Beyond Worlds Apart:
Managing Schools in Austerity and Transformation

BCPSEA Symposium: Insights and Opportunities
October 26, 2012

Thomas Fleming, Emeritus Professor, University of Victoria
1. To inform British Columbians about the struggle for control of provincial schooling and public policy between provincial governments and the BCTF for the past 40 years.

2. To remind government, teachers, and trustees they once worked cooperatively (1872-1972) to build one of the best school systems in Canada.

3. To suggest that decades of “business as usual” is over and it is now time to re-imagine our school organizations.
Chapter 1: Public Schooling’s Golden Age, 1872-1972

Chapter 2: Disconnections at the Core of Public Schooling, 1972-present

Chapter 3: Managing Schools in Austerity and Transformation
Nine Reasons for the Public School’s Success, 1872-1972

1. Stable and secure public funding

2. The system’s original mandate was simple, clearly defined, and understood by all

To create schools for all children to attend *commonly*, grounded in a *common* curriculum with *common* texts, *commonly-trained* teachers using *common* instructional methods and *common* exams and administered according to *common* policies and practices—all aimed at serving the *common* good
3. Unified governance and administration functions, along with strong, centralized, regulatory control

A colonial and imperial form of school administration: Offices of the Crown Colony, Victoria, 1860s
4. First modern management information system

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5. Tight oversight of teacher preparation, credentialing, and inspection

6. Vertical integration of classroom structures made public schools one of the 19th century’s three great organizational inventions (along with factories and corporations)

7. Closely-knit educational community feudally bound by family, personal, and institutional ties

8. Transparent quality control measures (h. s. entrance exams at end of grade 8 and jr. and sr. matriculation exams at the end of grades 11 and 13)
9. Immense public and civic support for schools.

Pictured above is Victoria Central School and High School, 1876. The high school (annex to the left) was the first in the three westernmost provinces and the first agency for training B.C. teachers.
Provincial and civic support for schools expressed in bricks, mortar and wood

Cache Creek Boarding School, 1876
Nanaimo Public School at Good Templar’s Hall, 1885
Vancouver High School with pupils on north playing field around 1912. No other civic structures as large or architecturally impressive as schools.
Chilliwack High School, 1913
West Vancouver's palatial Point Grey Secondary School, 1929 in art deco style
In sharp contrast, architectural splendor rarely graced the province’s rural schools.

Pemberton Meadows school in the 1880s
Barkerville youngsters at street-front school, 1880s
Esquimalt youngsters 1885
Granville School c. 1890s.
Interior school c. 1900s
Kelly Lake School, 1920s
One-room schools, some with sod roofs, were commonplace in many small settlements until the end of World War II.
Rose Prairie School, Peace River, in the 1930s
Visiting schools in the Peace River, 1933: Inspector Bill Plenderleith
Off the road: inspector’s car in the north, mid-1930s
### Growth in British Columbia Schools, Pupil Populations, and Teaching Cohort, 1872-1971

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<th>Years</th>
<th>Elem. Schools</th>
<th>Sec. Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Elem. Pupils</th>
<th>Sec. Pupils</th>
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<td>312</td>
<td>10,773</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>47,817</td>
<td>2,151</td>
<td>49,968</td>
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<td>85,097</td>
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<td>115,919</td>
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<td>183,112</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1,507</td>
<td>333,952</td>
<td>193,154</td>
<td>527,106</td>
<td>12,917</td>
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In 2012, 549,836 students and 30,407 teachers in B.C. schools
1972 a turning point in school enrolments as a high percentage of the provincial population
How did post-1972 public schooling become so conflict ridden?

1. Consolidating 600+ districts into 74 in 1946 changed relationships between trustees and government, between trustees and teachers, and between teachers and government. Increased size of system led to institutionalized relationships and bureaucratic norms.

3. The post-1945 emphasis on individual rights, the post-1960s counter-culture attack on authority, and the rise of educational special interest groups in the 1970s, destroy the idea of commonality around which the system revolved.

4. Post-1970s changes in family life prompt schools to add a cumbersome and costly “social” agenda. No longer are they simply “educational” institutions.

5. Failure of civil service and politicians to carefully define the school’s mission after 1972.

6. The BCTF’s “conversion to partisanship” in 1972 changes political alliances and signals a shift from “public” to “professional” control of the schools.
2. Disconnections at the Core, 1972-present

- Separation of governance and administrative functions creates an adversarial system

- No longer clear who is in charge of schools: provincial government’s right to command is seriously questioned

- Public upset with lack of accountability and finger pointing: five provincial initiatives were made to reform schools 1977-1991, four were unsuccessful

- Public consensus about the school’s mandate collapses, as does public support: inside schools, the mandate becomes diffuse—“mandate creep”
• By mid-1980s, BCTF executive emerges as government’s unelected “official opposition” in education
• B.C. emerges as most troubled educational jurisdiction in the country

“B.C. teachers on strike,” one national journalist reported, “so what else is new?”
Struggle between BCTF and government for the control of public schooling has become pure political theatre, a morality play that casts valiant defenders of education’s sacred trust against callous neo-liberal governments.

Or, if you prefer another version, defenders of the public purse and children’s right to attend school wrestle bravely against the dark forces of a self-serving and non-accountable union.

The galvanizing issue or “loyalty oath” rests on how we answer the question: “Are we spending enough?”
K-12 enrolment as a percentage of the provincial population is approaching its lowest level since 1911.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public School Enrolment</th>
<th>Provincial Population</th>
<th>Enrolment as % of Provincial Population</th>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>44,900</td>
<td>392,480</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>527,106</td>
<td>2,184,620</td>
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<td>548,418</td>
<td>4,525,207</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>535,738*</td>
<td>4,595,207*</td>
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Although BC’s population has more than doubled since 1971, school enrolment has scarcely increased.
The educational community has remained wedded to the idea that public schooling would remain forever an expanding universe of new programs and services and that enrolments would increase forever, even when data showed otherwise.
In 2001, the 15-24 year-old cohort was 41% larger than the 55-64 year-old cohort. By 2021, the older cohort will exceed the younger by 28%.
3. Managing Schools in a Time of Austerity and Transformation
Signs of Impending Public Sector Austerity

 Warned about coming era of austerity since 1971. Now it’s here. Shift in spending from K-12 sector toward health and retirees

– 1800 retirees a day for the next 18 years will pit taxpayers against tax users

– Health and retirement costs accelerating by 30% between 2010 and 2015

– 2011-2012 provincial and federal budgets face a $46 billion shortfall (Parliamentary Budget Office)

– Canada’s unfunded public pension debt estimated at $65 billion (C.D. Howe)
– Public sector analysts worry about future provincial solvency and vulnerability to declining revenues

– Ratio of 60 dependent persons for every 100 workers of recent decades will jump to 84 dependent persons for every 100 workers by 2056

– Declining workforce will shrink tax receipts and prompt higher taxes

– Difficult to maintain current levels of school spending as enrolments slide and the general population ages
“The golden age is over: the education system is now faced with having to justify the euphoria of these golden years”
Peter Powell, BCSTA president, 1971

Sketches of the Years Ahead

1. Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services, 2012 (Don Drummond)

2. BC Ministry of Education and School Districts Service Delivery Transformation, 2012 (Deloitte)
Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services

• Sustainability in public schooling depends on a 1% annual increase, plus:
  - phasing out 70% of non-teaching staff (some 13,800 added over the past decade)
  - containing retirement costs
  - delivering services more efficiently
  - tying qualification and experience grants to student outcomes
  - applying “evidence-based solutions” to special education programs
  - 7600 more new teachers annually than required
$100-246 million can be saved in service delivery transformation

Could similar savings plans be drawn up for (a) governance, administration, and taxation structures (b) curriculum and instructional sides of schooling?
Difficulties Ahead

1. School structures born in the Victorian-Age are inflexible

2. The key actors (BC Ministry of Education, BCTF, and BCSTA) serve as “agencies for the prevention of change.” The system is “owned and operated” by insiders

3. For 30 years, government has lacked the perseverance, ambition, and leadership to reform school governance, finance or administration

4. Since the Year 2000 fiasco, government’s influence over curriculum and instruction has receded to the point of invisibility
Four Questions

1. Will harsh financial circumstances eventually compel government to permit new technologies and new agencies to deliver instructional programs and other services?

2. Will taxpayers underwrite current educational spending levels as school populations fall and relatively fewer families are served by schools?

3. Have decades of discord pushed the public to a “tipping point” where support for public schools will continue to decline?

4. Dare provincial authorities re-centralize control of public schooling to meet the needs of the 21st century? Should we try a “loose and tight” governance model?