should always be exercised when extending the results of any study to a broader population.

Stake (1978) also points out that the intent of all single case studies is not always to represent larger populations in any event. The purpose could be one in which there is need for generalization about, or to, a particular case rather than generalization to a population of cases. Under such circumstances Stake (1978) posits that the onus is on the investigator not to generalize findings but rather to accurately describe the target case so that readers of the research can compare similarities between the target case and any others.

Regardless of the methodology or design, generalizability of findings from any study always appears to be a matter of judgement in any event. Even though that judgement has traditionally been in the hands of the researcher conducting a particular study, Kennedy (1979) declared that this ought not to be a major issue for the single case study experimental design. Of greater importance is that details about the case be produced and shared as accurately as possible so that the receivers of the information can determine its applicability. Donmoyer (1990) echoes similar sentiments specifically regarding the generalizability of research findings in noting that:

Even statistically significant findings from studies with huge, randomly selected samples cannot be applied directly to particular individuals in particular situations; skilled clinicians will always be required to determine whether a research generalization applies to a particular individual, whether



the generalization needs to be adjusted to accommodate individual idiosyncrasy, or whether it needs to be abandoned entirely with certain individuals in certain situations. (p. 181)

Donmoyer (1990) further suggests that although increasing sample size will increase the probability for success it will not ensure success.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) attempted to side step the generalizability issue by introducing the term "transferability". According to these authors, the degree of transferability of findings from one context to another is directly related to the degree of similarity between the two contexts and is referred to as "fittingness" (cited in Donmoyer, 1990). It is postulated that the greater the congruence between the two contexts then the greater the fittingness and, hence, the more transferable are the findings to the new context.

Donmoyer (1990) suggests that the function of case study research should be more than simply generalizing from Case A to Case B. It should be used instead to expand and enrich the selection of experimental designs available to researchers. Further, Donmoyer points out that "research can only function as a heuristic; it can suggest possibilities but never dictate action" (p. 182).

Generally, the applicability of case study findings to other settings appears to be a matter of judgement - judgement that is based on the similarity of contexts. In this particular instance the rural setting under study appears to be very similar to a number of other rural areas within Newfoundland and Labrador and, although the study employs a case study design, the findings should prove beneficial for others. In any event, the setting will be described in such a manner that the reader will be able to make his/her own decisions as to the applicability of the findings.

## **Interviews**

Interviewing as a basic mode of inquiry is very common to every day living and has been since the earliest of times (Siedman, 1991). The interview process can range from highly structured and rigid to flexible and open-ended, or, from a situation which is totally controlled by the interviewer to a situation in which the interviewee can determine, within certain limits, the line of questioning (Bauer and Gergen, 1968; Dexter, 1970). The latter of these two approaches, referred to by Dexter (1970) and Feldman (1981) as "indepth" or "elite" interviewing, is being employed in this study.

As a research strategy, interviewing, in particular open-ended interviewing, has several advantages over other methods of collecting data. For example, it provides a high information yield at relatively low cost and increases the likelihood that all samples are reached. In addition, it is a highly flexible method which permits follow-up, allowing the investigator to probe complex issues in much greater depth to obtain more data and greater clarity (Bauer and Gergen, 1968; Dexter, 1970; Borg and Gall, 1989).

More specifically, Borg and Gall (1989) note that, depending on the comfort level of the interviewee, the interviewer may be able to elicit information which would not normally be revealed. Typically, this information might concern some negative aspect of the person being interviewed or deal with an issue which that person finds particularly sensitive. Siedman (1991) states that the interview permits greater understanding of people's behavior since it provides access to the context of the behavior otherwise unknown.

Dexter (1970) and Feldman (1981) report that it is not always necessary to have such depth of understanding of all participants in a given event. Sometimes "in-depth" interviews with the "elites", who are the leaders or decision makers for the given event, are sufficient. These individuals are the most influential and possess the knowledge that an investigator requires. Gaining an understanding of the perceptions or inside perspectives of these people is necessary in order to understand as much as possible about the entire process of decision making or about the entire set of events (Feldman, 1981).

Siedman (1991) claims that the very nature of the interview process itself does more than merely lead the researcher to an understanding of how participants understand and make meaning of their experiences. It is speculated that the validity of a study is enhanced considerably if the interview structure works in such a manner as to allow the subject to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer. Siedman (1991) notes that the validity of a study could also be increased by interviewing a number of participants and connecting their experiences and cross-checking responses.

The reliability of the interview process also appears favorable. Borg and Gall (1989) reports on the findings of several studies that compared interview responses with questionnaire responses. For each of the studies under review the interview and questionnaire data proved to be of comparable consistency and accuracy.

## **Questionnaires**

The use of questionnaires is a very common method of collecting data in educational research. There are several advantages of this approach which are well documented in the literature. For example, it provides for the collection of data from a large population relatively inexpensively and the biasing error is reduced since there is very little personal contact between investigator and respondents. Also, those surveyed can have an opportunity to reflect and consult before answering and all respondents are exposed to the same standardized instructions. Most importantly, the results of this method of survey research are considered to be accurate, that is, within the sampling error (Fox, 1969; Kerlinger, 1986; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981).

Possibly the greatest drawback to using questionnaires to collect data is related to the poor rate of return in some instances. This can be overcome to some extent through a process called "mixed interaction". This approach was referred to by Fox as early as 1969 and, as the label implies, involves direct contact between the researcher and respondents. During this process, prior to distribution of the questionnaire, the researcher is afforded an opportunity to meet with and explain the purpose of the study, the intent of the questionnaire, and answer questions from the respondents. The instrument is then distributed and any further questions may be answered by the researcher before the respondents begin to answer the questionnaire. Fox claimed that this personal flavour and involvement on the part of the researcher provides sufficient motivation for a higher number of respondents to complete the questionnaire, yet it maintains some degree of standardization since everyone still answers the same questions in the same order.

### **The Research Setting**

The school under study is Evergreen All-Grade School located in the community of Evergreen, Long Bay. The nineteen year old building originally designed to accommodate junior and senior high students falls under the jurisdiction of the Long Bay School Board. It services students from the seven communities of Riverside, Boot Cove, Evergreen, Rider's Harbour, Spaniard's Cove, Blackduck Cove and Little Harbour. The furthest of these communities from the school are Little Harbour, 20 kilometres to the north, and Riverside, 15 kilometres to the south.

The student population for 1993-94 was 240 from kindergarten to Level 3 or grade 12. There were 94 students registered at the kindergarten to grade 6 level, 69 in grades 7 to 9 and 77 in Levels 1, 2 and 3. Most students are bussed to school on one of four buses while the remaining half-dozen walk to school. Approximately 90% of the students are Protestant and, although there is a Catholic school located in the nearby community of Rider's Harbour, the remaining 10% are Roman Catholics from Rider's Harbour and Spaniard's Cove. Apparently, the parents of these students have opted to send their children to the larger, integrated school because the Catholic school only has a population of approximately 40 high school students and, as a result, a very limited course selection.

There were twenty teachers, 13 male and 7 female, on staff at Evergreen All-Grade School including the principal and vice-principal. The average age of the teaching staff was between 35 and 40 years. Eight of these teach primarily at the primary and elementary levels while the others taught mostly at the junior and senior high levels. Five teachers had less than 5 years teaching experience, one had from 6 to 10 years experience, three had from 10 and 15, six had from 16 and 20, and five had more than 20 years experience. Except for the four new teachers who joined the staff for the 1992-93 school year, all other teachers had taught at the school for at least 5 years. Seven members of the staff lived in one of the communities serviced by the school while the others commuted to Coopersville, the largest town in the area, approximately 50 kilometres south. Five staff members, including the principal and vice-principal were originally from the area. The principal and vice-principal had between 10 and 15 years teaching experience each and were formerly principals of elementary schools that had closed with the pupils being bussed to Evergreen All-Grade School.

Most people in the area were laborers and, until the recently announced fish moratorium, depended upon the fishery for their livelihood. Prior to the moratorium, they typically worked in fish plants, on company owned draggers or operated their own fishing boats. Some were still employed in Coopersville, a relatively large industrial town, and commute back and forth while others leave their families for extended periods of time during the year to work in central and western Canada. In addition to the teachers, there were approximately twelve other professional people who worked in the area including pharmacists, public health nurses and doctors. Only a few of these people lived in the area full-time. Other than the children of teachers, very few other students who attended Evergreen All-Grade came from families with a parent in a professional occupation.

### Data Collection

The school selected for study was one of fourteen within the school board and the school board was one of twenty-seven within the province. The research setting may be described as typical of many of the rural settings around Newfoundland and Labrador. The school was of average size and was one of two within close proximity, each catering to students of the same grades but from different religious denominations. Students who attended the school came predominantly from coastal communities that shared similar lifestyles as those in many other communities around the province. While generalizability was not the primary concern for selecting this setting, many of the findings might indeed be applicable to other areas. The setting was chosen on the basis of convenience for the researcher and a prior knowledge that the district might be interested in and willing to cooperate with the researcher in such a proposed study.

Data were collected through the use of interviews and questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with the elites of the system specifically, the superintendent, two board members, board chairperson, principal and vice-principal (Appendix A). Questionnaires were used to collect information from students, teachers and parents (Appendices B, C and D).

The type of interview employed was formal and semi-structured. It was formal in the sense that a specific time and place for the interviews were mutually determined. The interviews were semi-structured in that a specific set of questions was not asked of the interviewee but served as a guide. This type of interview has been termed by Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) as "the focused interview". Bauer and Gergen (1968) describe it as follows:

...before he makes the interview, the investigator develops a series of hypotheses concerning the effects of the environment on the person. This entails, of course, that the investigator possess a prior working knowledge of his area of study. On the basis of these hypotheses, the investigator fashions an *interview guide* that contains a list of major areas of inquiry and the hypotheses. The guide serves to orient the interviewer to specific types of questions. However, unlike the standard interview, the guide does not list a specific set of questions to be asked of each respondent. Rather, the interviewer is allowed considerable freedom in the type of question he asks

and when he asks it. In addition, he is allowed to probe more deeply whenever it appears desirable. In other words, the guide provides a set of foci for the interviewer, but the interviewer himself determines the exact form and structure of the interview as he best sees fit. (p. 222)

For this particular study, the interviewer and the investigator are one and the same.

The interview was kept semi-casual so that the process was as non-intimidating and uninhibiting as possible for the participants. Although the direction of the conversation was largely controlled by the investigator, considerable leeway was given to interviewees in responding to the questions. It was the intent of the interviewer to make the interviewees comfortable enough so that "through the careful motivation of the subject and maintenance of rapport, (the interviewer) can obtain information that the subject would probably not reveal under any other circumstances" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 447). With permission of the participants the conversations were recorded on audio cassette, otherwise the interviewer attempted to keep copious notes.

The direction of the interview was largely determined by the research questions. Generally, the intent was to ascertain the various stakeholders' perceptions of the recently proposed change for school governance in the form of school councils. More specifically, the researcher focused on the positive and negative aspects of such a change, potential barriers to the recommended changes, the impact of the proposed changes on current practices, and the expectations of each group for their new roles.

### **Interview Schedules**

The same interview schedules were used for all interviews. However, since the format was semi-structured, neither the order of topics nor the line of questioning was necessarily be the same for each interview (Appendix A). If an opportunity presented itself and the information appeared relevant, the interviewer exercised his prerogative to explore the topic in more depth.

The interview schedule was organized under five topics as follows:

1. School councils as means of increasing local involvement in school governance.

The general intent of the first part of the interview was to set the stage for the rest of the interview. The situation was made as congenial as possible so that participants felt comfortable and uninhibited. Interviewees were encouraged to express their opinions about the workability of such a model and what they perceived as some of the positive and negative aspects of the model.

2. Identification of potential barriers to successful implementation of school councils.

Interviewees were asked to speculate about the potential difficulties inherent in the proposed change. They were asked to comment on any obstacles they perceived from their perspective as well as the perspective of the other stakeholders.

3. Overcoming the perceived difficulties.

Having previously identified potential difficulties, each of the interviewees was asked his/her opinion as regards to possible solutions to these difficulties. If the interviewee has previously failed to identify any barriers, then the interviewer suggested some that have appeared in the literature. The interviewee was asked to comment on whether or not they perceived it as an obstacle and, if so, how it might be overcome.

4. Impact of proposed change on current practices.

Each of the interviewees was asked to speculate on how these proposed changes would impact on current practices, not only from their own perspective, but from the perspective of the other major stakeholders as well.

5. Future role expectations of stakeholders.

Those interviewed was asked to describe how they perceived their role in school governance under the proposed scheme.

6. Other comments.

Opportunity was afforded the interviewees to comment on any other issues related to school councils that they felt were important but had not been addressed in the interview.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires were used to solicit the opinions of all students registered in Levels 1, 2 and 3, all teachers instructing in the school, and all parents who had children attending the school. Each group received a different form of the questionnaire but all three forms covered the same topics, only the perspective changed (Appendices B, C and D). The focus of the questionnaires was similar to that of the interview schedules. For each question, the respondents were asked to identify or rank items from lists provided, answer positively or negatively, or, indicate their degree of satisfaction with particular statements.

### **Administration of Interview Schedules and Questionnaires**

Permission was received from the superintendent of the selected school board to carry out the proposed study in the fall of 1993. Two weeks was spent in the district during October to carry out the research. During that interval all potential interviewees were be contacted, the purpose of the interview explained, and a mutually acceptable time and place set.

Permission was received from the principal to meet separately with the staff and Levels 1, 2 and 3 students to explain the purpose of the research. Questionnaires were handed out at that time. Arrangements were made to have students fill in the questionnaires at that time, otherwise both teachers and students were given two or three days to complete the questions.



The questionnaires for parents was distributed to students through homeroom visits by the researcher. The return of these questionnaires was encouraged by follow-up visits to the homeroom and by general announcements from the principal's office. Approximately one week was allowed for the return of these forms.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected in this study were analysed and interpreted within the context of what may loosely be referred to as a "case study approach" to research in which the investigator makes a detailed examination of a single subject, group or phenomenon (Borg and Gall (1989). Yin (1984) further specifies that the phenomenon under study should be contemporary and within a real life context. The case study approach has also involved "long periods of time actually in the field collecting detailed observational data ... while 'living' as members of the selected community" (Harte, 1989, p. 46). While this is not a part of prescribed methodology employed by the present researcher, the time spent in the district both prior to and during data collection did provide insights not otherwise gleaned.

The data collected were of two forms, qualitative from the interviews and quantitative from the questionnaires. The qualitative data were in narrative form and included verbatim accounts where appropriate. Audio tapes and any other notes kept by the interviewer was examined and the findings categorized on the basis of the research questions and interview schedules as outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively.

The questionnaires in this study contained a Likert-type scale in which "the individual checks one of five possible responses to each statement: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 311). The information collected from the students, teachers and parents via this instrument was analysed and displayed using the statistical software package, SPSS-X (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences - Version 10*). Descriptive statistics, including the mean, median and standard deviation, were used to describe and compare measures of central tendency for each group. Cross-tabulations were also employed to complete a comparative analysis across all three groups.

The data were categorized and analysed on the basis of the research questions. Responses of the participants was compared and contrasted in view of these questions and an attempt was made to provide a rationale for any similarities and discrepancies. From a

broader perspective, the findings of this study were also analysed in light of the findings of other studies presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. In particular, the findings were interpreted from the perspective that the present research setting, unlike most of those presented in the literature review, was rural. Again, significant similarities and/or discrepancies with previous research were noted and an attempt was made to provide an explanation for each of these.

### **Summary**

The study was conducted within a rural region of Newfoundland and included all major stakeholders associated with one particular school in that area. The research design employed might loosely be called a case study and relied on both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the form of questionnaires and interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the superintendent, two board members, the board chairperson, principal and vice-principal, who are commonly referred to as the elites of the system. The interview schedule addressed five topics: school councils as workable models for local involvement in school governance; identification of potential barriers to successful implementation of school councils; overcoming the perceived difficulties; impact of proposed change on current practices; and, the future role expectations of the stakeholders.

Questionnaires were administered to the other three major groups of stakeholders, namely, students, teachers and parents. A Likert-scale type instrument was used to ascertain the attitudes held by each of these groups towards each of the five previously stated topics.

The data analysis consisted of a detailed examination of audio tapes and notes from the interviews, as well as statistical information from the questionnaires. Similarities and discrepancies, both within and across the various groups and individuals, were noted and a rationale for each was attempted. It is not the intent of this study to make generalizations on the basis of the data collected. Any applicability of findings collected from the setting described herein to any other setting is strictly a matter of judgement for the reader.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**DATA ANALYSIS**

Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires were used to obtain the data. This chapter is divided into two sections, the first presenting and analyzing the interview data collected from the six interviewees and the second part presenting and analyzing the data from the questionnaires. Table 4.1 provides the numbers and percentages of respondents to the questionnaires.

Table 4.1

Number and Percentage of Respondents to Questionnaires

	Total Population	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Students	77	62	80.5
Parents/Guardians	149	87	58.4
Teachers	20	17	85.0

The total population of students and family units (parents/guardians) was determined on the basis of school registration records. It was determined from the data collected that the 87 respondents in the parents/guardians category each came from 87 different families units and represented 153 of the 240 students attending the school. That is to say, the 87 family units represented 58% of the family units connected with the school or 64% of the student population.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of taped interviews included interviews with the superintendent, principal, vice-principal, school board chairperson, and two school boards members. The

analysis of questionnaire data included three different questionnaires from students, parents and teachers. The data were used to address each of the six research questions as outlined in Chapter 3. These questions focused on school councils as a workable means of increasing local involvement in school governance, the positive and negative aspects of such involvement, the identification of potential barriers to successful implementation of school councils, overcoming the perceived difficulties, the impact of proposed change on current practices, and the future role expectations of stakeholders.

### **Organization of Interview Data**

Semi-structured interviews were held with the elite of the school and school board. All but one of the interviewees had been in their current role for several years and all individuals were quite knowledgeable with respect to the topics raised in the interviews. Not all interviews proceeded in exactly the same fashion since the individuals involved represented different perspectives, and consequently, some of the questions had greater meaning for some of the interviewees than for others. The emphasis of the interview depended to some extent on the role and will of the individual being interviewed.

### **Organization of Questionnaire Data**

The results or responses for all items on the questionnaires pertaining to present opportunities for involvement in school governance as well as items pertaining to the composition and responsibilities of school councils were summarized by frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. These statistics were calculated for all groups of respondents together as well as for each of the groups separately. The crosstabs and oneway anova procedures permitted comparisons of correlation and variance among the three groups.

The questionnaire items related to present opportunities for involvement contained five possible responses from which to choose including *Very Dissatisfied*, *Mildly Dissatisfied*, *No Opinion*, *Mildly Satisfied* and *Very Satisfied* while those related to school council composition and responsibilities asked participants to choose from *Strongly Disagree*, *Tend to Disagree*, *No Opinion*, *Tend to Agree* and *Strongly Agree*. Although descriptive statistics were obtained for each of the items based on the 1 to 5 scale used in

the questionnaires (Appendices A, B and C), each of the responses was further collapsed to a 1 to 3 scale and categorized as either *Dissatisfied*, *No Opinion* and *Satisfied* or *Disagree*, *No Opinion* and *Agree* for the others. Descriptive statistics were then obtained for each of the items based on these new categories as well as statistics describing the relationship among the three respondent groups and variance in group means.

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

Interviews were conducted with six individuals including the superintendent, principal, vice-principal, school board chairperson, and two other school board members who are referred to as board member A and board member B. Both of these board members are members of the clergy. The interviews were approximately one hour in duration.

#### **Research Question #1 - Do the major stakeholders perceive the concept of school councils, as presented in the Royal Commission Report, as a workable model for local involvement in school governance?**

Interviewees were asked a series of 15 questions related to the composition and responsibilities of the school councils as outlined by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary and Secondary Education. Specifically, the interviewer identified each of the individuals and groups recommended to comprise the councils along with each of its responsibilities and asked interviewees to indicate their agreement or disagreement and justify their answers. Interviewees were then asked whether or not they agreed generally with the proposed composition and responsibilities of the council. Each specific question is given below in italics.

*Do you agree that the composition of school councils should include parents elected by parents of children registered at the school? Why or why not?*

The superintendent, principal, vice-principal, and both board members agreed that parents of children registered at the school ought to be involved. The superintendent cautioned, however, that his concern was not so much whether they were parents of children in the school system or if they were elected as long as there were parents capable

of serving on the various committees. Concern was expressed by the principal and vice-principal that those parents involved be able to express themselves clearly and be genuinely concerned about the education of their children and not simply out for "teacher blood".

Board member B, who had served on several school boards in other areas of the province, noted that parental involvement was desirable but expressed a concern about getting people to run for these positions. Many school board positions, he argued, are presently filled by appointment in many rural areas because nobody runs for election. The member stated "I've had to beat the bushes to try to get people involved, not only in this area but it is the same in other areas where I have lived. Outside of the urban centres, I've not been in an area where there has been an election."

The lone interviewee who did not totally agree with the concept of parents being involved was the board chairperson who found it "difficult to imagine" and thought "it might work better in some areas than others". The interviewee argued that parents associated with one particular school "might not see the overall picture from the board perspective particularly when confronted with issues such as staffing and school closings. Parents have to realize that there is only so much money to go around."

*Do you agree that the composition of school councils should include teachers elected by teachers? Why or why not?*

The responses to this item were split with three individuals in favour and three against. The principal, vice-principal, and school board member A agreed with the recommendation. The principal noted that as long as people, either parents or teachers, brought a positive outlook to the school then he was satisfied. The board member stated that "if we are going to have a representative type of system then teachers and parents coming together is vital for children's education".

The superintendent, board chairperson, and board member B disagreed with the recommendation and surmised that it could lead to a conflict of interest situation. For example, the superintendent stated "if there are councils with legislated autonomy power and we have employees of the system sitting on that council then there is blatant conflict of interest. I don't see it. I see teachers there in an advisory role to parents, either elected or appointed". The board chairperson thought that it would put staff members in a very awkward position if they were involved in a staffing decision and then the next day had to work with the individual who was the subject of discussion during the previous meeting.

Board member B reaffirmed the notion of conflict of interest by saying that it was not proper for employees to set organizational policy.

*Do you agree that the composition of school councils should include representatives of the churches? Why or why not?*

All but one of the interviewees, the principal, agreed that representatives of the churches ought to be included on school councils. The principal expressed a fear that, although education might be the main interest of most clergy and other church lay people, religious prejudices could interfere with other events in the school.

The other interviewees observed that churches had a constitutional right to be there and serve as a voice for students and parents of the different religious denominations. Further, board member A stated that this was not the only place that the church should be involved in education but also that "it should be right at the very top of the governance structure in partnership with government". Board member B remarked that with all of the councils and committees presently in place, along with those proposed, that "there's not enough of us [clergy] to go around".

*Do you agree that the composition of school councils should include representatives of the community chosen by other council members? Why or why not?*

The superintendent, principal and board chairperson agreed that any individual would be welcomed if they had a worthwhile contribution to make to the education system. The superintendent again indicated that it did not matter to him if the individuals were parents of children registered in a school or not, as long as they were willing people and able to help. He noted for example that retired people, particularly retired principals, have both the experience and the time to be able to make a significant contribution in many capacities.

The other three interviewees had reservations about members of the general community participating in school governance. The vice-principal thought that only those members of the general public with children attending school should be permitted to serve on school councils. Board member A expressed concern that the "shakers and movers of the community", along with the clergy, were already so involved in all of the other organizations within the community that they would not have the time to serve on school councils or, at the very least, they would be stretched to their limit. Board member B

commented that if principals become the chief executive officers and members of the general public are allowed to sit on council then they could easily stack the council to push through their policies.

*Do you agree that the composition of school councils should include the school principal? Why or why not?*

All interviewees except the superintendent and school board member B agreed that the school principal should be on the council. The superintendent stated

[It] depends on how or if these councils evolve. If done by school then the position of principal will be similar to position of superintendent to school board. The principal will be the chief executive officer of the school council. The principal will probably not be any more a member of council than I am a member of the school board. Don't agree with principal or any other teacher being a member of council.

The superintendent further noted that the role of the principal, as chief executive officer of the council, will be to advise and take direction from the council.

Board member B expressed some difficulty with the notion of the principal as chief executive officer. In particular, the participant disagreed with the amount of authority that would be associated with the principalship position if the number of boards was reduced, as proposed in the Royal Commission Report, and schools became distanced from central office. He viewed this as a regressive step, back to the days of the school inspector when someone would visit the school once or twice a year.

The principal reflected a similar concern that, under the proposed new council, a principal could have too much power or say especially over particularly sensitive issues. However, the principal maintained that since it was essential for only those with the required background knowledge to have the final say with regard to issues such as curriculum then the principal had to be included on school councils. The vice-principal and board member A voiced the opinion that the principal should simply be an ordinary member of the council with full voting privileges.



*Generally, do you agree with the proposed composition of school councils as outlined by the Royal Commission? Why or why not?*

The superintendent, board chairperson, and the two board members had reservations regarding the proposed composition of school councils. The superintendent, for example, indicated that more parental involvement was desirable but the concept of school councils was not the best alternative to achieve this. He viewed the increased teacher involvement as a problem and that, despite the stated intent in the Royal Commission Report to cut back on bureaucracy, in reality it was proposing to add an extra layer with the introduction of these councils. The superintendent noted that putting in a school council and attaching one for every school was a step backward to what existed before 1969 and the integration of the boards at that time. It was acknowledged that some kind of system to further enhance parental involvement should be put in place but that it did not need to be a legal and autonomous one.

The board chairperson reiterated disagreement with school councils but conceded that if there had to be councils then the composition as proposed in the Royal Commission Report would provide for fair representation. Both board members expressed similar views indicating that the implications for the school and community were far reaching and that many individuals who would be expected to give a greater contribution are already overburdened. In contrast, the principal and vice-principal strongly agreed with the overall composition, noting that greater parent involvement was needed to help set expectations and examples for the students.

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to protect local educational interests? Why or why not?*

Most interviewees were unsure of what was meant by 'protecting local educational interests'. The superintendent however did note that, in the context of much larger boards as proposed in the Royal Commission Report, a school board member would have responsibility for a much larger area. And, since board members would not have the time to represent all views within their jurisdiction, it would probably be left to the councils to voice many of the local concerns and interests pertaining to education.

Other interviewees thought the question meant either looking at individual community needs and tailoring the school operation to suit those needs, or protecting and maintaining a community school. Board member A thought that this might have a negative

effect if it was interpreted to mean that different denominational schools in the same community would strive to hang on to their own interests at a cost of not coming together or sharing. Board member B suggested that the recommendation reflected negatively on the present system and seemed to imply that what was already in place was not sufficient.

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to influence the formation of the school? Why or why not?*

Although the interviewees were uncertain as to what was meant by 'influencing the formation of the school', all but the vice-principal offered possible interpretations and/or comments regarding the same. The superintendent, for example, suggested that if it were related to either "school atmosphere, programming or the physical plant then a school council could be in the best position to pass judgement on some of these matters" and, if the council was not satisfied with the direction being taken by the school, it could initiate the appropriate change.

The principal and board chairperson suggested that the role of school councils might evolve into that of lobby groups and become another means of putting pressure on government. This pressure, they noted, might have direct consequences for the formation of schools particularly with regard to such sensitive areas as multi-grouping, school construction and maintenance during this period of declining student enrolments. Board member B stated that if the responsibility has to do with pulling together some of the schools then "this already exists". Board member A noted that vague responsibilities such as this one will not make the role of the council, or attracting members to serve on the council, any easier.

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as curriculum? Why or why not?*

All interviewees except the superintendent suggested that final decisions on curriculum issues should not be a responsibility allocated to councils but rather be left in the hands of professionals who would listen to the concerns of the local councils. It was generally felt by the interviewees that non-educators do not have the necessary background to be able to make sound decisions in this area. In any event, board member B stated that, regardless of what the councils decided regarding curriculum, "the department will only

provide so much funding and the principal's flexibility as to what courses should be offered is limited ".

The superintendent viewed it differently by noting that since boards are not into developing curriculum then this must be interpreted to mean that we should inform parents what it is that we are teaching. The superintendent continued

It is important that parents have a good philosophical understanding of what we are doing. For example, what the expectations of students are for primary, elementary, intermediate and senior high. It is obvious that parents want to have a say in educational issues. In order for them to be able to make an intelligent decision they have to get to know the system. Parents need to be informed more of what the curriculum is about before they can help their children with their homework, .... Parents are demanding more accountability. This is putting a lot of pressure on schools, on teachers. We, as educators, only have these children for five of the twenty-four hours, the parents have them for the other nineteen hours. They are the greatest single influence on their children. We need to get parents cooperating, not view them as a threat, familiarize them with the curriculum and what is expected of them at each grade level. The asset is going to be enormous.

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as funding? Why or why not?*

All of the interviewees except the principal seemed to indicate agreement with having the school council involved in funding if any were available. Both board members and the board chairperson noted that since the local school authority had been disbanded there was very little flexibility in funding decisions to be made by either the board or its councils. Receipts were reduced significantly from what they had been previously and there was barely enough to maintain the essentials.

The superintendent thought that since the Department of Education was considering a "block funding" approach to school boards rather than the categorized method presently employed, it might be possible to channel an amount to each council who would have the autonomy to decide how to spend it. He noted that this would be advantageous since the councils would be closer to the schools and able to make sounder decisions.

The principal was uneasy about having parents determine where the money should be spent. "They might not be fully aware of the entire situation and not have the knowledge base to make such decisions." He suggested that financial matters might be better left in the hands of less biased individuals.

Five of the six interviewees seemed to link funding to fund-raising and all five of these individuals expressed support for the notion of having parents play a greater role in this area. The superintendent's comment seemed to sum up the feelings of the other four when he stated that "if a specific sum of money is assigned [to] a particular council and that is not enough, then this might provide some encouragement on behalf of the councils to do some fund-raising to meet their needs". Board member B disagreed, however, and noted that "there's too much selling of chocolate bars in the communities now".

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as staffing? Why or why not?*

There was unanimous disagreement by all interviewees regarding the inclusion of this item as a responsibility for school councils. All were adamant that staffing should be dealt with at the school board level and not at school council level. Confidentiality and sensitivity were mentioned as reasons for not including it. Interviewees thought it might be very uncomfortable and unethical for teachers on school councils to have to make decisions regarding the employment of other colleagues. Also, it was suggested that, in order to limit community gossiping and protect the reputation of an individual whose name might arise in connection with some sensitive issue, then the matter might be more appropriately dealt with by a group, such as a small committee of the school board, who would be more removed from the community.

The superintendent reflected the group's feelings by stating that "If teachers are a part of the council, then ... hiring, firing and evaluation cannot be included. It's absurd. Doesn't make sense." The principal suggested that "A fast talking principal could very well exert undue influence by selling to a school council a potential employee who might not necessarily have been the best qualified person available for the job".

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to authorize the raising of funds at the school level? Why or why not?*

Although the principal expressed a concern that the school council not become just a fund-raising arm of the school, all interviewees considered the coordinating of fund-raising efforts to be an area where councils could have a major role to play. It was noted, especially by the superintendent, that school boards are not involved in fund-raising and that boards are allocated only so much funding from the government. Beyond this amount

it becomes the responsibility of the individual schools to raise further funds. The superintendent stated that "there was a time when the main function of PTAs was to raise funds but that was frowned upon. My response to that is that it is just as important as any other task they might do."

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices? Why or why not?*

In general, interviewees agreed that the school council would provide a very useful link between the community and the school board. Board member A stated that

It would make it clear as to what body to deal with from the point of view of the school board. In recent times in this area the school board had to communicate to the parents its long term plans and get input from the point of view of the community. The councils could help [in this area].

Board member B stated that communication links between school boards and the general public was something that needed to be addressed and that school councils, although adding another layer of bureaucracy for parents to get through, would be much more accessible than school boards. The superintendent expressed agreement with the idea as long as boards were not obligated to take direction from the councils. In this regard, he noted that school councils were not any different from boards developing their own local education committees and parent advisory groups especially as boards get larger.

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life? Why or why not?*

It was noted by all interviewees that while many previous attempts had proven unsuccessful in this area it was much needed and a commendable goal for the council. It was felt by the two board members, chairperson, and superintendent that local school personnel might be more successful in this endeavour than the school board which was much more distant and removed from the community. One board member noted, however, that despite the PTAs lack of success in involving parents, many of his congregation came to him "knowing [that] I can shake the school or school board regarding any concerns they might have rather than they themselves".

*Do you agree that one of the responsibilities of school councils should be to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents? Why or why not?*

The superintendent reported that, although no formal reports are written, this was not new since there has been a process in place for some time whereby information can be obtained about a particular school or schools. The vice-principal and board chairperson agreed that this would be a useful function for school councils as it would provide a measure of accountability to the educational process.

The chairperson cautioned, however, against the possibility of a "witch hunt" especially in the case where a particular class did poorly. The principal and board member B warned that care should be taken in this area since it is sometimes easy to paint a rosy picture of less than an ideal situation. Board member B also questioned, that while it might be appropriate to prepare such a report, how many would understand it? It was noted that many newcomers to the school board scene just sit in bewilderment for the first few months trying to get a handle on things, and that much of the information published in the report would be "right over their heads".

It was the opinion of board member A that such a report could be better handled at the board level rather than the local level. He stated, "They will have to deal with very complex situations such as personnel, facilities, student make up, who should be in a course, etc. You need board personnel to deal with these issues. They have the expertise and objectivity."

*Generally, do you agree that school councils should have the proposed responsibilities as stated above? Any particular advantages or disadvantages or other comments?.*

The reaction to this question was mixed. The superintendent and board member B indicated that this was a regressive step, it added another level of bureaucracy and, based on the history of the district, it would not work. However, the superintendent also pointed out that parental involvement was needed but thought that there was a better way of achieving it.

Three of the interviewees responded positively to the question but qualified their answers. The vice-principal, for example, stated that staffing and curriculum should be excluded from the list of responsibilities. Board member A agreed that local education

committees should have a little more recognized authority in some areas such as fund-raising but did not think it necessary that this be legislated authority. In the opinion of the board chairperson it would be good to have someone like the principal present to help steer and advise the committee but feared that many of the parents would not understand some of the complex issues surrounding such matters as funding, transportation, and staffing.

The only interviewee to give a totally positive response to the concept was the principal. He thought it was long over-due and stated "Anything which increases parent involvement in school would be much appreciated on my part".

*Do you think school councils, as outlined in the Royal Commission Report, will work in this area?*

The board chairperson, both board members, and the superintendent responded negatively to this question. All four individuals cited lack of parental support as the main reason for their answer. They added that the system would simply become too clumsy, "an administrative nightmare", and "a bureaucratic muddle" under the proposed format, especially if the number of school boards is reduced so that each becomes responsible for a larger area.

Board member A stated that to get things done you need people with certain abilities, skills and personality characteristics. Unlike urban centres, rural areas do not have the population to obtain the types of individuals necessary to fill all the required positions on these committees, which will be duplicated over and over in each of the communities.

The principal and vice-principal were unsure if school councils would work or not. While there did not seem to be a problem in getting parent volunteers on a day-by-day basis, previous attempts at setting up local education committees had failed. Both questioned whether the idea of long term commitment, which is what would be needed for school councils, would scare off most members of the general community.

**Research Question #2 - What do the various stakeholders perceive as positive and negative aspects of increased local involvement?**

*What do you view as some of the positive aspects of the concept?*

The single greatest accomplishment of school councils, in the view of most of the interviewees, might be to encourage a greater number of parents to become involved in the education process. This would provide the parents with what board member A described as greater ownership of their education system. The principal expressed the hope that it would allow the school access to a group of parents that was previously inaccessible. He added that through this process the general community would continually be aware and have greater input into dealing with such issues as disruptive students. The possibility of greater funding, better staffing, and improved facilities were also cited by the vice-principal as potential positive outcomes of such increased involvement by the general community.

*What do you view as some of the negative aspects of the concept?*

On the negative side, the superintendent and the board chairperson expressed the view that the proposed councils could make the education system more clumsy by adding another layer of bureaucracy and possibly creating dozens of mini-boards within a district. The board chairperson pointed to the cost associated with the operation of all of these mini-boards or councils as an inhibiting factor. It was the opinion of the vice-principal and board member A that there would not be enough people sitting on these councils with the necessary qualifications to make the broad "board-type" decisions that would have to be made by school councils. The principal feared that councils could contain interest groups who would have their own special agendas such as protecting the church. Board member B expressed concern about the potential amount of control that a principal, as chief executive officer of the council, could have over the educational process. As well, this individual noted that two or more active school councils in a community could possibly stir up animosity between the different schools.

**Research Question #3 - What do the major stakeholders perceive as potential barriers to the successful implementation of school councils?**

*From your perspective, can you foresee any potential difficulties in establishing and/or operating school councils? Explain.*

All six individuals noted "lack of parental involvement" as the major obstacle to establishing school councils. The board chairperson reflected the group's opinions by stating that it might be difficult to attract "the right kind of person to serve on councils".



Interviewees also expressed a concern that if individuals with totally negative attitudes and confrontational personalities were elected to school councils then this would negate any efforts of the council.

The vice-principal speculated that some teachers might either be reluctant to become involved for fear of such issues as hiring and firing, or would be very eager to volunteer for a particular reason which might not be in the best interests of the council overall. Either way, the presence of these teachers would be a barrier.

The superintendent stated that the concept of school councils and expanded parental involvement will need to be sold to the general public and noted the cost associated with it.

We need to sell to parents, or create an awareness among parents, that ultimately the education of their children is their responsibility, the school is only an institution to provide that service. That role will fall to the schools and school boards which will cause added drain on resources.

The principal and vice-principal concurred that in order for school councils to operate as outlined by the Royal Commission sufficient funds would have to be made available to establish and maintain them.

*From the perspective of the other stakeholders (i.e. students, teachers, vice-principal, principal, superintendent, school board members) can you foresee any obstacles to the implementation of school councils? Explain.*

The superintendent stated that the most undesirable job in education at the present is that of a principal. He noted the number of pressures with which these individuals have to deal include those coming from boards, individual board members, students, teachers, parents, program coordinators, and all central office staff, and relate to funding, equipment, IPPs, and so on. "It's absurd to add school councils to this load. Something will have to be done to alleviate this pressure", he suggested.

Both the principal and vice-principal stated that there are a number of very capable students in the school who could make meaningful contributions to a school council but noted that they were not included. The principal also expressed a concern that the superintendent and board members were already overburdened with meetings every other evening and that the introduction of school councils would simply add to an already exhausting schedule. Board member A stated that the roles and responsibilities of the principal, superintendent, and indeed the council itself were uncertain and speculated that it

would lead to confusion. Board member B maintained that attracting members would be undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to the implementation of school councils from the perspective of any stakeholder.

**Research Question #4 - How, in the view of the various stakeholders, might these barriers be overcome?**

*Can the difficulties indicated above be overcome? If so how?*

The reaction to this question was mixed. The superintendent suggested that parent apathy could be overcome by approaching certain people in the community and encouraging them to participate. In his view, the process of establishing a council should proceed slowly. It would need to be structured so that it was unnecessary to call a full scale meeting each time an issue arose. Instead, he suggested that regular public meetings would need to be held throughout the year to maintain a sense of ownership. A suggestion was made that the various administrative roles within the school would need to be re-defined to alleviate some of the principal's burden. The principal agreed with the superintendent that meetings should be held regularly otherwise people will become complacent and lose interest. He further added that the meetings would need to be structured and informational but not overburdened with administrative items.

The vice-principal agreed that an aggressive approach might be needed in contacting and encouraging people to volunteer to serve on school councils but, before this occurred, emphasized that teachers needed to be "brought on side". He noted that sufficient funding should be made available to operate the council effectively. It was also suggested that, as in some other jurisdictions where school councils have been tried, leave time from work commitments would need to be provided for all individuals serving on councils so they could attend meetings.

The board chairperson remarked that parents would need to be made aware of "the big picture, the overall situation". They would need to consider such matters as how staffing for the entire district occurs and what courses are necessary for students for the various post-secondary institutions. Board member A noted that, in addition to the education of those sitting on school councils, improved communication links with the general community were needed to keep people better informed and educated regarding the importance of their children's education. It was speculated that this would lead to a

more positive atmosphere in the home and result in improved attitudes, particularly on the part of students, toward the process of education.

*Some have suggested that administrators do not value the input of outside groups (i.e. parents and other community members) and that this will adversely affect the success of school councils. Do you think this will be a problem? If so, how might it be overcome?*

None of the participants viewed reluctance to community involvement on the part of administrators as a problem. On the contrary, the superintendent emphasized that principals throughout the school district had done everything in their power to involve parents. The principal suggested that, although he was not aware of any, there might be individuals in the principal's role who would be hesitant to involve the general public due to "what might be brought back out to the community". As long as representatives of the public "were there for the right reasons" the vice-principal could not foresee any difficulties. Board member A noted that the cooperation of the principal was vital to the effective operation of the councils, and if there was any possibility that the individuals in these positions would feel threatened by this process then administrative training should be provided.

*Some have also suggested that apathy on the part of parents will adversely affect the success of school councils. Do you think this will be a valid criticism for this area? If so, how might it be overcome?*

The interviewees who were directly associated with the school board, namely the superintendent, board chairperson, and board members, speculated that parent apathy would be a problem in the area. The superintendent identified several reasons contributing to this, such as, in the case of regional schools, parents not identifying with schools outside of their community and a feeling among parents of lack of expertise and confidence since many had not themselves completed high school. Board member B suspected that the attitude of many parents would be "everything is going alright...let others worry about it" and would not step forward to participate. The superintendent emphasized, however, that the problem could be overcome by "Keeping at it. Keep sending information home. Let parents know they are needed, that their contribution is important".

The principal echoed the superintendent's sentiments as to why parents might be hesitant to participate by stating "Parents have become passive because of past experiences.

Parents have become lost with what is happening to education. It's way out of their league, beyond their control, and they are leery of getting involved." Both the principal and vice-principal expressed hope that this could be turned around when parents saw the real benefits of the process.

**Research Question #5 - What do the various stakeholders perceive as their role in school governance?**

*How will these proposed changes affect you in your current role (i.e. either as superintendent, school board chairperson or member, vice-principal or principal)?*

The superintendent envisioned a drastic role change for anyone serving in his position, and commented

I would have a lot more people to answer to. The bureaucracy would become so entangled that you would never get to what you were suppose to do, that is student achievement and education. Now, I can be a visionary, I can plan, I can project this is where we want to go. I can focus with the present clientele on what the greatest needs are and develop strategic action planning. But if I have to answer to a board plus 28 school councils then my position will become more of a reactionary one rather than pro-active.

The principal viewed the role change for an individual in the principal's position in a positive manner. The principal noted that if parents became involved in the school it would result in a movement of "control away from myself and the school to making the community and parents more responsible for their own children's education. As to whether this would be treading on my toes is not a concern for me."

The other four interviewees viewed the proposed change in school governance as increasing the workload of an individual in their position. The vice-principal stated "The introduction of school councils will probably give me more paper work and more meetings. I see myself chairing 1 or 2 sub-committees and may even be expected to chair the council, in which case the responsibilities would be tremendous. If this comes in place then my workload could double". The board chairperson imagined that her role would become "totally unmanageable". The two board members concurred and noted that an expanded school board would totally confound the matter.

*How do you think it will affect the other major stakeholders?*

Although not the intention of the interviewer, interviewees contained their remarks to the professional staff. All but one of the interviewees commented on the increased workload of the principal which would accompany the introduction of school councils. For example, the vice-principal, although acknowledging the benefits of councils, enunciated that "The principal is on the firing line". The comments of the board chairperson seemed to reflect the opinion of most,

The principals.... they are spending a lot of extra time right now. If we add to that the responsibility of running a council including running elections and trying to coax people into participating, it becomes impossible. It's difficult enough now to find principals, if this is added to their plate who will want the position. We'd have to pay them some dollars.

Board member A remarked that "They will need at least 2 more people to handle the administration [of the school]".

Most interviewees also commented on the increased workload for a person in the position of superintendent. The board chairperson summarized these remarks by noting "The superintendent right now is spending an incredible amount of time away from home especially with school closings. There is a lot of stress involved." Board member B predicted that the superintendent and other board personnel would become so bogged down in office matters that there would be very little personal contact with the schools.

The principal and superintendent noted the effect of establishing school councils on teachers. The former guessed that some might be hesitant to participate while the latter speculated

For teachers it will provide four [of them] with an opportunity to be a part of an autonomous body, this will provide another avenue for other teachers in addition to the board members. Since it is closely attached to the school the teachers are going to become much more accountable. If schools don't measure up to each other then some teachers are going to find themselves responding more and more and being held more accountable for what they do. This will produce added pressures but it might also produce benefits as well in the form of added motivation.

**Research Question #6 - How, in the view of the various stakeholders, would the implementation of school councils impact on current practices?**

*What do you think your role, or the role of a person in your position, will be if school councils are implemented?*

The vice-principal could foresee "things being delegated down" resulting in an increased workload, time, and commitment. The superintendent thought his role would become reactive, rather than pro-active as it should be. He envisioned himself "Going around putting out brush fires since more will be created". The principal perceived his role as

[Seeing] that a committee is put in place and a structure whereby they could meet regularly. Make sure that all issues affecting this school and this area are brought forward to this group. Make sure that parents are continually informed of issues pertaining to curriculum and the like.

The volunteer members of the board were uncertain as to their future. For example, the chairperson responded

I'm not sure. It would depend on the chain of communication between these councils and the board. Right now it is manageable but wouldn't want to see it expanded. This is a voluntary position and one would need to assess priorities, families and personal matters would have to come first.

Board member A debated whether, as a church representative, he would serve on the school council or the school board.

It might be a problem in determining my loyalties. With certain issues I might be able to see it from the local perspective but also understand from the board perspective. Those balances have to be decided. [In determining] what is best for the children, it may not be able to be seen at the local level.

Board member B was concerned about the reduced role of the church.

There are a lot of principals, and teachers too, who think the church has no place in schools. As a church representative, there are not enough of us now to go around. I will be too far removed, they will probably appoint someone in Clarendville [under the proposed expanded board]. Newcomers will just sit there without much contribution although I could probably hold my own.

*Will that role be satisfactory?*

The principal was the only participant to respond positively by noting "It seems it should improve my role if anything". All others answered negatively for reasons already stated. The board chairperson added that "under the proposed plan a board member would spend so much time running around to handle individual problems there would not be enough time to become informed on current issues such as school improvement plans and so on".

### **Analysis of Questionnaire Data**

Questionnaires were distributed to students, parents, and teachers. Although the questionnaire for each group was different, there were similarities. In addition to obtaining respondents' views on present opportunities for involvement in local school governance and their perceptions of the composition and responsibilities of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report, background information was also collected from each group. From parents, for example, the data collected included level of education, typical type of work, age, number and grade level of children attending school, present level of involvement in school and community, willingness to serve on school councils, and whether or not students should be included on the proposed councils. Teachers were asked to indicate their teaching experience, age, grade level most frequently taught, and level of involvement with community organizations. Information regarding age, grade level, and participation in extra-curricular activities was requested from students.

The student questionnaire differed from the other two on the question that asked students to indicate their level of agreement with the responsibilities of school councils as recommended in the Royal Commission Report. The parent and teacher questionnaire contained each of the responsibilities as outlined by the commission. Since some of these were thought to be irrelevant for students, these were either omitted or modified. The two that were omitted were "to protect local educational interests" and "to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life". The items "to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents" and "to hold meetings with parents to discuss the annual report and any other matters concerning the operation of the school" were combined and modified to read "to analyze and report information about

how well the school is doing in comparison to other schools in such things as exam results and student attendance".

The analysis of questionnaire data focused on the level of satisfaction of respondents with present opportunities for involvement in local governance, as well as their level of agreement with the proposed school councils. The complete data for each questionnaire are provided in condensed form in Appendices E, F, and G.

### **General Characteristics of Respondent Groups**

#### Parents

Parents were asked to indicate the highest level of education obtained by themselves and their spouses by selecting from one of five categories. Responses indicated that 45% of the respondents and 33% their spouses had completed high school. Sixty-eight of 80 respondents, 85%, listed their most typical type of work as labourer. Of the 85 people who indicated their age group, 51% selected the 'From 35 to 44 years old' category while 38% selected 'From 25 to 34 years old'. Fifty-eight percent of the parents had children in the elementary grades and 43% had offspring in junior and senior high only. When asked to check their level of involvement with the school, 57% of parents responded that they had 'No involvement at this time' although 48% had attended meetings for some purpose at the school during the past year. Sixty-seven percent responded negatively to the question which asked "*Do you currently hold, or have you held, a leadership position (e.g. president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) on community organizations such as Lions, Town Councils or Church Groups?*"

#### Teachers

Eleven of the teachers, 65%, had more than 16 years of teaching experience while 5, or 29%, had less than five years in the teaching profession. Of the five age categories listed on the questionnaire, 59% selected 'From 35 to 44 years old' and 35% choose 'From 25 to 34 years old'. Approximately 67% of the respondents listed junior and senior high as the area that they did most of their teaching. When asked whether they now hold, or have in the past held, a leadership position on community organizations, 59% responded negatively.



### Students

The majority of the students, 58%, were 16 years old. When combined with the 17 year olds, these two groups comprised 86% of student respondents. The number of students in each of Levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively was 17, 25 and 18. Two other students indicated that they were in another grade level which is identified as Level 4 by the school. The student population was divided equally with regard to participation in extra-curricular activities with 30 each responding negatively and positively.

### **Satisfaction with present opportunities for local involvement in school governance**

Items 8, 4 and 5 on the parents, student and teachers questionnaires respectively, asked respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance. For example, the question to parents read:

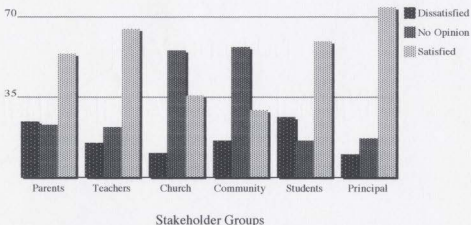
How satisfied are you with present opportunities for the following groups or individuals to have input into school decision making? (Circle one for each part.)

		Very dissatisfied	Mildly dissatisfied	No opinion	Mildly satisfied	Very satisfied
a)	parents	1	2	3	4	5
b)	teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c)	church leaders	1	2	3	4	5
d)	other community member	1	2	3	4	5
e)	students	1	2	3	4	5
f)	school principal	1	2	3	4	5

Teachers and students were asked to respond to an identical question.

When the responses to each part within the item were collapsed from the 5 point scale to a 3 point scale, that is, *Dissatisfied*, *No Opinion*, and *Satisfied*, and combined for all three groups of respondents, over half of all responses indicated satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement by all groups of stakeholders. More specifically, 17% of all responses from all groups were *Dissatisfied*, 31% were *No Opinion*, and 52% were *Satisfied* (Table 4.2). Omitting the *No Opinion* responses, then over three-quarters of the remaining survey population responded positively to all parts of the question.

It is evident from Figure 4.1 that, generally, respondents were more pleased than displeased with present opportunities for participation in school governance. Over half of the respondents indicated their satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement by parents and students, and over two-thirds indicated the same about the principal and teachers. The only two groups of stakeholders whose opportunity for input was deemed not to be satisfactory by at least half of the survey population were church and general community representatives. In each case, however, over 50% of the respondents had no opinion. Respondents were most dissatisfied with present opportunities for input by students and parents.



**Figure 4.1.** Level of satisfaction of all respondents with present opportunities for involvement in school practices by stakeholders (percentages).

As evident from Table 4.2, when the respondent groups are viewed separately on this question there appear to be substantial differences among the three groups. For example, while approximately 53% of students and 61% of parents were satisfied with present opportunities for parental involvement, only 23% of teachers were satisfied. Nearly three-quarters, or 12 out of 17, of the teachers indicated a dissatisfaction with present parental opportunities. This difference was highly significant ( $F=8.90, p<.0002$ ). Regarding opportunities for teacher input into the governance process, the teachers themselves were fairly evenly split with half being satisfied and half being dissatisfied.

Sixty out of 82 parents expressed satisfaction on the same item. The difference in responses between teachers and the other two groups with respect to opportunities for teacher input was statistically significant ( $F=6.44, p<.002$ ).

Table 4.2

Level of satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance by various stakeholders.

Stakeholders	Level of Satisfaction	Student Responses		Parent Responses		Teacher Responses		Total Responses	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Parents	Dissatisfied	8	13	18	22	12	71	38	24
	No Opinion	21	34	14	17	1	6	36	23
	Satisfied	32	53	49	61	4	23	85	53
Teachers	Dissatisfied	5	8	9	11	9	53	23	14
	No Opinion	21	35	13	16	0	0	34	21
	Satisfied	27	57	60	73	8	47	102	64
Church Rep.	Dissatisfied	8	13	6	7	2	12	16	10
	No Opinion	38	62	43	53	7	41	88	55
	Satisfied	15	25	33	40	8	47	56	35
Community	Dissatisfied	9	15	9	11	6	35	24	15
	No Opinion	39	66	45	56	4	24	88	56
	Satisfied	11	19	27	33	7	41	45	29
Students	Dissatisfied	15	25	19	23	7	41	41	26
	No Opinion	13	22	12	15	0	0	25	16
	Satisfied	32	53	51	62	10	59	93	58
Principal	Dissatisfied	5	8	8	10	2	13	15	10
	No Opinion	19	31	7	9	0	0	26	17
	Satisfied	37	61	65	81	13	87	115	73
<b>Total</b>	Dissatisfied	50	14	69	14	38	38	157	17
	No Opinion	151	42	134	27	12	12	297	31
	Satisfied	161	44	285	59	50	50	496	52

Although no other group responses were significantly different from each other at the 0.05 level, several other points from Table 4.2 are noteworthy. First, the principal received the highest level of satisfaction for present opportunity for input into school governance by all respondents, nearly 75%. Second, over 50% of the responses received from respondents in the parent and student groups with respect to involvement of church and community representatives were *No Opinion*. And the third notable point concerns the overall high incidence, generally, of the *No Opinion* response by students to this question. Approximately 42% of student responses fell in this category as compared to 27% for parents and 12% for teachers.

#### **Agreement with composition of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report.**

In addition to obtaining views on existing opportunities for the various stakeholders to become involved in school governance, respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the composition of school councils as proposed by the Royal Commission. All three groups were asked to respond to the following question:

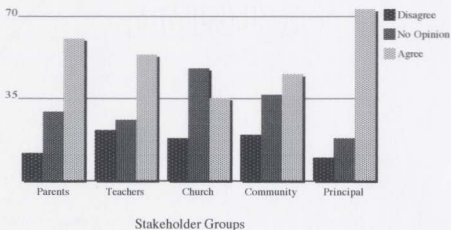
The Royal Commission Report recommends that School Councils be made up of the following people. Indicate whether you: (Circle one)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No Opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) parents elected by parents of children registered at the school	1	2	3	4	5
b) teachers elected by teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c) representatives of the churches	1	2	3	4	5
d) representatives of the community chosen by other council members	1	2	3	4	5
e) the school principal	1	2	3	4	5

It is evident that, generally, most respondents agree with the composition of school councils as proposed by the Royal Commission. Specifically, when the responses of all

participants were combined and reduced to a 3 point scale, 16% of the responses indicated disagreement with the proposed composition of school councils, 31% had no opinion, while 53% agreed with the proposal (Table 4.3). If those who indicated *No Opinion* were omitted then over three-quarters of the remaining respondents indicated favour with the composition of councils as outlined.

From Figure 4.2, a greater percentage of the respondents indicated agreement that parents, teachers, general community members, and the principal should be included in school governance as compared to those who had no opinion or disagreed. The only group not to receive a greater percentage of agreement than the other two categories were representatives of the church. Approximately one-third of the survey population agreed that church representatives should be included as compared to nearly half who expressed no opinion. More than half of all respondents agreed with the recommendation that the council should be comprised of *parents elected by parents, teachers elected by teachers and the school principal*. The principal received the greatest percentage of agreement with approximately three-quarters of all respondents indicating their support.



**Figure 4.2** Level of agreement by all respondents with the composition of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report.

The most receptive group to the composition of school councils would appear to be teachers with an overall mean of slightly over 75% in favour of all proposed stakeholders as compared with 63% and 34% for parents and students respectively (Table 4.3). This overall high percentage on the part of the teachers, however, is not indicative of the level of support given to all of the proposed groups of stakeholders. While the notion of parents and teachers being elected, by their peers to serve on councils, along with the principal, received nearly unanimous agreement, less than half of the teachers, 47%, agreed that church and community representatives should serve on the school councils.

Parental agreement with the proposed composition of councils nearly paralleled teacher responses except that frequency percentages were not quite as high in most instances. None of the responses for each of the groups to any of the items in this question were statistically significant from each other at the 0.05 level. The principal received the greatest level of support followed by parents and teachers. Less than half the parent population agreed that church representatives should be involved in school governance while slightly more than half agreed that general community members should be involved. The two groups to receive the strongest level of disagreement by parents to being on council appeared to be teachers and general community representatives, although only 20% indicated such.

Student responses were the most dissimilar of the three groups. The differences in mean responses of students to parents, teachers, principal and church representatives sitting on school councils was statistically significant from the other two groups at the 0.05 level. The respective F values were 11.22 ( $p < .0000$ ), 8.31 ( $p < .0004$ ), 7.18 ( $p < .001$ ) and 5.28 ( $p < .006$ ). Student response means for the first three of these were lower than the other two groups while fourth was higher.

The greatest difference between student responses and the responses of the other two groups was in the frequencies of *No Opinion* responses. Nearly one-half of the participating student population opted not to show any favour for or against the various proposed groups of stakeholders. Of those that did choose, the principal received the greatest amount of support with 53% indicating their agreement. Approximately one-third

Table 4.3

Level of agreement with composition of school councils as proposed by the Royal Commission.

Stakeholders	Level of Agreement	Student Responses		Parent Responses		Teacher Responses		Total Responses	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Parents elected by parents	Disagree	9	14	8	10	1	6	18	11
	No Opinion	32	52	14	17	0	0	46	29
	Agree	21	34	58	73	16	94	95	60
Teachers elected by teachers	Disagree	16	26	16	21	1	6	33	21
	No Opinion	25	41	15	19	0	0	40	26
	Agree	20	33	47	60	16	94	83	53
Church representatives	Disagree	12	20	11	14	5	29	28	18
	No Opinion	40	65	30	39	4	24	74	47
	Agree	9	15	37	47	8	47	54	35
Community representatives	Disagree	8	13	16	20	6	35	30	19
	No Opinion	31	52	22	28	3	18	56	36
	Agree	21	35	41	52	8	47	70	45
Principal	Disagree	7	11	8	10	0	0	15	10
	No Opinion	22	36	6	8	0	0	28	18
	Agree	33	53	64	82	17	100	114	72
<b>Total</b>	Disagree	52	17	59	15	13	15	124	16
	No Opinion	150	49	87	22	7	8	244	31
	Agree	104	34	247	63	65	77	416	53

of the group indicated agreement with parents, teachers and the general community being on the council while only 9 of 62 respondents, 15%, agreed that church representatives should be included. The group of stakeholders to receive the least number of *No Opinion* selections from students, next to the principal, was teachers. Students appeared to be a little more decisive toward inclusion of teachers than the other proposed stakeholders with one-third of them expressing agreement as compared to one-quarter indicating disagreement.

Respondents were also asked their views regarding the number of teachers and parents who should be on council. More specifically, respondents were asked to respond to the following, or similar question:

If school councils are established and have legislative authority, would you prefer that the council members be: (Circle one.)

Mostly parents and community members?	1
Mostly teachers?	2
Equal numbers of each?	3

Eighty-six percent of all respondents indicated that they preferred to see a council made up of equal numbers of parents and teachers. The teachers themselves were unanimous in their agreement with equal numbers from each group being on council while 85% and 84% of parents and students, respectively, indicated the same.

When asked whether or not senior high school students should be on school councils, nearly three-quarters of all respondents indicated 'yes'. This overall percentage was inflated somewhat by the nearly 80% of the students who responded positively to the question. However, even if students are excluded, 70% of parents and teachers think that senior high school students should be included on councils.

#### **Agreement with responsibilities of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report.**

Respondents were also asked their opinion regarding the proposed responsibilities of school councils. Parents and teachers were asked to respond to the following question:



The Royal Commission Report recommends that school councils have, through legislation, the following responsibilities. Indicate whether you: (Circle one)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) to protect local educational interests	1	2	3	4	5
b) to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as:					
i) <u>curriculum</u> (courses to be offered at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
ii) <u>funding</u> (how money is to be raised and spent for the school)	1	2	3	4	5
iii) <u>staffing</u> (personnel to be employed at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
c) to authorize the raising of funds at the school level	1	2	3	4	5
d) to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices	1	2	3	4	5
e) to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life	1	2	3	4	5
f) to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents	1	2	3	4	5
g) to hold meetings with parents to discuss the annual report and any other matters concerning the operation of the school	1	2	3	4	5

Students were given a similar question in which parts (a) and (e) were omitted and parts (f) and (g) were combined into one item.

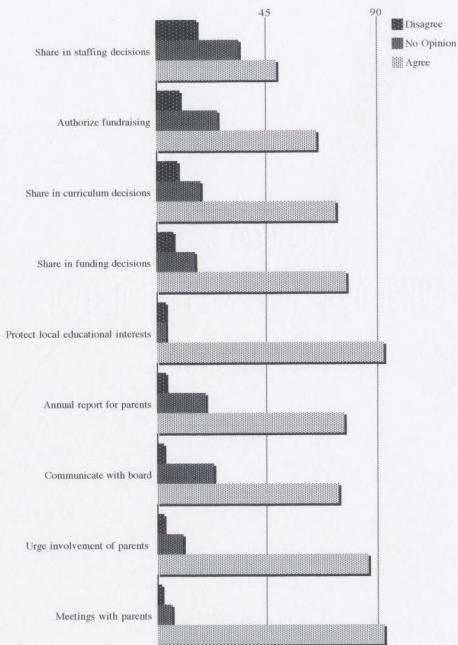


Table 4.4  
Level of agreement with responsibilities of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report

Responsibilities	Level of Agreement	Student Responses		Parent Responses		Teacher Responses		Total Responses	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Protect local educational interests	Disagree	N/A	N/A	3	4	1	6	4	4
	No Opinion	N/A	N/A	4	5	0	0	4	4
	Agree	N/A	N/A	72	91	16	94	88	92
Share in curriculum decisions with board	Disagree	6	10	5	6	3	18	14	9
	No Opinion	21	34	6	8	1	6	28	18
	Agree	35	56	68	86	13	76	116	73
Share in funding decisions with board	Disagree	5	8	3	4	3	18	11	7
	No Opinion	17	27	9	11	0	0	26	16
	Agree	40	65	68	85	14	82	122	77
Share in staffing decisions with board	Disagree	4	7	8	10	14	82	26	17
	No Opinion	32	51	21	27	1	6	54	34
	Agree	26	42	50	63	2	12	78	49
Authorize raising of funds	Disagree	3	5	8	10	4	23	15	10
	No Opinion	27	45	10	13	2	12	39	25
	Agree	30	50	62	77	11	65	103	65
Communicate concerns about board policy	Disagree	2	3	2	3	0	0	4	3
	No Opinion	27	44	9	11	0	0	36	23
	Agree	33	53	68	86	17	100	118	74
Seek ways to involve parents	Disagree	N/A	N/A	2	2	1	6	3	3
	No Opinion	N/A	N/A	11	14	0	0	11	11
	Agree	N/A	N/A	67	84	16	94	83	86
Prepare annual report about school	Disagree	4	7	1	1	1	6	6	4
	No Opinion	26	42	3	4	3	18	32	20
	Agree	32	51	75	95	13	76	120	76
Discuss report with parents	Disagree	N/A	N/A	2	3	0	0	2	2
	No Opinion	N/A	N/A	5	6	1	6	6	6
	Agree	N/A	N/A	74	91	16	94	90	92
<b>Total</b>	Disagree	24	6	34	5	27	18	85	7
	No Opinion	150	41	78	11	8	5	236	19
	Agree	196	53	604	84	118	77	918	74

Generally, from Figure 4.3, there was overwhelming support for the proposed responsibilities of school councils as outlined in the Royal Commission Report. Approximately three-quarters of the responses from all participants were either *Tend to Agree* or *Strongly Agree* (Table 4.4). If the *No Opinion* responses are omitted and the percentage of those agreeing with the recommendation are calculated on the basis of those who indicated either agree or disagree, then the positive response rate rises to 92%.

All but one of the listed responsibilities received at least 65% acceptance from students, parents and teachers. The identified responsibility to receive the least amount of support was *to share in staffing decisions with the board*, although, almost one-half of the respondents agreed that it should be included. Only 12% of teachers agreed to it as compared to 42% and 63% of students and parents, respectively.

The mean percentage of all responses also indicate an overall acceptance of the listed responsibilities by each group. Over one-half of the students and over three-quarters of the parents and teachers agreed with each of the items outlined in the Royal Commission Report. Parents and teachers were fairly decisive in response to this item since only 11% and 5% of each group, respectively, expressed no opinion. Although only 6% of students disagreed with the overall responsibilities, 41% had no opinion.

Although all groups appeared supportive of the proposed responsibilities, the group showing the greatest level of support was parents with 84% of their responses being either *Tend to Agree* or *Strongly Agree*. Mean responses by this group to sharing in curriculum and funding decisions, as well as preparing an annual report, were significantly higher than the other two groups with respective F values of 4.93, 3.22 and 17.82 ( $p < 0.0084$ ,  $p < 0.0428$  and  $p < 0.0000$ ). Parents and students were significantly higher than teachers with regard to having input into staffing decisions. Parents and teachers were higher than students with respect to communicating concerns to the school board. The obtained F values, respectively, for these two items were 25.47 and 12.15 ( $p < 0.0000$  and  $p < 0.0000$ ). With the exception of sharing in staffing decisions and authorizing the raising of funds, all other responsibilities were strongly supported with more than eight in every ten parents indicating agreement. The two exceptions, although not receiving as high a percentage of support, were nevertheless well supported receiving 63% and 78% respectively.

Teachers were, for the most part, in agreement with school councils having the responsibilities as outlined. The notion that councils be able to communicate to the board its concern about board policy was accepted by all teachers. Most of the other items met the acceptance of all but a few of the teachers. On only one proposed responsibility did more than one quarter of the teachers disagree. Fourteen of the seventeen participating teachers did not agree with the school council sharing in staffing decisions with the board. This was the only proposed responsibility that teachers differed significantly from either of the other two groups. The mean response was lower with an obtained F value, as reported above, of 25.47 ( $p < 0.0000$ ).

The mean percentage responses of each group to the proposed responsibilities shows that, although students were the least agreeable of the three, over half of them sided with parents and teachers in expressing their agreement. Over 40% of students indicated *No Opinion*. In comparing the percentage of students agreeing to the various items, there is a 23% difference between the most accepted, at 65%, and the most rejected, at 42%. The responsibility receiving the most support from students was *to share in funding decisions with the board* while *sharing in staffing decisions with the board* was the least popular. The item indicated by 10% students to be the most disagreeable was *sharing in curriculum decisions with the board*.

### **Perceived barriers to the successful implementation of school councils.**

All respondents were asked whether or not they would serve on school councils. Overall, approximately 60% indicated that they would. There were vast differences in responses, however, between teachers and the other two groups to this question. All but one of the teachers indicated their willingness to serve in such a role while only approximately one-half of the parents and students gave a positive response.

Regarding the reluctance of parents to become involved, over three-quarters of the teachers agreed that this might be a possible barrier to the successful implementation of school councils. Only 40% of the students thought it might be a problem while 60% expressed no opinion on the topic.

When teachers and students were questioned about the notion that the success of school councils would be adversely affected because administrators do not value the input of outside groups such as parents and other community members, the results were mixed.

Sixty-five percent of the teachers disagreed. Nearly one-half of the student respondents perceived this to be a possible barrier.

### Summary

Data for this study were collected by interviewing six of the elites associated with the school and school board, and included the superintendent, board chairperson, two board members, principal and vice-principal. Questionnaires were administered to teachers, parents and students. One hundred sixty-six individuals responded including 17 teachers, 87 parents and 62 students. These numbers reflected over 60% of the family units associated with the school and over 80% of the teachers and students.

The interview data were organized along the lines of the research questions. Responses to the concept of school councils as a workable for local involvement in school governance, or more specifically, level of agreement with the proposed composition and list of responsibilities of school councils as outlined in the Royal Commission Report, were grouped together in one category. Other categories of responses included positive and negative aspects of increased local involvement, potential barriers of the implementation of successful school councils, overcoming these barriers, perception of role of present stakeholders in school governance, and impact of school councils on current practices.

Of the six interviewees, 5 agreed that parents and church representatives should be included on school councils, 4 agreed that the principal should be present, and 3 agreed to include teachers and members of the general community. Although most agreed that increased participation on the part of parents was needed and necessary, generally, only two agreed with the entire composition as proposed in the Royal Commission Report. Concerns were expressed that it would be difficult to attract enough individuals to participate, especially individuals with expertise, since many of these individuals in small communities are already over extended by their involvement in various other organizations. Concern was also expressed regarding the increased amount of authority that would befall principals. It was thought that these individuals might be able to stack councils and promote personal agendas. Conflict of interest on the part of any teachers sitting on councils was identified in half of the interviews as another problem with the proposed recommendation as well as adding another layer of bureaucracy to the system.

Interviewees thought that two of the identified responsibilities for school councils, to protect local educational interests and to influence the formation of the school, were vague and choose not to indicate agreement one way or the other. All or most interviewees agreed, however, with school councils being able to authorize the raising of funds, communicate policy and practice concerns to the school board, seek ways to involve parents not previously involved, and share with the school board in funding decisions. None of those interviewed agreed that school councils should share with the board in curriculum or staffing decisions. It was felt generally that parents either do not have the expertise to deal with such issues or, in the case of staffing, that confidentiality and sensitivity needed to be maintained and, therefore, the task should remain in the hands of board personnel.

Most interviewees viewed the proposed increase in parental involvement itself as the single greatest positive factor associated with school councils. Through such involvement it was felt that the community would experience a greater sense of ownership of education. The increased involvement, it was felt, would also translate into heightened community awareness for education and educational issues, and lead to a greater desire on the part of the general public for more input into the school system. It was hoped as well that the increased involvement would also lead to more funding, better staffing and improved facilities.

Some of the negative factors associated with school councils include adding another layer of bureaucracy to the system, insufficient expertise from the general public to deal with complex issues and too much power for principals. Caution was issued regarding those individuals who might become involved in councils simply to push their own personal agendas. Interviewees also noted that sufficient funding had to be provided to allow for the successful implementation and efficient operation of these councils otherwise they will not work.

Parent apathy was mentioned by all interviewees as a major potential barrier. It was felt that there would be difficulty attracting qualified volunteers from the smaller communities to serve on school councils. Other barriers mentioned included hidden agendas, cost, time and increased workloads, especially for principals and superintendents.

Suggestions were made as to how some of these barriers could be overcome. For example, approach qualified individuals in advance and encourage them to run for council, provide sufficient funding for the operation of councils, and provide leave time for

meetings. It was also suggested that meetings should not be held too frequently but on a regular basis and that they should not be full of administrative. Even though council members might have one school as their primary focus, they should be made aware of circumstances for the entire district and, therefore, develop an appreciation for the school board's position on some issues. The increased workload problem, at least for principals, might be overcome by re-defining roles within the school.

The superintendent, when asked what he perceived as his role in school governance and the impact of the implementation of school councils on current practices, responded that it would change from visionary to reactionary. Much of his time would be taken up with managing crisis situations around the district instead of making long range plans. Both the principal and vice-principal speculated that their workload would increase since they would be responsible for establishing and running the council and the associated committees and sub-committees. All three board members thought that their workloads would increase but were unsure as to the exact impact since details regarding the restructuring of school boards were not known.

The analysis of the questionnaire data was organized under four headings: satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance, agreement with the proposed composition of school councils, agreement with the proposed responsibilities of school councils, and perceived barriers to the successful implementation of school councils. Approximately one-half of all respondents indicated a general satisfaction with opportunities for all listed stakeholders. The opportunities for involvement by the principal and teachers were viewed most satisfactorily while opportunities for church representatives and general community members were seen as least satisfactory. When the results are examined on a group basis, the most glaring difference occurs in response to opportunities for parental involvement. While over half of the parents and students were satisfied with present opportunities, three-quarters of the teachers were not satisfied.

Slightly over half of all responses given by all respondents were in agreement with the proposed groups of stakeholders being included on school councils. Principals received the highest percentage of agreeable responses followed by parents and then teachers. Church representatives and general community members received support from less than half of the respondents. Over eighty percent of the respondents preferred a



council that had equal numbers of teachers and parents while three-quarters of them thought that senior high students should have been included on school councils.

Seventy-five percent of all responses were in favour of councils having the responsibilities as outlined in the Royal Commission Report. The only item listed not to obtain support from at least half of the respondents concerned sharing in staffing decisions with the school board. Although 63% of the parents agreed along with 42% of the students, 82% of the teachers disagreed.

In examining some of the potential barriers that might exist to the successful implementation of school councils, three-quarters of the teachers thought that parent apathy would be a problem. However, 55% of the parents indicated their willingness to serve on council. Regarding administrator reluctance to involve parents and other community members, half of the students and parents perceived this to be a potential difficulty while the majority of teachers indicated that this would not be a problem.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study, its purpose, pertinent information arising from the literature search, methodology and findings. The summary of the findings include interview data with respect to school councils as workable governance models, perceived positive and negative aspects of councils, as well as potential barriers to councils along with suggestions for overcoming the difficulties are also included. A brief synopsis of the questionnaire data relating to the satisfaction of parents, students, and teachers with present opportunities for local involvement in school governance is presented along with their reactions to the proposed composition and responsibilities of school councils. The discussion section considers the findings, their implications and their relation to more general issues. Finally, general conclusions and recommendations are presented along with suggestions for further research.

### SUMMARY

#### Statement of the Problem

The growing level of public dissatisfaction with the results of the present school systems has spurred changes. Perhaps the most significant of those changes has been in the area of school governance. There has been a growing trend towards greater public involvement into the management of education, through school councils, in many countries. The establishment of these councils, however, has not been without difficulties. To date, most of the research in this area has focused primarily on urban areas. There have been very few studies conducted in rural communities. This present study investigates the attitudes and perceptions of the major stakeholders, namely the superintendent, board chairperson, board members, principal, vice-principal, teachers, parents and students, towards the establishment of school councils in a rural area of Newfoundland and Labrador.

### **Review of the Literature**

Two potential barriers have been identified as impeding the success of school councils. These relate to the attitudes and expectations of school administrators and parents. It appears that, on the one hand, school administrators, principals in particular, do not value the input of the general citizenry into school governance and often sabotage or manipulate such efforts thereby protecting their traditional control over education. The parents, on the other hand, not used to having a meaningful role in the governance of schools, hesitate to get involved, especially in rural areas.

### **Methodology**

The present study relied on the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Questionnaires were employed to gather data from teachers, parents and students. Semi-structured interviews were held with the principal, vice-principal, superintendent, board chairperson, and two other board members. The research setting was a central school, kindergarten to level 3, located in a predominantly rural school board. The aim of the study was to determine the attitudes of the major stakeholders with respect to the implementation of school councils.

### **Summary of Findings - Interview Data Analysis**

#### **School Councils as a Workable Model for Local Involvement in School Governance**

##### **1. Agreement with the Proposed Composition of School Councils**

When asked to indicate their level of agreement with the proposed composition of school councils, none of the proposed groups received unanimous agreement from the interviewees although five of the six agreed that parents should be included. The board chairperson was the only person to disagree stating that parents should not be included because they might see issues from a narrow, local perspective and might find it difficult to perceive things from the broader view. The other interviewees, although concerned with parent apathy, all agreed that parents should serve on school councils provided they were capable of serving on committees and able to make a worthwhile contribution.

Representatives of the church on councils also received support from five of the six interviewees. Reasons given for their inclusion on school councils included a constitutional right to be there, to provide a voice for the different denominations, and that morally churches should be involved in education at all levels. The principal was the lone individual not to agree stating that in some instances there might be religious interference.

The principal, vice-principal, board chairperson, and board member A agreed that the principal should be included on councils since it was deemed that the expert advice of such a person would be essential to the effective operation of councils and schools. Both the superintendent and board member B disagreed noting that the principal would take direction from the council just as the superintendent presently takes direction from school boards and would not have any voting power. Concern was also expressed that the principal would hold too much authority.

With regard to inclusion of teachers and representatives of the general community on school councils, the reaction was mixed. Both school administrators and board member A agreed that teachers should be included while the superintendent, board chairperson and board member B thought their inclusion would create a conflict of interest situation. The superintendent, principal and board chairperson agreed that if members of the general public could make meaningful contributions then they should be included. The vice-principal, along with board members A and B, disagreed noting that there were not enough qualified volunteers to go around and that positions would have to be filled by appointments which could lead to councils being stacked by the principal.

The principal and vice-principal indicated that generally they would be satisfied with the proposed composition noting that such a council was necessary to set expectations and examples for the student population. The other interviewees did not think it was essential and noted that while more involvement was necessary it did not need to be through a legal and autonomous group such as school councils which added another layer of bureaucracy to the system.

In summary, the superintendent agreed that school councils should include parents, and representatives of the church and general community. The board chairperson favoured these last two groups plus the principal. Board member A thought that all proposed groups except representatives of the general community should be involved. Board member B indicated agreement with only the parents and representatives of the church being present on councils. The principal agreed with all of the proposed groups except church

representatives while the vice-principal agreed with all except representatives of the general community.

2. Agreement with the Proposed Responsibilities of School Councils

With respect to the identified responsibilities of school councils, all interviewees agreed that councils should be able to authorize the raising of funds, communicate to the school board its concerns regarding policies and practices, and seek ways to involve parents who have not traditionally been involved in school life. The superintendent viewed the proposed role in fund raising as being extremely important and also noted, with regard to the second item, that he was in agreement as long as the board was not obligated to take direction from school councils. All interviewees agreed that local attempts, through school councils, might be more successful at increasing parental involvement than previous board attempts.

None of the interviewees agreed that councils should share in staffing decisions with the school board. Problems with confidentiality, sensitivity and self-serving politics were given as reasons for not including this item. The superintendent was the only interviewee to agree that councils should share in curriculum decisions. The other interviewees thought that curriculum was something that was better left to the experts. The principal felt that members of the council might not be aware of the entire situation and was the only one not to agree with councils sharing in funding decisions.

The superintendent agreed that school councils should be responsible for protecting local educational interests, and, along with the principal and board chairperson, should be responsible for influencing the formation of the school. Others were unsure as to the meaning of these. Reaction to the responsibility of analyzing and preparing a report on the degree of success of the school was mixed. The superintendent, vice-principal and chairperson agreed with the recommendation while the others expressed concerns that the report might not be accurate, few would understand it, and that a more objective approach might be undertaken by the school board.

Generally, the board chairperson, principal, vice-principal and board member A responded that they agreed with the responsibilities as outlined with the exception of staffing and curriculum. Board member A added that the involvement need not be legislated. The superintendent and board member B disagreed citing as reasons regressiveness, added bureaucracy and parent apathy.

### 3. Perceived Workability of School Councils in the Area

When asked whether school councils would work in the area, none of the interviewees was totally positive. Based on previous unsuccessful attempts at setting up education committees, the principal and vice-principal were unsure if school councils would work. Both board members, the board chairperson, and the superintendent didn't think they would. Lack of parental support, lack of qualified individuals, bureaucratic muddle, and an administrative nightmare were offered as reasons as to why councils would not be successful in the area.

### **Perceived Positive and Negative Aspects of Increased Local Involvement**

Interviewees identified a number of factors related to increased local involvement through school councils which they considered to be positive. For example, most reiterated that such an approach could enhance access to a group of parents who were previously inaccessible and produce an atmosphere of ownership of the education system. It was speculated that the process might lead to a greater awareness by parents and the general community of some of the problems faced by school personnel which, in turn, might lead to an improved learning environment.

The proposed method of increased local involvement also had negative connotations for some interviewees. Councils were viewed as mini-school boards and an added layer of bureaucracy in the system. Concern was expressed regarding the cost of operating such a system and the insufficient numbers of qualified individuals to serve on all of these councils. It was also felt that too much control would be passed to principals through local councils and, further, that the councils could be controlled by individuals, or groups of individuals, with their own agendas.

### **Perceived Potential Barriers to School Councils and Suggestions for Overcoming these Barriers**

The major difficulty identified by all interviewees in the establishment of school councils was parental apathy. This was followed closely by fear of negative and confrontational attitudes on the part of council members. Some interviewees felt that either

some teachers might not want to serve for fear of conflict of interest situations arising from council business or that others might be over zealous in their enthusiasm for their own personal motives. Cost of operation, lack of clarity with regard to roles, and increased workloads, in particular for principals, were also given as inhibiting factors. None of the interviewees thought that reluctance on the part of school administrators would be a problem.

A number of proposals were made with regard to overcoming some of these difficulties. For example, several of the interviewees suggested that, rather than merely calling for nominations, certain qualified individuals in the community should be approached and encouraged to run for council. Sufficient funding, time and training for council members were deemed essential. The importance of a regular, but not overburdening, meeting schedule was also noted. To overcome the problem of increased workloads, it was suggested that administrative roles would need to be re-defined.

### **Impact of School Councils on Roles and Practices**

All interviewees except the principal imagined that the workload of an individual in their position would increase under the school council system. The principal viewed the change as empowering the parents and the general community. Although the principal did not express a concern regarding the increased workload of a person in this position, all of the other interviewees did. Similar sentiments were echoed for the superintendent. It was also speculated that the increased accountability brought on by the proposed system would create added pressure and stress for everyone in the system. The principal was the only interviewee to acknowledge that the proposed new role would be satisfactory.

### **Summary of Findings - Analysis of Questionnaire Data**

**Satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance and agreement with composition and responsibilities of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report**

### Students

Where students were given the choice within questionnaire items of *No Opinion*, many of them choose that response. For example, an average of over 40% of the responses to the questions concerning level of satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in local school governance and level of agreement with the proposed composition and responsibilities of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report fell into this category. In most instances this was more than double the similar response from either parents or teachers. This response by students should not be surprising considering the traditional bureaucratic governance structure of the education system and the low position that students occupy within this structure. Students, being at the lower end of the pyramid, are the least involved and, therefore, the least informed.

The average of student responses to present opportunities for involvement in governance by all identified groups of stakeholders, however, shows that of those students who did choose between satisfied and dissatisfied, more than three times the number of students indicated that they were satisfied than dissatisfied. Specifically, over half of the student population surveyed were satisfied with present opportunities for parents, teachers, students, and the principal. One-quarter of the students indicated that they were satisfied with opportunities for church representatives while less than a quarter of them indicated the same about members of the general community.

Only one-half of the students expressed an opinion with regard to the proposed composition of school councils by selecting either agree or disagree. Of these students, twice as many agreed as disagreed with the overall recommendation to include all of the identified stakeholders. The most favourably viewed of these stakeholders appeared to be the principal with more than half of all students agreeing that this person should be included on councils. For every student who indicated disagreement with the inclusion of the principal, five indicated agreement. Approximately one-third of the surveyed student population agreed that teachers, parents, and general community representatives should be included. Except for teachers, this meant that at least double the number of students agreed as disagreed with including the other two groups. The only proposed group not to receive a higher percentage of agreement than disagreement for inclusion on school councils was church representatives. Sixty percent of the students who expressed an opinion on this question item did not agree that they should be included on school councils.



In comparing the average of all student responses to all items listed under the proposed responsibilities of school councils, 40% were *No Opinion*.. However, more than half of the students still indicated agreement with all identified items. For those decided students, nine times more agreed with the proposed responsibilities than disagreed. At least 50% of all students surveyed agreed with each of the identified items in the question except staffing. Forty percent agreed that it should be included. When responses are compared for each identified responsibility, there are anywhere from five to ten times as many students agreeing with each item as disagreeing.

### Parents

When asked their level of satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance, the average of parent responses to all of the items listed in the question indicated 60% of them were satisfied. Overall, more than four times as many parents were satisfied with present arrangements as were dissatisfied.

Specifically, at least three of every five parents were pleased with present opportunities for parents, teachers, students, and the principal. Parents appeared most pleased with opportunities for involvement by the principal with more than three-quarters of them indicating their satisfaction on that item. Parents were least satisfied with present opportunities for representatives from the church and general community. These were the only two groups with which less than half of the parents indicated that they were satisfied and over half expressed no opinion.

Generally, parents seemed pleased with the proposed composition of school councils since, when all responses for each item within the question were averaged, four of every five indicated their agreement. Over 80% of the parents favoured the principal being included on council. The only identified group of stakeholders not to receive support from at least half of the parents was church representatives, although 47% did agree that they should be included. The next least popular group among parents was representatives from the general community receiving the support of just over half of the surveyed population. In considering only those parents who expressed an opinion by choosing either agree or disagree for each proposed group of stakeholders, anywhere from three to eight times as many agreed as disagreed.

The average of all responses from parents to the overall proposed list of responsibilities of school councils was very positive with over 80% indicating their

agreement as compared to 5% who disagreed. The only item not to receive the support of at least three-quarters of the parents was the proposal to share in staffing decisions with the school board. However, even this item received the support of over 60% of all parents and 86% of those parents who expressed an opinion.

### Teachers

The average of all teacher responses to level of satisfaction with present opportunities for involvement in school governance by all identified groups of stakeholders shows that, generally, 50% were satisfied while 38% were dissatisfied. These percentages, however, do not reflect the typical percentages for each group of stakeholders. While there was nearly unanimous agreement with present opportunities for the principal, less than a quarter of the teachers were pleased with opportunities for parents. Also, less than half expressed satisfaction with opportunity for input by teachers, church representatives and representatives from the general community.

Although the overall average of the teachers' responses to the proposed composition of school councils is 77% in favour, it is once again not very reflective of their reaction to each individual group. For example, teachers expressed unanimous, or near unanimous, agreement with the council including parents, teachers and the principal while less than half of them agree with including representatives from the church and the general community. Some teachers seemed to have the greatest difficulty in determining whether or not to include these last two groups since, uncharacteristically, nearly one-quarter of them indicated *No Opinion*.

Responses to the question which asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with responsibilities of school councils as proposed shows that at least two-thirds of the teachers agreed with all of the identified responsibilities except one. Only 12% of the respondents agreed that the school council should share in staffing decisions with the school board. Eighty-two percent expressed disagreement with including this item as a responsibility.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate a disparity of opinion among the elite with regard to the proposed changes for the education system within the research setting. For example,

the principal, vice-principal and teachers appeared willing to adopt the idea of school councils as presented in The Royal Commission Report while the superintendent and board members had grave concerns about handing over a major portion of educational governance to such a group. Why this disparity of opinion? All of the individuals interviewed epitomized honesty, integrity and genuineness. There appeared to be a congruency between each individual's response during the interviews and their underlying philosophy regarding the operation of the school system. Why then should there be such a difference of opinions among individuals who have as a primary concern the education of children under their care? Why would the parents, students, teachers and school administration support the inclusion of teachers on councils while those more closely associated with the school board not want them involved? Partial answers to these questions might be found by considering how organizations in general, and school boards in particular, typically respond to change.

The greatest resistance to school councils appears to be emanating from those most closely associated with the school board, namely the superintendent, board chairperson and board members. These individuals are the key components of the school board organization. As presented in Chapter 2, Davies (1987) proposed that one approach to understanding the resistance of any organization to change is to examine the nature of organizations per se. Davies explains that inherent in most organizations is a drive to seek stability, to strive to maintain the status quo. It is the nature of organizations to perform functions through standardized routines and procedures, maintain control and avoid uncertain situations, change only incrementally, and, if change is necessary, choose a course of action that is low risk and "will do".

The establishment of school councils, however, could mean that school boards would potentially be opening themselves up for a barrage of input from external sources which could disrupt their normal routine and procedures. Such openness would make it very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain any degree of control, therefore creating a situation fraught with uncertainty. As well, school councils, armed with legislated authority, represent more than just a marginal adaptation of current Parent-Teacher Associations, Home and School Associations, or Parent Advisory Committees, they represent a radical departure from the status quo for most school boards and, hence, present a high risk situation.

What is it that causes these types of reactions on the part of organizations? Surely, organizations are just collections of individuals. Why would the individuals in any organization resent change? In particular, why would some members of the elite associated with a school board resist the establishment of school councils as proposed in the Royal Commission Report? Throughout this study, reasons such as parental apathy, lack of expertise among parents, and conflict of interest on the part of teachers have been put forward by respondents. These are legitimate concerns, but are there other underlying issues not yet uncovered?

It will be recalled from Chapter 1 that the educational governance structure in this province was described as a social systems model which relies, in part, on environmental demands to spur changes to the system. These demands can, and do, occur through any number of different methods including the most recent, a Royal Commission. The reasons for such calls for reform usually involve dissatisfaction with the existing system. In the present instance, these calls from the environment center around educational and social imperatives, and financial realities.

An integral component of this social systems model is the traditional pyramid of authority with the church and state at the top level, followed on each successive level by the school board, superintendent, principal, teachers and community members at the bottom (see Figure 1.2). Those at the top of the pyramid are viewed as having greater authority than those further down. Weber described authority such as this, which was legitimized by position, as legal authority (Hoy and Miskel, 1987). Weber also described two other bases of authority, charismatic and traditional. The first of these was dependent upon an individual's character and personality, while the second was associated with a high status customarily afforded to an individual in a particular position. In light of these three orientations to authority, how might the proposed changes impact the future of each of the stakeholders included in the pyramid?

Traditionally, the church and state have been viewed as a partnership with each having a significant input into educational matters. This partnership, however, has been tested recently with the release of the Royal Commission Report and its apparent adoption by the provincial government. The Report contains two hundred eleven recommendations, including a proposal to eliminate the existing denominational system and, consequently, reduce the role of the churches in education. To fully appreciate the impact of this proposal

on the part of the churches, one must consider the history of the church involvement in education in this province.

Churches have, for almost two hundred years, played a major role in the delivery of education. They were initially responsible for building and maintaining schools, developing curriculum, supplying books, and hiring staff, among other things. To this present day, the churches have a major say in what is taught, how it is taught, where it is taught and by whom. They believe that they have a constitutional and moral right to be involved in the education of children. It should, therefore, come as no surprise to anyone that any initiative which seeks to undermine their authority in this area would be met with some resistance. It would not be unreasonable to expect a less than enthusiastic response on the part of any church official to any of the recommendations from the Royal Commission Report which has the potential of usurping their control.

This explanation, in part, might assist in better understanding the reaction of some school board members. In addition to the general responsibility of every school board member which includes representing the concerns of the entire district, some members of the school board are church appointees. These individuals have a special agenda which includes protecting the rights and voicing the concerns of their respective churches and their parishioners with respect to education. Under the proposed restructuring of the education system, of which school councils was just one aspect which has particular relevance for most of the elite, a number of options are available for these individuals.

Firstly, they could continue to serve as board members on the revised boards. If such were the case, the situation could be very different from that previously experienced. Considering that the number of school boards for the province was to be reduced to one-third of the current number, then, on average, each of the new boards would be responsible for a district three times the present size. With this increase there could potentially be three times the number of schools under the jurisdiction of any one board. It is also possible that there would be an increase in the number of people sitting on boards. If this is the case, any individual school board member is likely to have less influence than previously and the position of school board member could conceivably lose some legal and traditional authority.

A second option for present board members, including those who are church appointees, is to sit as school council members. This too would probably be a different experience from sitting as a member of the present board. Depending on the final

composition for these councils, representatives of the church could very well find themselves in the minority in the midst of a forum dominated by much larger teacher and parent groups. Considering that many of the parents and teachers surveyed indicated that they did not want, or appeared uncertain about, involving representatives of the church, this venue might not afford church representatives the degree of status and respect to which they are accustomed. Under such circumstances, it is possible that there would be a further erosion of their legal and, perhaps, traditional authority since some of the mystique that the community holds for members of the clergy would decrease with continued contact.

A final possibility, though unlikely, for present board members is that they may not sit on either the proposed new board or a school council. The result of such an event would be that individuals in these positions would lose any authority associated with the positions. From these perspectives, it is perhaps understandable why some board members, although in favour of increased input by parents, could not totally conceive of the concept of school councils as a workable model. While board members might have legitimate concerns about school councils, it could be viewed that the establishment of these bodies would lead to a lessening of their legal and traditional authority, and associated status, within the education system.

The proposed changes for educational governance also have significant repercussions for any person who is currently in the role of school board chairperson. If these people continue to serve in the same capacity under an expanded board, with responsibility over a much greater area, the traditional type of authority usually attached to the position of board chairperson is likely to be enhanced. However, a major drawback to this scenario would be the increased workload, due in part to all of the newly formed school councils, and the difficulty of maintaining control. The demands of these councils, backed by legislated authority, would undermine some of the current legal authority of a school board and its chairperson. Considering the number of requests likely to be forthcoming from all of the councils for the limited resources available, a healthy dose of charismatic authority might be essential for the position as well!

Other possibilities for those currently filling the role as board chairpersons to consider is that school councils might be introduced but the current school board situation would remain unchanged. In the likelihood of such an event, the situation for board chairpersons will probably not change much from that already described for expanded boards. The authority placed in the hands of school councils will likely detract from that

usually assigned to boards and, through them, their chairpersons. Much of the control traditionally associated with the current boards is apt to disappear. The other two possibilities for current board chairpersons, to sit as regular board members or not sit at all, will obviously result in reduction or loss of authority as well.

A person in the position of superintendent of a school board, with responsibility for administering an entire district, takes direction from regulations and policies as laid down by the Department of Education and the board itself. Not only does this person act on input from the higher echelons of government but, through school board elections and appointments, there is also a formal structure in place whereby parents and other members of the community can also have a say. Generally then, the authority given to the position is legitimized on the one hand by government legislation and on the other by the will of the people.

Future prospects for superintendents, as with school board members and chairpersons, are also uncertain and appear to hold several possibilities. One scenario is that these individuals maintain their current status as superintendents of the revised and expanded school board. As with the board chairperson, the added responsibilities associated with managing the board of a much larger district ought to cause an increase in the authority ascribed to the position. Again however, a drawback is likely to be loss of control over traditional school board matters such as staffing and funding. This will likely occur due to the presence of school councils with their own legislated authority over these and other issues, and also, due to limitations imposed by a workload filled with other duties. Even if the school board structure remains unchanged, it appears that school councils will erode some of the authority afforded the superintendent through his position on the school board. Other options available to individuals in the position of superintendent might include either a re-assignment to another position such as an assistant superintendent or leaving the employment of the board. Both moves have negative consequences from an authority perspective for those presently serving in the role of superintendent.

Contrary to the potential negative effects of school councils on the other members of the elite and their resulting attitudes, it would appear that the principal, from the point of view of authority, is in a no-lose situation with the establishment of school councils and is consequently very receptive of them. As discussed in Chapter 1, the principalship is already considered a prestigious position by many, particularly in rural communities. As

such, it carries with it a degree of authority afforded few others in those communities. Although the role of the principal has yet to be specified with regard to school councils, research seems to indicate that, regardless of the role specified, the principal usually wields a fair amount of control over the operation of such councils. It seems as though this could be especially true in smaller communities where leadership experience may sometimes be lacking. This, combined with the additional exposure within the community, an even greater degree of authority might be attributed to this position than previously.

Unlike superintendents, whose position is legitimized by formal governmental regulations and public input, generally, the authority associated with the principalship comes down from the stakeholders placed higher up on the pyramid. That is, the legal authority of principals is spelled out in regulations and policies from the Department of Education and school boards. While it may vary from board to board, it is fairly substantive. For example, principals have, to varying degrees, control over such functions as the curriculum that is taught in their schools, who teaches the curriculum, how funds are raised and spent, timetabling, supervision and student discipline. The basis of a principal's authority gives a person in that position a fair degree of command over those lower down on the pyramid.

It appears, however, that this may soon change. Not only will individuals in the principal's position continue to hold on to the legal authority presently experienced, but they will also be empowered through the legislated authority given to school councils. As *ex officio* members of council, it appears that the authority of principals will not only extend downward on the traditional pyramid but, also, upward. In the future, when principals approach school boards, they will likely be perceived as acting on behalf of an entire community and not just themselves or a few isolated teachers, students, or parents. From this perspective, it would seem that their concerns might receive more attention than in the past.

Charismatic authority on the part of principals will also likely become more important with the establishment of school councils. As principals attempt to bring together individuals from varying backgrounds and interests in promoting the smooth operation of a council, an accommodating approach on their part will probably be seen as an asset. It would seem that principals involved with school councils will need to be much more cognizant of their public relations role.



School councils may also have ramifications for the position of vice-principal. For example, depending upon some of the decisions made by council and in keeping with regulations and policies that govern them, vice-principals may be given specific authority by council to deal with certain issues in a particular manner. For example, if student discipline is one of the duties normally performed by the vice-principal, the school council may wish to adopt a specific policy with regard to the same. Also, since the duties of the vice-principal are, in large measure, determined by the principal, the amount of authority associated with the former is dependent upon the amount possessed by the latter. That is, the more leeway a principal has in the administration of the school, the more authority that person is likely to delegate to the vice-principal.

As discussed previously, the position of a teacher, particularly in rural communities, typically carries with it a fairly high degree of traditional authority as far as the general public is concerned. This is sometimes evident in the fact that these individuals are expected to perform functions normally reserved for those in positions of leadership. In reality, the only legal authority many of these individuals possess is limited to the teaching that occurs in their own classrooms. While they may have a collective voice as a staff, and some may exert influence through the use of charismatic authority, teachers, without the support of the principal, are for the most part powerless to affect change. This might explain the strong positive reaction by teachers to school councils since they see these councils as a means of changing this situation. They will have opportunity to voice their opinions and influence decisions made. Their legal authority, as teachers, should be amplified since, either as members of council or through their representatives, they will have an official, legislated say in matters of concern to them.

Until now, opportunities for parents to have any real influence over matters affecting their children have been limited. For those wishing to have input on a district bases, there was the possibility of being elected or appointed as a member of the school board. Otherwise, parents' options were restricted to voicing their concerns: to individual board members, school administration or teachers, neither of which carried much influence from the point of view of legislated authority. The introduction of school councils will also change this. Approximately seventy-five percent of the parents surveyed agreed that the parents of children attending the school should be included on school councils. Over fifty percent indicated their willingness to sit as members of school councils. It seems that

parents want another more accessible and official means of input into the educational system, especially as it affects their local schools.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contrary to reports from much of the literature, and the Report of the Royal Commission in particular, that the general public is demanding more say in educational governance, the findings of this study do not support these claims. Teachers were much more concerned with the limited access to educational governance available to parents than were the parents themselves. Nearly three-quarters of the teachers indicated that they were dissatisfied with the present situation as compared to only one in four of the parents.

The literature also indicated that there were two major barriers to the establishment of school councils. The first of these relates to the reluctance of parents to become involved. This view was not supported by the findings of this study. Although a majority of the parents who responded to the survey indicated that they were satisfied with conditions as they presently existed, a majority of them also indicated that they would serve on school councils if they were established. Since nearly sixty percent of all families with children attending the school were represented in the study, the findings also imply then that nearly one-third of them would be willing to be involved with school councils. This appears to be a significant number especially considering that, of the twelve elected positions available on the district school board, none were contested, four were filled by acclamation, and eight were filled by appointment in lieu of elections.

A second barrier to school councils mentioned in the literature concerned the reluctance of school administrators to involve parents in the governance process. The findings of this study indicated the opposite is actually true. Although there were concerns at the school board level, the two individuals most closely associated with the school, the principal and vice-principal, were very strongly in favour of such involvement. A majority of the teachers in the school did not view it as a problem either. Admittedly, while this single sample does not form very solid grounds for dismissing school administrator reluctance as a potential barrier to school councils, it is, however, such an important issue in the impending success of these councils, that it requires further research.

Another finding from this study which might be of concern to some relates to the presence of representatives of the church and the general community on school councils. While there was no overwhelming negative reaction towards the inclusion of both of these groups, there was a high incidence of indecision towards them on the part of parents, teachers and students. It appears that this issue may require further study, or, at the very least, the careful attention of those entrusted with the responsibility of establishing and operating school councils. If these representatives, as a minority, are to be included, then a public relations effort on the part of principals, school boards, or the Department of Education may be necessary in order to justify their presence to the majority.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, depending upon the ages of children attending the school, student representatives have sometimes been part of school councils in other areas. A majority of the respondents of this study, including approximately two-thirds of the teachers and parents, also agreed that they should be included for this province. Over three-quarters of the students themselves thought that they should be included and over half indicated that they would be willing to serve on school councils. In light of the foregoing, the Department of Education may wish to amend the recommendation of the Royal Commission and add students to its list of stakeholders to be included on councils.

With respect to the responsibilities proposed for school councils, staffing appears to be the most sensitive. Only approximately one-third of the parents agreed with the recommendation while over one-quarter of them were indecisive. Most of the teachers and interviewees disagreed with including it as a responsibility for school councils. Part of the mixed reaction seems to relate to confusion on the part of some respondents as to the implications of this and other recommendations. In this incidence, it was unclear if "sharing with the board" implied that school councils would have, for example, a direct input into which individual was hired, or, if the authority of councils would limit them to simply recommending to the board the areas of teacher specialization that were required for the school. These issues should be clarified and studied before proceeding with the establishment of school councils.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that, despite the concerns of the elite of the school system regarding parent interest and ability, the parents themselves appear ready and willing to accept the challenge of increased involvement in governance at the local school level. As well, contrary to findings cited elsewhere, the principal in this study would appear to welcome parental input. While it would be inappropriate to

generalize from one case study, it may be that principals, particularly in rural areas, see the establishment of school councils as actually increasing their influence and control over local education. To the contrary, senior administrators and board members may view the establishment of school councils as an erosion of their influence and control as they become further removed from the local community. Recognition of the impending shift in the balance of power may, in fact, explain the attitudes and perceptions as evident among most, if not all, stakeholders who participated in this study.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**(Interview Schedule)**

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

*To ensure that the interviewees are familiar with the topic of school councils, they will be given a copy of the relevant section, "A New Role For Parents", from the Royal Commission Report prior to the interview.*

1. SCHOOL COUNCILS AS A WORKABLE MEANS OF INCREASING LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE
  - a) What arrangements now exist for parental involvement into school practices, both at the school and board levels?
  - b) The Royal Commission Report recommends that School Councils comprise of the following people. Do you agree with each? Why or why not?
    - i) parents elected by parents of children registered at the school.
    - ii) teachers elected by teachers.
    - iii) representatives of the churches.
    - iv) representatives of the community chosen by other [school] council members.
    - v) the school principal.
  - c) Generally, do you agree with the proposed composition of school councils as outlined above?
  - d) The Royal Commission Report recommends that school councils have, through legislation, the following responsibilities. Indicate whether you agree or disagree. What is your reason?
    - i) to protect local educational interests.
    - ii) to influence the formation of the school.
    - iii) to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as:
      - curriculum
      - funding

## -staffing

- iv) to authorize the raising of funds at the school level.
  - v) to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices.
  - vi) to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life.
  - vii) to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents.
- e) Generally, do you agree that school councils should have the proposed responsibilities as stated above?
- f) Do you think school councils, as outlined in the Royal Commission Report, will work in this area?
- g) What do you view as some of the positive aspects of the concept?
- h) What do you view as some of the negative aspects of the concept?

2. IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

- a) From your perspective, can you foresee any potential difficulties in establishing and/or operating school councils?
- b) From the perspective of other stakeholders (i.e. students, teachers, vice-principal, principal, superintendent, school board members) can you foresee any obstacles to the implementation of school councils?

3. OVERCOMING PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES

- a) How might the difficulties indicated above be overcome?

- b) Some have suggested that administrators do not value the input of outside groups (i.e. parents and other community members) and that this will adversely affect the success of school councils. Do you think this will be a problem? If so, how might it be overcome?
- c) Some have also suggested that apathy on the part of parents will adversely affect the success of school councils. Do you think this will be a valid criticism for this area? If so, how might it be overcome?

4. IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGE ON CURRENT PRACTICES

- a) How will these proposed changes affect you in your current role (i.e. either as superintendent, school board member, vice-principal or principal)?
- b) How do you think it will affect the other major stakeholders (i.e. superintendent, school board member, vice-principal or principal)?

5. FUTURE ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

- a) What do you think your role, or the role of a person in your position, will be if school councils are implemented?
- b) Will that role be satisfactory?

6. OTHER COMMENTS

Do you think there are other issues related to school councils that should be addressed but have not been in this interview? Explain, if necessary.

**APPENDIX B**  
(Questionnaire to Parents)

**QUESTIONNAIRE TO PARENTS****A Study of Attitudes and Perceptions  
Related to the Establishment of  
School Councils**

The 1992 report by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education proposed new roles for parents in the operation of schools. The report recommended the establishment of School Councils consisting of parents, teachers, church representatives, the school principal, and other members from the general community. It is the intent of this study to obtain people's views on the proposed school councils.

In addition to obtaining answers to the above questions it is also necessary to ask some general questions about you and your family. **DO NOT** identify yourself. All responses will be completely confidential and no one will be identified.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in this study by completing this questionnaire.

**Instructions**

PLEASE READ ALL QUESTIONS CAREFULLY.

**DO NOT IDENTIFY YOURSELF.** BOTH YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

WHERE APPROPRIATE, INDICATE YOUR ANSWER BY CIRCLING A NUMBER(S) AT THE RIGHT.

PLACE THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENVELOPE, SEAL IT AND RETURN IT TO THE SCHOOL WITH YOUR CHILD.

1. What was the highest level of education attained by you and your spouse?  
(Circle one for each)
- |  | You | Spouse |
|--|-----|--------|
| Elementary                                     | 1   | 1      |
| Some high school                               | 2   | 2      |
| Completed high school                          | 3   | 3      |
| Some university, college or trade school       | 4   | 4      |
| Completed university, college, or trade school | 5   | 5      |
2. What type of work do you most typically do? (e.g. fisherman, nurse, teacher, fish plant worker, office worker, labourer)
- 
3. To which age group do you belong? (Circle one)
- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Less than 25 years old  | 1 |
| From 25 to 34 years old | 2 |
| From 35 to 44 years old | 3 |
| From 45 to 54 years old | 4 |
| More than 54 years old  | 5 |
4. Circle the grade for each child you have in school. (Circle as many as necessary.)
- K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
5. Which of these best describes your present level of involvement with the school? (Circle as many as necessary).
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Member and/or attend meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association or Home and School Association | 1 |
| Volunteer at school (e.g. library, cafeteria)  | 2 |
| Other (Please specify: _____)  | 3 |
| No involvement at this time  | 4 |
6. How often have you attended school meetings (for any purpose) during the past (1992-93) school year? (Circle one.)
- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| None                      | 1 |
| One occasion              | 2 |
| Two occasions             | 3 |
| Three occasions           | 4 |
| More than three occasions | 5 |
7. Do you currently hold, or have you held, a leadership position (e.g. president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) on community organizations such as Lions, Town Councils or Church Groups? (Circle one.)
- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No  | 2 |



8. How satisfied are you with present opportunities for the following groups or individuals to have input into school decision making? (Circle one for each part.)

		Very dissatisfied	Mildly dissatisfied	No opinion	Mildly satisfied	Very satisfied
a)	parents	1	2	3	4	5
b)	teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c)	church leaders	1	2	3	4	5
d)	other community members	1	2	3	4	5
e)	students	1	2	3	4	5
f)	school principal	1	2	3	4	5

9. The Royal Commission Report recommends that School Councils be made up of the following people. Indicate whether you: (Circle one)

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a)	parents elected by parents of children registered at the school	1	2	3	4	5
b)	teachers elected by teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c)	representatives of the churches	1	2	3	4	5
d)	representatives of the community chosen by other council members	1	2	3	4	5
e)	the school principal	1	2	3	4	5

10. The Royal Commission Report recommends that school councils have, through legislation, the following responsibilities. Indicate whether you: (Circle one.)

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a)	to protect local educational interests	1	2	3	4	5
b)	to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as:					
	i) <u>curriculum</u> (courses to be offered at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
	ii) <u>funding</u> (how money is to be raised and spent for the school)	1	2	3	4	5
	iii) <u>staffing</u> (personnel to be employed at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
c)	to authorize the raising of funds at the school level	1	2	3	4	5
d)	to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices	1	2	3	4	5
e)	to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life	1	2	3	4	5
f)	to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents	1	2	3	4	5
g)	to hold meetings with parents to discuss the annual report and any other matters concerning the operation of the school.	1	2	3	4	5

11. If school councils are established and have legislative authority, would you prefer that the council members be: (Circle one.)
- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Mostly parents and community members? | 1 |
| Mostly teachers?                      | 2 |
| Equal numbers of each?                | 3 |
12. Would you be willing to serve on school councils? (Circle one.)
- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No  | 2 |
13. Do you think that senior high students should be included on these councils? (Circle one.)
- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No  | 2 |

**APPENDIX C**  
(Questionnaire to Teachers)

## QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

### A Study of Attitudes and Perceptions Related to the Establishment of School Councils

The 1992 report by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education proposed new roles for parents in the operation of schools. The report recommends the establishment of School Councils consisting of parents, teachers, church representatives, the school principal, and other members from the general community. It is the intent of this study to obtain people's views on the proposed school councils; some of the perceived advantages and disadvantages which might be associated with these councils; some of the perceived difficulties which might be encountered in setting up these councils and how these can be overcome; how people think they should be involved in the operation of schools; and, how these changes will affect the current operation of schools.

In addition to obtaining answers to the above questions it is also necessary to ask some general questions about you. DO NOT identify yourself. All responses will be completely confidential and no one will be identified.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in this study by completing this questionnaire.

#### **Instructions**

PLEASE READ ALL QUESTIONS CAREFULLY.

WHERE APPROPRIATE, INDICATE YOUR ANSWER BY CIRCLING A NUMBER(S) AT THE RIGHT.

**DO NOT IDENTIFY YOURSELF.** BOTH YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

PLACE THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENVELOPE, SEAL IT AND RETURN IT TO ME.

1. How many years have you been teaching? (Circle one)
- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 0 to 5 years   | 1 |
| 6 to 10 years  | 2 |
| 11 to 15 years | 3 |
| 16 to 20 years | 4 |
| over 20 years  | 5 |
2. To which age group do you belong? (Circle one)
- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Less than 25 years old  | 1 |
| From 25 to 34 years old | 2 |
| From 35 to 44 years old | 3 |
| From 45 to 54 years old | 4 |
| More that 54 years old  | 5 |
3. If you are a classroom teacher, at what grade level(s) do you do most of your teaching? (Circle one only)
- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Primary (K-3)                | 1 |
| Elementary (4-6)             | 2 |
| Junior High (7-9)            | 3 |
| High School (Levels 1,2 & 3) | 4 |
4. Do you currently hold, or have you held, a leadership position (e.g. president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) on community organizations such as Lions, Town Councils or Church Groups? (Circle one.)
- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No  | 2 |
5. How satisfied are you with present opportunities for the following groups or individuals to have input into school decision making? (Circle one for each part.)
- |                            | Very dissatisfied | Mildly dissatisfied | No opinion | Mildly satisfied | Very satisfied |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------|----------------|
| a) parents                 | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| b) teachers                | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| c) church leaders          | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| d) other community members | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| e) students                | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| f) school principal        | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |

6. The Royal Commission Report recommends that School Councils be made up of the following people. Indicate whether you: (Circle one)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) parents elected by parents of children registered at the school	1	2	3	4	5
b) teachers elected by teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c) representatives of the churches	1	2	3	4	5
d) representatives of the community chosen by other council members	1	2	3	4	5
e) the school principal	1	2	3	4	5

7. The Royal Commission Report recommends that school councils have, through legislation, the following responsibilities. Indicate whether you: (Circle one.)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) to protect local educational interests	1	2	3	4	5
b) to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as:					
i) <u>curriculum</u> (courses to be offered at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
ii) <u>funding</u> (how money is to be raised and spent for the school)	1	2	3	4	5
iii) <u>staffing</u> (personnel to be employed at the school)	1	2	3	4	5
c) to authorize the raising of funds at the school level	1	2	3	4	5
d) to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
e)	to seek ways to involve parents, particularly those who, in the past, have chosen not to be involved in school life	1	2	3	4	5
f)	to analyze the information about how well the school is doing and, with the assistance of the school board, prepare an annual report to parents	1	2	3	4	5
g)	to hold meetings with parents to discuss the annual report and any other matters concerning the operation of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	If School Councils are established and have legislative authority, would you prefer that the council members be: (Circle one)					
	Mostly parents?					1
	Mostly teachers?					2
	Equal numbers of parents and teachers					3
9.	Do you think that senior high students should be included on these councils? (Circle one.)					
					Yes	1
					No	2
10.	The reluctance of parents to become involved has been identified as a possible barrier to the successful implementation of School Councils. Indicate whether you:					
					Strongly disagree	1
					Disagree	2
					No opinion	3
					Tend to agree	4
					Strongly agree	5
11.	Some people have suggested that the success of school councils will be adversely affected by the perceived notion that administrators do not value the input of outside groups such as parents and other community members. Indicate whether you:					
					Strongly disagree	1
					Disagree	2
					No opinion	3
					Tend to agree	4
					Strongly agree	5



12.	Would you be willing to serve on School Councils if they are established?		
		Yes	1
		No	2

**APPENDIX D**  
(Questionnaire to Students)

## QUESTIONNAIRE TO STUDENTS

### A Study of Attitudes and Perceptions Related to the Establishment of School Councils

The 1992 report by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education proposed new roles for parents in the operation of schools. The report recommends the establishment of School Councils consisting of parents, teachers, church representatives, the school principal, and other members from the general community. It is the intent of this study to obtain people's views on the proposed school councils.

In addition to obtaining answers to the above questions it is also necessary to ask some general questions about you. DO NOT identify yourself. All responses will be completely confidential and no one will be identified.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in this study by completing this questionnaire.

#### **Instructions**

PLEASE READ ALL QUESTIONS CAREFULLY.

WHERE APPROPRIATE, INDICATE YOUR ANSWER BY CIRCLING A NUMBER(S) AT THE RIGHT.

**DO NOT IDENTIFY YOURSELF.** BOTH YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO YOUR TEACHER WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED.

1. What is your present age as of December 31, 1993? (Circle one)
- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Less than 15 years | 1 |
| 16 years           | 2 |
| 17 years           | 3 |
| 18 years           | 4 |
| More than 18 years | 5 |
2. What is your present grade level? (Circle one)
- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | 1 |
| Level 2 | 2 |
| Level 3 | 3 |
| Other   | 4 |
3. Do you usually belong to any of these in your school? (Circle the number 1 for each part if the answer is 'yes', otherwise circle the number 2.)
- |  | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Sports teams (e.g. hockey, basketball, badminton) | 1   | 2  |
| b) Student council                                   | 1   | 2  |
| c) Clubs (e.g. drama, chess, math)                   | 1   | 2  |
| d) Year-book committee                               | 1   | 2  |
| e) Other groups                                      | 1   | 2  |
4. How satisfied are you with present opportunities for the following groups or individuals to have input into school decision making? (Circle one for each part.)
- |                            | Very dissatisfied | Mildly dissatisfied | No opinion | Mildly satisfied | Very satisfied |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------|----------------|
| a) parents                 | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| b) teachers                | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| c) church leaders          | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| d) other community members | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| e) students                | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |
| f) school principal        | 1                 | 2                   | 3          | 4                | 5              |

5. The Royal Commission Report recommends that School Councils be made up of the following people. Indicate whether you: (Circle one for each part)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) parents elected by parents of children registered at the school	1	2	3	4	5
b) teachers elected by teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c) representatives of the churches	1	2	3	4	5
d) representatives of the community chosen by other council members	1	2	3	4	5
e) the school principal	1	2	3	4	5

6. Some of the responsibilities of the School Councils as recommended by The Royal Commission are listed below. Indicate whether you: (Circle only one of the numbers for each part)

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	No opinion	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
a) to share with the school board in school-level decisions such as					
i) <u>curriculum</u> (courses that are offered in your school)	1	2	3	4	5
ii) <u>funding</u> (where and how money is spent in your school)	1	2	3	4	5
iii) <u>staffing</u> (individuals who are hired)	1	2	3	4	5
b) to authorize the raising of funds at the school level	1	2	3	4	5
c) to communicate to the school board its concerns about board policies and practices (i.e. discipline, school attendance)	1	2	3	4	5

- d) to analyze and report information about how well the school is doing in comparison to other schools in such things as exam results and student attendance
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
7. If School Councils are established would you prefer that they be made up:  
(Circle only one of the numbers.)
- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Mostly of parents?                        | 1 |
|  | Mostly of teachers?                       | 2 |
|  | Of equal numbers of parents and teachers? | 3 |
8. Some have suggested that there should also be senior high school representatives on School Councils. Indicate whether you (Circle only one.)
- |  |                   |   |
|--|-------------------|---|
|  | Strongly disagree | 1 |
|  | Disagree          | 2 |
|  | No opinion        | 3 |
|  | Tend to agree     | 4 |
|  | Strongly agree    | 5 |
9. The reluctance of parents to become involved has been identified as a possible barrier to successfully setting up School Councils. Indicate whether you: (Circle only one number.)
- |  |                   |   |
|--|-------------------|---|
|  | Strongly disagree | 1 |
|  | Disagree          | 2 |
|  | No opinion        | 3 |
|  | Tend to agree     | 4 |
|  | Strongly agree    | 5 |
10. The reluctance of the principal to involve students and parents in making school decisions has also been identified as a possible barrier to successfully setting up School Councils. indicate whether you: (Circle only one.)
- |  |                   |   |
|--|-------------------|---|
|  | Strongly disagree | 1 |
|  | Disagree          | 2 |
|  | No opinion        | 3 |
|  | Tend to agree     | 4 |
|  | Strongly agree    | 5 |
11. Would you be willing to serve on School Councils as a student representative?
- |  |     |  |    |
|--|-----|--|----|
|  | Yes |  | No |
|  | 1   |  | 2  |

**APPENDIX E**  
(SUMMARY OF PARENT DATA)

**Summary of Parent Data: Frequency Distribution Questions 1-13. (N=87)**

Questions #		Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>1.</b>	<b>Highest level of education attained by:</b>				
(a)	<b>You?</b>				
	Elementary	1	5	5.7	5.8
	Some high school	2	42	48.3	48.8
	Completed high school	3	16	18.4	18.6
	Some post-secondary	4	8	9.2	9.3
	Completed post-secondary	5	15	17.2	17.4
	Missing	9	1	1.1	
(b)	<b>Spouse?</b>				
	Elementary	1	10	11.5	12.3
	Some high school	2	44	50.6	54.3
	Completed high school	3	14	16.1	17.3
	Some post-secondary	4	6	6.9	7.4
	Completed post-secondary	5	7	8.0	8.6
	Missing	9	6	6.9	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Type of work you typically do?</b>				
	Office work	1	7	8.0	8.8
	Labourer	2	68	78.2	85.0
	Professional	3	3	3.4	3.8
	Other	4	2	2.3	2.5
	Missing	9	7	8.0	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Age?</b>				
	< 25 years	1	0	0	0
	25-34 years	2	32	36.8	37.6
	35-44 years	3	43	49.4	50.6
	45-54 years	4	8	9.2	9.4
	> 54 years	5	2	2.3	2.4
	Missing	9	2	2.3	
<b>4.</b>	<b>Grade levels of children in school?</b>				
	Primary-elementary	1	50	57.5	57.5
	None in primary-elementary	2	37	42.5	42.5
<b>5.</b>	<b>Present level of involvement in school?</b>				
	Attend P.T.A.	1	26	29.9	31.3
	Volunteer	2	4	4.6	4.8
	Other	3	6	6.9	7.2
	None	4	47	54.0	56.6
	Missing	9	4	4.6	



	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>6. School meeting attendance?</b>				
None	1	14	16.1	16.3
Once	2	18	20.7	20.9
Twice	3	23	26.4	26.7
Three times	4	12	13.8	14.0
> three times	5	19	21.8	22.1
Missing	9	1	1.1	
<b>7. Leadership experience on community organizations?</b>				
Yes	1	28	32.2	32.9
No	2	57	65.5	67.1
Missing	9	2	2.3	
<b>8. Level of satisfaction with present opportunities for input into school decision making by these groups:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	4	4.6	4.9
Mildly dissatisfied	2	14	16.1	17.3
No opinion	3	14	16.1	17.3
Mildly satisfied	4	30	34.5	37.0
Very satisfied	5	19	21.8	23.5
Missing	9	6	6.9	
<b>(b) Teachers?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	1	1.1	1.2
Mildly dissatisfied	2	8	9.2	9.8
No opinion	3	13	14.9	15.9
Mildly satisfied	4	25	28.7	30.5
Very satisfied	5	35	40.2	42.7
Missing	9	5	5.7	
<b>(c) Church leaders?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	4	4.6	4.9
Mildly dissatisfied	2	2	2.3	2.4
No opinion	3	43	49.4	52.4
Mildly satisfied	4	20	23.0	24.4
Very satisfied	5	13	14.9	15.9
Missing	9	5	5.7	
<b>(d) Other community members?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	2	2.3	2.5
Mildly dissatisfied	2	7	8.0	8.6
No opinion	3	45	51.7	55.6
Mildly satisfied	4	17	19.5	21.0
Very satisfied	5	10	11.5	12.3
Missing	9	6	6.9	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(e) Students?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	1	1.1	1.2
Mildly dissatisfied	2	18	20.7	22.0
No opinion	3	12	13.8	14.6
Mildly satisfied	4	31	35.6	37.8
Very satisfied	5	20	23.0	24.4
Missing	9	5	5.7	
<b>(f) School Principal?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	2	2.3	2.5
Mildly dissatisfied	2	6	6.9	7.5
No opinion	3	7	8.0	8.8
Mildly satisfied	4	21	24.1	26.3
Very satisfied	5	44	50.6	55.0
Missing	9	7	8.0	
<b>9. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that School Councils be comprised of:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents elected by parents of children registered at the school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	5	5.7	6.3
Tend to disagree	2	3	3.4	3.8
No opinion	3	14	16.1	17.5
Tend to agree	4	33	37.9	41.3
Strongly agree	5	25	28.7	31.3
Missing	9	7	8.0	
<b>(b) Teachers elected by teachers?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	11	12.6	14.1
Tend to disagree	2	5	5.7	6.4
No opinion	3	15	17.2	19.2
Tend to agree	4	31	35.6	39.7
Strongly agree	5	16	18.4	20.5
Missing	9	9	10.3	
<b>(c) Representatives of the churches?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	5	5.7	6.4
Tend to disagree	2	6	6.9	7.7
No opinion	3	30	34.5	38.5
Tend to agree	4	29	33.3	37.2
Strongly agree	5	8	9.2	10.3
Missing	9	9	10.3	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(d) Representatives of the community chosen by other council members?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	6	6.9	7.6
Tend to disagree	2	10	11.5	12.7
No opinion	3	22	25.3	27.8
Tend to agree	4	30	34.5	38.0
Strongly agree	5	11	12.6	13.9
Missing	9	8	9.2	
<b>(e) The school principal?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	6	6.9	7.7
Tend to disagree	2	2	2.3	2.6
No opinion	3	6	6.9	7.7
Tend to agree	4	29	33.3	37.2
Strongly agree	5	35	40.2	44.9
Missing	9	9	10.3	
<b>10. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that responsibilities of School Councils consist of these.</b>				
<b>(a) Protect local educational interests?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	3	3.4	3.8
No opinion	3	4	4.6	5.1
Tend to agree	4	24	27.6	30.4
Strongly agree	5	48	55.2	60.8
Missing	9	8	9.2	
<b>(b) Share with board in:</b>				
<b>i. curriculum decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.1	1.3
Tend to disagree	2	4	4.6	5.1
No opinion	3	6	6.9	7.6
Tend to agree	4	29	33.3	36.7
Strongly agree	5	39	44.8	49.4
Missing	9	8	9.2	
<b>ii. funding decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.1	1.3
Tend to disagree	2	2	2.3	2.5
No opinion	3	9	10.3	11.3
Tend to agree	4	28	32.2	35.0
Strongly agree	5	40	46.0	50.0
Missing	9	7	8.0	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>iii. staffing decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	4	4.6	5.1
Tend to disagree	2	4	4.6	5.1
No opinion	3	21	24.1	26.6
Tend to agree	4	27	31.0	34.2
Strongly agree	5	23	26.4	2.1
Missing	9	8	9.2	
<b>(c) Authorize raising of funds?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	3	3.4	3.8
Tend to disagree	2	5	5.7	6.3
No opinion	3	10	11.5	12.5
Tend to agree	4	40	46.0	50.0
Strongly agree	5	22	25.3	27.5
Missing	9	7	8.0	
<b>(d) Communicate with board its concern about policies and practices?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.1	1.3
Tend to disagree	2	1	1.1	1.3
No opinion	3	9	10.3	11.4
Tend to agree	4	31	35.6	39.2
Strongly agree	5	37	42.5	46.8
Missing	9	8	9.2	
<b>(e) Seek ways to involve parents?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	2	2.3	2.5
No opinion	3	11	12.6	13.8
Tend to agree	4	33	37.9	41.3
Strongly agree	5	34	39.1	42.5
Missing	9	7	8.0	
<b>(f) Prepare annual reports about school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	1.1	1.3
No opinion	3	3	3.4	3.8
Tend to agree	4	29	33.3	36.7
Strongly agree	5	46	52.9	58.2
Missing	9	8	9.2	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(g) Hold meetings with parents about school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.1	1.2
Tend to disagree	2	1	1.1	1.2
No opinion	3	5	5.7	6.2
Tend to agree	4	27	31.0	33.3
Strongly agree	5	47	54.0	58.0
Missing	9	6	6.9	
<b>11. Would you prefer that School Councils be made up:</b>				
Mostly of parents	1	9	10.3	10.6
Mostly of teachers	2	4	4.6	4.7
Of equal numbers	3	72	82.8	84.7
Missing	9	2	2.3	
<b>12. Would you serve on school councils?</b>				
Yes	1	46	52.9	54.8
No	2	38	43.7	45.2
Missing	9	3	3.4	
<b>13. Should senior high students be included on councils?</b>				
Yes	1	59	67.8	70.2
No	2	25	28.7	29.8
Missing	9	3	3.4	

**APPENDIX F**  
**(SUMMARY OF TEACHER DATA)**

**Summary of Teacher Data: Frequency Distribution Questions 1-12. (N=17)**

Questions #	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>1. Years teaching experience?</b>				
0 to 5 years	1	5	29.4	29.4
6 to 10 years	2	1	5.9	5.9
11 to 15 years	3	0	0	0
16 to 20 years	4	6	35.3	35.3
over 20 years	5	5	29.4	29.4
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>2. Age?</b>				
< 25 years	1	0	0	0
25-34 years	2	6	35.3	35.3
35-44 years	3	10	58.8	58.8
45-54 years	4	1	5.9	5.9
> 54 years	5	0	0	0
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>3. Grade level most taught?</b>				
Primary	1	2	11.8	13.3
Elementary	2	3	17.6	20.0
Junior High	3	5	29.4	33.3
High School	4	5	29.4	33.3
Missing	9	2	11.8	
<b>4. Leadership experience on community organizations?</b>				
Yes	1	7	41.2	41.2
No	2	10	58.8	58.8
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>5. Level of satisfaction with present opportunities for input into school decision making by these groups:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	4	23.5	23.5
Mildly dissatisfied	2	8	47.1	47.1
No opinion	3	1	5.9	5.9
Mildly satisfied	4	3	17.6	17.6
Very satisfied	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(b) Teachers?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	1	5.9	5.9
Mildly dissatisfied	2	8	47.1	47.1
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Mildly satisfied	4	8	47.1	47.1
Very satisfied	5	0	0	0
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(c) Church leaders?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	0	0	0
Mildly dissatisfied	2	2	11.8	11.8
No opinion	3	7	41.2	41.2
Mildly satisfied	4	5	29.4	29.4
Very satisfied	5	3	17.6	17.6
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(d) Other community members?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	2	11.8	11.8
Mildly dissatisfied	2	4	23.5	23.5
No opinion	3	4	23.5	23.5
Mildly satisfied	4	6	35.3	35.3
Very satisfied	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(e) Students?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	1	5.9	5.9
Mildly dissatisfied	2	6	35.3	35.3
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Mildly satisfied	4	9	52.9	52.9
Very satisfied	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(f) School Principal?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	0	0	0
Mildly dissatisfied	2	2	11.8	13.3
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Mildly satisfied	4	3	17.6	20.0
Very satisfied	5	10	58.8	66.7
Missing	9	2	11.8	



	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>6. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that School Councils be comprised of:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents elected by parents of children registered at the school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	9	52.9	52.9
Strongly agree	5	7	41.2	41.2
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(b) Teachers elected by teachers?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	10	58.8	58.8
Strongly agree	5	6	35.3	35.3
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(c) Representatives of the churches?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to disagree	2	4	23.5	23.5
No opinion	3	4	23.5	23.5
Tend to agree	4	8	47.1	47.1
Strongly agree	5	0	0	0
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(d) Representatives of the community chosen by other council members?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to disagree	2	5	29.4	29.4
No opinion	3	3	17.6	17.6
Tend to agree	4	6	35.3	35.3
Strongly agree	5	2	11.8	11.8
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(e) The school principal?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	0	0	0
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	6	35.3	35.3
Strongly agree	5	11	64.7	64.7
Missing	9	0	0	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>7. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that responsibilities of School Councils consist of these.</b>				
<b>(a) Protect local educational interests?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	9	52.9	52.9
Strongly agree	5	7	41.2	41.2
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(b) Share with board in:</b>				
<b>i. curriculum decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	3	17.6	17.6
No opinion	3	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to agree	4	9	52.9	52.9
Strongly agree	5	4	23.5	23.5
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>ii. funding decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	3	17.6	17.6
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	9	52.9	52.9
Strongly agree	5	5	29.4	29.4
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>iii. staffing decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	2	11.8	11.8
Tend to disagree	2	12	70.6	70.6
No opinion	3	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to agree	4	1	5.9	5.9
Strongly agree	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(c) Authorize raising of funds?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	2	11.8	11.8
Tend to disagree	2	2	11.8	11.8
No opinion	3	2	11.8	11.8
Tend to agree	4	8	47.1	47.1
Strongly agree	5	3	17.6	17.6
Missing	9	0	0	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(d) Communicate with board its concern about policies and practices?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	0	0	0
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	13	76.5	76.5
Strongly agree	5	4	23.5	23.5
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(e) Seek ways to involve parents?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	5	29.4	29.4
Strongly agree	5	11	64.7	64.7
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(f) Prepare annual reports about school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	3	17.6	17.6
Tend to agree	4	12	70.6	70.6
Strongly agree	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(g) Hold meetings with parents about school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	0	0	0
No opinion	3	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to agree	4	11	64.7	64.7
Strongly agree	5	5	29.4	29.4
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>8. Would you prefer that School Councils be made up:</b>				
Mostly of parents	1	0	0	0
Mostly of teachers	2	0	0	0
Of equal numbers	3	16	94.1	100
Missing	9	1	5.9	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>9. Should senior high students be included on councils?</b>				
Yes	1	10	58.8	62.5
No	2	6	35.3	37.5
Missing	9	1	5.9	
<b>10. Level of agreement with possible parent apathy?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	2	11.8	11.8
Disagree	2	1	5.9	5.9
No opinion	3	0	0	0
Tend to agree	4	10	58.8	58.8
Strongly agree	5	4	23.5	23.5
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>11. Level of agreement with reluctance of principal to involve students and parents?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	4	23.5	23.5
Disagree	2	7	41.2	41.2
No opinion	3	1	5.9	5.9
Tend to agree	4	4	23.5	23.5
Strongly agree	5	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>12. Would you serve on school councils?</b>				
Yes	1	16	94.1	94.1
No	2	1	5.9	5.9
Missing	9	0	0	

**APPENDIX G**  
(SUMMARY OF STUDENT DATA)

**Summary of Student Data: Frequency Distribution Questions 1-11. (N=62)**

Questions #	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
<b>1. Age</b>	< 15 years	1	1	1.6	1.6
	16 years	2	36	58.1	58.1
	17 years	3	17	27.4	27.4
	18 years	4	7	11.3	11.3
	> 18 years	5	1	1.6	1.6
<b>2. Grade</b>	Level 1	1	17	27.4	27.4
	Level 2	2	25	40.3	40.3
	Level 3	3	18	29.0	29.0
	Other	4	2	3.2	3.2
<b>3. Are you active in/on:</b>					
<b>(a) Sports?</b>	Yes	1	30	48.4	50.0
	No	2	30	48.4	50.0
	Missing	9	2	3.2	
<b>(b) Student Council?</b>	Yes	1	6	9.7	10.3
	No	2	52	83.9	89.7
	Missing	9	4	6.5	
<b>(c) Clubs?</b>	Yes	1	18	29.0	31.6
	No	2	39	62.9	68.4
	Missing	9	5	8.1	
<b>(d) Yearbook committee?</b>	Yes	1	1	1.6	1.8
	No	2	56	90.3	98.2
	Missing	9	5	8.1	
<b>(e) Other groups?</b>	Yes	1	15	24.2	26.8
	No	2	41	66.1	73.2
	Missing	9	6	9.7	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>4. Level of satisfaction with present opportunities or input into school decision making by these groups:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	2	3.2	3.3
Mildly dissatisfied	2	6	9.7	9.8
No opinion	3	21	33.9	34.4
Mildly satisfied	4	20	32.3	32.8
Very satisfied	5	12	19.4	19.7
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>(b) Teachers?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	2	3.2	3.3
Mildly dissatisfied	2	3	4.8	5.0
No opinion	3	21	33.9	35.0
Mildly satisfied	4	24	38.7	40.0
Very satisfied	5	10	16.1	16.7
Missing	9	2	3.2	
<b>(c) Church leaders?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	4	6.5	6.6
Mildly dissatisfied	2	4	6.5	6.6
No opinion	3	38	61.3	62.3
Mildly satisfied	4	10	16.1	16.4
Very satisfied	5	5	8.1	8.2
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>(d) Other community members?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	3	4.8	5.1
Mildly dissatisfied	2	6	9.7	10.2
No opinion	3	39	62.9	66.1
Mildly satisfied	4	10	16.1	16.9
Very satisfied	5	1	1.6	1.7
Missing	9	3	4.8	
<b>(e) Students?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	6	9.7	10.0
Mildly dissatisfied	2	9	14.5	15.0
No opinion	3	13	21.0	21.7
Mildly satisfied	4	18	29.0	30.0
Very satisfied	5	14	22.6	23.3
Missing	9	2	3.2	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(f) School principal?</b>				
Very dissatisfied	1	3	4.8	4.9
Mildly dissatisfied	2	2	3.2	3.3
No opinion	3	19	30.6	31.1
Mildly satisfied	4	22	35.5	36.1
Very satisfied	5	15	24.2	24.6
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>5. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that School Councils be comprised of:</b>				
<b>(a) Parents elected by parents of children registered at the school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	3	4.8	4.8
Tend to disagree	2	6	9.7	9.7
No opinion	3	32	51.6	51.6
Tend to agree	4	18	29.0	29.0
Strongly agree	5	3	4.8	4.8
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(b) Teachers elected by teachers?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	6	9.7	9.8
Tend to disagree	2	10	16.1	16.4
No opinion	3	25	40.3	41.0
Tend to agree	4	17	27.4	27.9
Strongly agree	5	3	4.8	4.9
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>(c) Representatives of the churches?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	7	11.3	11.5
Tend to disagree	2	5	8.1	8.2
No opinion	3	40	64.5	65.6
Tend to agree	4	8	12.9	13.1
Strongly agree	5	1	1.6	1.6
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>(d) Representatives of the community chosen by other council members?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	3	4.8	5.0
Tend to disagree	2	5	8.1	8.3
No opinion	3	31	50.0	51.7
Tend to agree	4	21	33.9	35.0
Strongly agree	5	0	0	0
Missing	9	2	3.2	



	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(e) The school principal?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	2	3.2	3.2
Tend to disagree	2	5	8.1	8.1
No opinion	3	22	35.5	35.5
Tend to agree	4	23	37.1	37.1
Strongly agree	5	10	16.1	16.1
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>6. Level of agreement with recommendation of Royal Commission that responsibilities of School Councils consist of these.</b>				
<b>(a) Sharing with board in:</b>				
<b>i. curriculum decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.6	1.6
Tend to disagree	2	5	8.1	8.1
No opinion	3	21	33.9	33.9
Tend to agree	4	25	40.3	40.3
Strongly agree	5	10	16.1	16.1
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>ii. funding decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	5	8.1	8.1
No opinion	3	17	27.4	27.4
Tend to agree	4	21	33.9	33.9
Strongly agree	5	19	30.6	30.6
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>iii. staffing decisions?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	4	6.5	6.5
No opinion	3	32	51.6	51.6
Tend to agree	4	23	37.1	37.1
Strongly agree	5	3	4.8	4.8
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(b) Authorize raising of funds?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.6	1.7
Tend to disagree	2	2	3.2	3.3
No opinion	3	27	43.5	45.0
Tend to agree	4	23	37.1	38.3
Strongly agree	5	7	11.3	11.7
Missing	9	2	3.2	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>(c) Communicate with board its concerns about policies and practices?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.6	1.6
Tend to disagree	2	1	1.6	1.6
No opinion	3	27	43.5	43.5
Tend to agree	4	26	41.9	41.9
Strongly agree	5	7	11.3	11.3
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>(d) To analyze and report information about school?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Tend to disagree	2	4	6.5	6.5
No opinion	3	26	41.9	41.9
Tend to agree	4	23	37.1	37.1
Strongly agree	5	9	14.5	14.5
Missing	9	0	0	0
<b>7. Would you prefer that School Councils be made up:</b>				
Mostly of parents?	1	5	8.1	8.1
Mostly of teachers?	2	5	8.1	8.1
Of equal numbers?	3	52	83.9	83.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>8. Level of agreement with senior high student representatives on School Council?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	1	1.6	1.6
Disagree	2	0	0	0
No opinion	3	12	19.4	19.4
Tend to agree	4	23	37.1	37.1
Strongly agree	5	26	41.9	41.9
Missing	9	0	0	
<b>9. Level of agreement with possible parent apathy?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0
Disagree	2	4	6.5	6.5
No opinion	3	35	56.5	56.5
Tend to agree	4	21	33.9	33.9
Strongly agree	5	2	3.2	3.2
Missing	9	0	0	

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>10. Level of agreement with reluctance of principal to involve students and parents?</b>				
Strongly disagree	1	4	6.5	6.6
Disagree	2	5	8.1	8.2
No opinion	3	24	38.7	39.3
Tend to agree	4	19	30.6	31.1
Strongly agree	5	9	14.5	14.8
Missing	9	1	1.6	
<b>11. Would you serve on School Councils?</b>				
Yes	1	33	53.2	54.1
No	2	28	45.2	45.9
Missing	9	1	1.6	

**APPENDIX H**  
(LETTERS OF CONSENT)

13 Belfast Street  
St. John's, Nfld.  
A1B 2G5  
August 10, 1993

Mr. Jones  
Superintendent  
Jonesville School Board  
Coppersville, Nfld.  
XXX XXX

Dear Mr. Jones,

The purpose of this letter is to request approval to conduct a research project at Evergreen All-Grade School during the month of October, 1993 as part of the requirements for the Master of Education program at Memorial University.

The research proposal is under the supervision of Dr. Austin Harte of the Faculty of Educational Administration and is pending approval by the Ethics Review Committee.

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes of the major stakeholders, within a rural setting, with respect to the implementation of school councils as proposed in the report of *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education*. Most studies investigating attitudes about school councils have been conducted in other countries and have tended to focus on urban settings. There appear to be very few Canadian studies and, indeed, no Newfoundland studies, pertaining to the topic.

The report of *The Royal Commission* recognizes that there may be difficulties associated with the process of establishing school councils and provides recommendations to alleviate these. This study should confirm or deny the existence of such difficulties for the area under study. The findings, which will be made available to the school board, should assist the board in determining the future direction it should take with respect to the implementation of these councils.

The research procedure would involve both interviews and questionnaires. Interviews of approximately one to one and a half hour duration, to be recorded on audio cassette, would be held with each of the superintendent, board chairperson, two other board members, the principal and vice-principal of the selected school. As well, questionnaires of approximately 3 to 4 pages in length would be administered to Levels 1, 2 and 3 students, all teachers within the school and all parents of students attending the school.

Although the topic is not a particularly sensitive one, each individual has the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering questions he or she prefers to omit. Letters of consent will be requested of all interviewees and from parents of students in Levels 1, 2 and 3.

While it is the intent of the researcher to identify the school and school board, none of the individuals in the study will be named. If this does not meet with your satisfaction then the researcher will gladly comply and delete any specific references which would identify either the board or the school. As superintendent, you reserve the right to view the findings and research report before its submission to the thesis committee. Any information which the board felt should be kept confidential would be deleted. A copy of the thesis would be made available to the school board.

Your consent would consist of a signature on the form attached to this letter. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours truly,

Roy J. Hodder

I \_\_\_\_\_ give permission to Roy Hodder to conduct a study at Evergreen All-Grade School as described in his letter dated August 10. The school board will reserve the right to view the study before its publication and to indicate if any of the findings should remain confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

13 Belfast Street  
St. John's, Nfld.  
A1B 2G5  
September 19, 1993

Mr. Jones  
Superintendent  
Jonesville School Board  
Coopersville, Nfld.  
XXX XXX

Dear Mr. Jones,

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated August 23, 1993, granting permission to conduct a research project at Evergreen All-Grade School during the month of October, 1993. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

For expediency and simplicity sake it has been decided to keep the names of the school, school board and all individuals participating in the study confidential. To do otherwise will mean mountains of bureaucratic red tape! All else, as outlined in my letter to you dated August 10, 1993, remains unchanged.

I hope this meets with your approval and look to meeting you soon. Thanks once again for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Roy Hodder



13 Belfast Street  
St. John's, Nfld.  
A1B 2G5  
September 19, 1993

Dear Interviewee,

The purpose of this letter is to request your consent to participate in a research project which is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Master of Education program at Memorial University.

The research project is under the supervision of Dr. Austin Harte of the Faculty of Education and has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee. Permission to conduct the study has also been granted by Mr. Jones, superintendent of the Jonesville School Board.

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes of the major stakeholders, within a rural setting, with respect to the implementation of school councils as proposed in the report of *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education*. Most studies investigating attitudes about school councils have been conducted in other countries and have tended to focus on urban settings. There appear to be very few Canadian studies and, indeed, no Newfoundland studies, pertaining to this topic.

The report of *The Royal Commission* recognizes that there may be difficulties associated with the process of establishing school councils and provides recommendations to alleviate these problems. This study will examine these perceived problems for the area under study. The findings, which will be made available to the school board, should assist the board in determining the future direction it should take with respect to the implementation of these councils.

Your participation would involve one interview of approximately one hour duration to be held during the month of October, 1993. This interview will be semistructured meaning that, although there will be specific questions to which answers will be sought, many of the questions will arise out of the conversation of the interview. For the sake of convenience and with your permission, I would like to record the interview on an audio cassette which would be erased once the study is completed.

Your participation, which would be greatly appreciated, is strictly voluntary. Although the topic is not a sensitive one, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering specific questions should you so desire. Neither you nor your school board will be identified in the study. Should you wish to examine the findings of the study, a copy will be available at the school board office.

Your consent would consist of a signature on the form attached to this letter. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Roy Hodder

**CONSENT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to an interview with Roy Hodder as part of his study involving the Jonesville School Board as described in his letter dated September 19, 1993. I understand that my name will not be used in the publication of any material gathered. I reserve the right to disallow the publication of any information which I might reveal to the researcher.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and, with the permission of the Faculty of Education and your school board superintendent, Mr. Jones, I am conducting a study at Evergreen All-Grade School.

The study concerns the establishment of School Councils as recommended in the report by *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Education*, chaired by Dr. Len Williams. The report suggests that changes be made in the manner in which schools operate in this province. It recommends that parents should take a more active role in the running of schools through the establishment of school councils. These councils would have legislative authority and would consist of parents, teachers and other community members as well as the school principal. It is recommended that these school councils would have the power to make decisions on matters that directly affect the school and to advise other levels (i.e. school board, Department of Education) on issues which concern them. The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes with respect to the role and function of school councils as outlined by the Royal Commission.

Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated. It would consist of completing the enclosed questionnaire, placing it in the envelope provided and returning it to the school with your child. All information gathered in the study will be strictly confidential and at no time will you, your school or your school board be identified. Participation is completely voluntary and you may refrain from answering specific questions if you so desire. The findings of the study will be made available to the school board and should assist in determining the future direction it should take with respect to the implementation of school councils.

For parents of students in Levels 1, 2 or 3, I also seek your assistance by asking your permission to have your child complete a questionnaire to examine their attitudes towards school councils. This would occur during class time and should take approximately 30 minutes. If you are in agreement with having your child participate, please complete the attached consent form.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Roy Hodder

**CONSENT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (parent/guardian) hereby give permission for my child,  
\_\_\_\_\_, (child's name) to take part in a study on school councils. I  
understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that my child can withdraw at any time. All  
information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Dear Fellow Teachers,

I am presently a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and, with the permission of the Faculty of Education and your school board superintendent, Mr. Jones, I am conducting a study at Jacques Fontaine All-Grade School.

The study concerns the establishment of school councils as recommended in the report by *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Education*, chaired by Dr. Len Williams. The report suggests that changes be made in the manner in which schools operate in this province. It recommends that parents should take a more active role in the running of schools through the establishment of school councils. These school councils would have legislated authority and would consist of parents, teachers and other community members as well as the school principal. It is recommended that councils have the power to make decisions on matters that directly affect the school and to advise other levels (i.e. school board, Department of Education) on issues which concern them. The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes with respect to the role and function of school councils as outlined by the Royal Commission.

Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated. It would consist of completing the enclosed questionnaire, placing it in the envelope provided and returning it to me. All information gathered in the study will be strictly confidential and at no time will you, your school or your school board be identified. Participation is completely voluntary and you may refrain from answering specific questions if you so desire. The findings of the study will be made available to the school board and should assist in determining the future direction it should take with respect to the implementation of school councils.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Roy Hodder









