



***A Survey of Board Governance
in School Divisions
Practices, Issues, and Opportunities
November 2013***





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Executive Summary

This report presents the results from a governance survey of Saskatchewan's boards of education. It is not an audit or evaluation of school boards.¹ This study was undertaken in mid-2013 to gain an understanding of the state of board governance in school divisions, to identify issues as perceived by board members and senior management, and to identify opportunities to improve governance practices.

Board members and senior executives (Directors of Education and Chief Financial Officers) responded to questions about board governance practices. Their responses are organized around nine attributes of board governance: purpose, accountability, board composition, board structure, board culture, information for decision making, education, training and evaluations, internal relationships, and external relationships.

The survey results provide an interesting picture of the state of board governance in school divisions and their role vis-à-vis the Minister of Education.

Board members and executives agree, to a significant extent, on many of the issues raised in the survey. Nevertheless, there are areas where the views of the two groups differ. For example, a significant number of board members indicate that board decision making is difficult because some board members represent special interests; almost twice as many executives hold this view. Fewer executives than board members say that the board requires action if the school division's performance is below the board's expectations. Board members and executives have different views on time commitment and attendance issues for board members, as well as on how the board uses the work of board committees, such as the audit/finance committee.

Also, divergent views and uncertainty regarding the roles and responsibilities of board members, boards and the Ministry of Education (Ministry) exist. The results point to a desire for improved communication between the Boards and the Ministry. Board members and executives have expressed the desire for more consistent messages from the Ministry about Ministry priorities and expectations, for the Ministry to consider, to an increased degree, the impact of Ministry decisions and directives on boards, and to obtain more feedback from the Ministry on their planning. Boards have also indicated that they do not think the public understands the role of boards and the issues they face.

We encourage the use of the survey results set out in this report as a resource for constructive dialogue. School board members may wish to discuss the survey results within their own board and with their executives. The Ministry and school boards could also consider how the survey results could be used to enhance governance training.

¹ In this report we use board of education and school board interchangeably to refer to the group responsible for governing a school division. .



Objective

This report presents the findings of a governance survey of 28 school boards, including the Conseil scolaire fransaskois. This study was not an audit or evaluation of school boards; it was intended to increase awareness of the current governance practices of these boards. In particular, the purpose of our study was to:

- › Gain an understanding of the state of school board governance
- › Identify issues as perceived by board members and senior management
- › Raise awareness of governance issues and best practices
- › Enable board members and senior management to assess their governance practices against best practices
- › Identify opportunities for improvement of governance practices

Background

There are 28 school divisions in Saskatchewan. Over 168,000 students are in more than 600 Saskatchewan schools each day.²

Effective governance is of particular importance for school divisions due to the crucial role of education in our society, the large amount of spending by school divisions (\$1.9 billion in 2012), and changes to education in Saskatchewan.

The Education Act, 1995 and regulations set out the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and of school boards. Members of school boards are elected. *The Education Act, 1995* and regulations, as well as *The Local Government Election Act* set out the process and requirements for elections. The fact that school board members are elected adds complexity to the governance model used for school boards.

Also, *The Education Act, 1995* and regulations set out the senior executive positions within school divisions including their key responsibilities and appointment process. For example, the Director of Education is the chief executive officer of a school division and is appointed by the board, as is the chief financial officer (CFO).

Methodology

Two surveys were developed by our office. One survey was designed for current board members, while the other was designed for executives of each school division who work closely with the board—the Director of Education and the CFO.

²For more information regarding school divisions, see our Office's 2013 Report – Volume 1, Chapters 5 and 8.



The survey took place in May and June 2013. Surveys were completed by respondents and reflect their opinions and experiences serving as board members and executives.

In total, 306 people received surveys and 137 were completed, giving an overall response rate of 45%. 97 board member surveys (39%) and 40 (71%) executive surveys were returned.

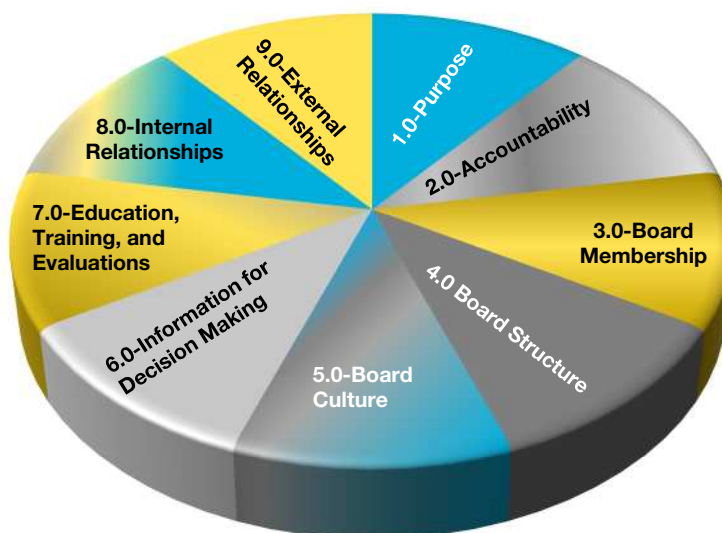
For most questions, respondents were asked to rank how strongly they identified with different statements regarding board governance using a scale of 1 to 5 with values as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral/neither; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. For the purposes of this report, we grouped responses 1 and 2 together as “disagree” and grouped responses 4 and 5 together as “agree.”

The practices reflected in our questions were developed from governance literature and the work of other legislation audit offices. In particular we referenced governance studies developed by the Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba.

Attributes of Governance

The chapters of this report are organized around the nine governance attributes outlined in **Figure 3**.³

Figure 3—Nine Attributes of Governance



³ These attributes were developed from work done by the Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba.



These attributes are outlined as follows:

1.0—Purpose

It is important that board members understand the role of the school division, and their individual responsibilities as board members.

2.0—Accountability

To fulfill the role of school divisions in providing an effective education system, it is important that board members are clear on their accountability relationships—what they are accountable for and to whom. School divisions must also ensure effective practices are in place to manage and monitor education priorities for which they are accountable.

3.0—Board Membership

Attributes of individual board members and the commitment of board members strongly influence how well boards are able to carry out their duties.

4.0—Board Structure

Board structure provides the framework within which board governance takes place. Board practices, such as the number of meetings per year, conflict-of-interest policies, agenda setting, and committee organization and influence help shape board structure.

5.0—Board Culture

Board culture is affected by, and has a strong influence on, board member participation, debate, and ultimately, decision making. The board chairperson plays an important role in managing the board and ensuring a productive board culture.

6.0—Information for Decision Making

Board decisions are based on different types of information; thus, it is important that boards identify the information necessary to make well-informed decisions. Boards should also receive information in a timely and clear manner, so it can readily be used for decision making.

7.0—Education, Training, and Evaluations

The provision of board education and training can be an invaluable way to increase the effectiveness of school boards. Education and training not only increase board member knowledge, but also promote a common understanding of the goals and work of their organization and the sector.

8.0—Internal Relationships

School boards work with senior management to provide an effective education system. Because of this, it is important that they have a positive working relationship where board members and senior management respect the role and authority of each other. As part of their responsibilities, boards are also responsible for evaluating senior management, and appointing and compensating the Director of Education.



9.0—External Relationships

Given their dual accountabilities to the provincial government and to their electorate, it is important that boards maintain a positive and open relationship with the Ministry of Education and the public. School boards should also work to develop positive relationships with others working in the education sector.

Presentation of Survey Results

Each following chapter begins with a general discussion of one of the governance attributes. The chapter is then divided into subtopics that begin with further discussion, followed by key observations, and then detailed results which outline the views of board members and executives. At the end of each chapter is a section called “Considerations” where we highlight selected issues.

The survey results are presented in both a graphical and descriptive format. Responses for most graphs present the percentage of respondents who agreed, disagreed, or provided a neutral response. Responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were grouped together to form the agree response, while responses of “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were grouped together to form the disagree response. Not all questions were applicable to board members or executives, and these are noted as “N/A” on the graphs.





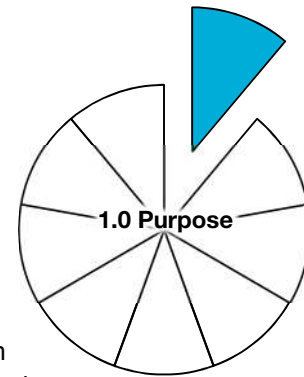
Survey Results





1.0 Purpose

The responsibilities of school boards as well as the Ministry of Education are set out primarily in *The Education Act, 1995*. School boards need to plan to ensure they fulfill their mandate. The Ministry has established processes for school board planning and reporting in order to align these activities with Ministry priorities. School boards have adopted varying approaches and types of planning and reporting in addition to the Ministry-mandated process (called the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework).



Key Observations

The survey results indicate that board members and executives appear to share a strong confidence in the ability of their board to make decisions regarding the planning, organization, delivery, and evaluation of education. There is concern that some board members do not understand their role and responsibilities on the board or the goals and mandate of their school division. However, the majority of board members and executives are of the opinion that their board has a clear understanding of its legislative mandate and are satisfied with the strategic planning process utilized by their board. They also indicate that their board demonstrates high ethical standards and sets an appropriate “tone at the top” for the school division. Most board members and executives feel satisfied with the performance of their school division in achieving the goals and objectives established by the board.

With respect to feedback from the Ministry on the board’s strategic plan, less than 10% of executives and around one-fifth of board members agree they receive adequate, timely feedback from the Ministry.

1.1 ROLE, MANDATE, AND VALUES

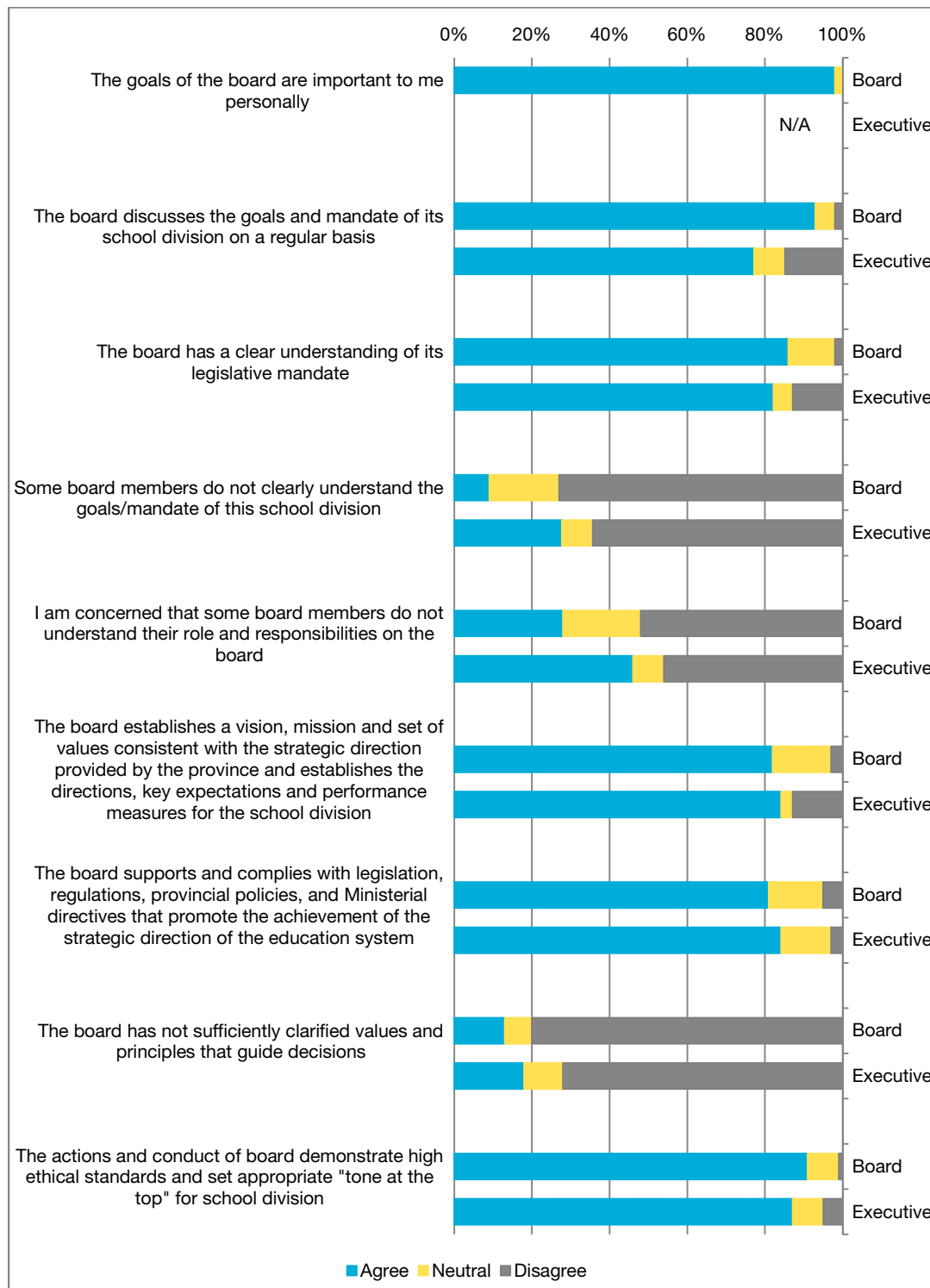
To govern effectively, it is important that board members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Using this knowledge, boards should establish plans for fulfilling their mandate and meeting the Ministry’s priorities and directives.

It is also important that boards clarify the values and principles that guide their decisions. Given the power entrusted to them by the people who elected them, boards must demonstrate high ethical standards that set an appropriate tone for the whole organization.



Detailed Results

Figure 1.1—Role, Mandate, and Values



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013



The survey found that:

- › Almost all board members (98%) agree that the goals of their board are important to them personally.
- › Boards discuss the goals and mandate of the school division on a regular basis, according to 93% of board members and 78% of executives.
- › Most board members (86%) and executives (83%) say that their board has a clear understanding of its legislative mandate.
- › 9% of board members are of the view that some board members do not clearly understand the goals and mandate of their school division; 28% of executives agree with this view.
- › 28% of board members and 46% of executives express concern that some board members do not understand their roles and responsibilities.
- › Most board members (82%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in establishing vision, mission, and values consistent with the strategic direction provided by the province and in establishing the directions, key expectations and performance measures for the school division.
- › Most board members (81%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in supporting and complying with legislation, regulations, provincial policies and Ministerial directives that promote the achievement of the strategic direction of the education system.
- › 13% of board members and 18% of executives feel that their board has not sufficiently clarified the values and principles that guide decisions.
- › Almost all board members (91%) and executives (88%) think the actions and conduct of their board demonstrate high ethical standards and set an appropriate "tone at the top" for the school division.

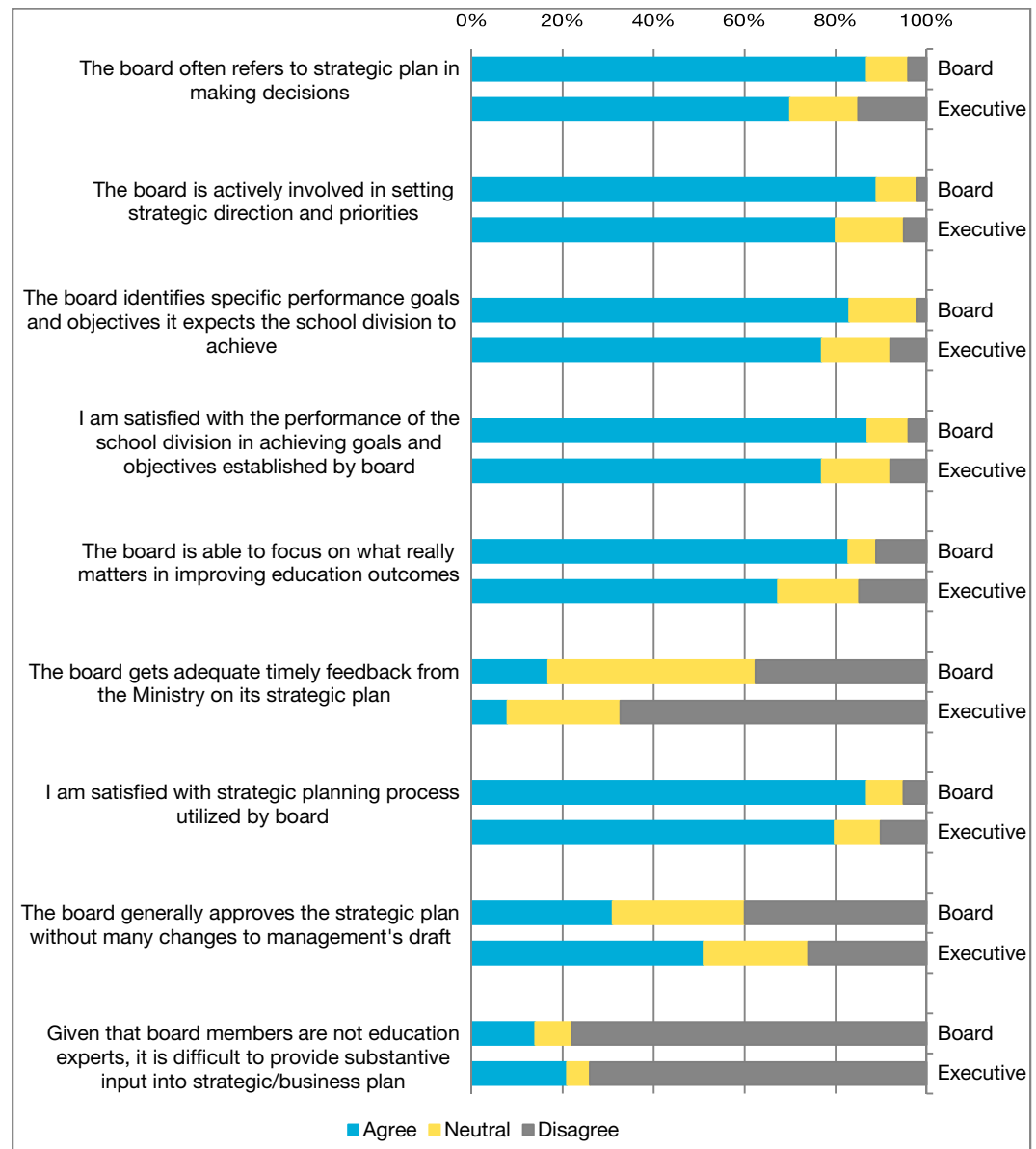
1.2 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Boards should be involved in developing plans and not merely ratify plans provided by management. Boards should identify specific performance goals and objectives they expect their school division to achieve in fulfilling their responsibilities. When making decisions, boards should then refer to their plans to determine whether their decisions are working towards the overall goals of their organizations. As well, it is important that boards receive adequate and timely feedback from the Ministry on their plans.



Detailed Results

Figure 1.2a—Strategic Direction



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

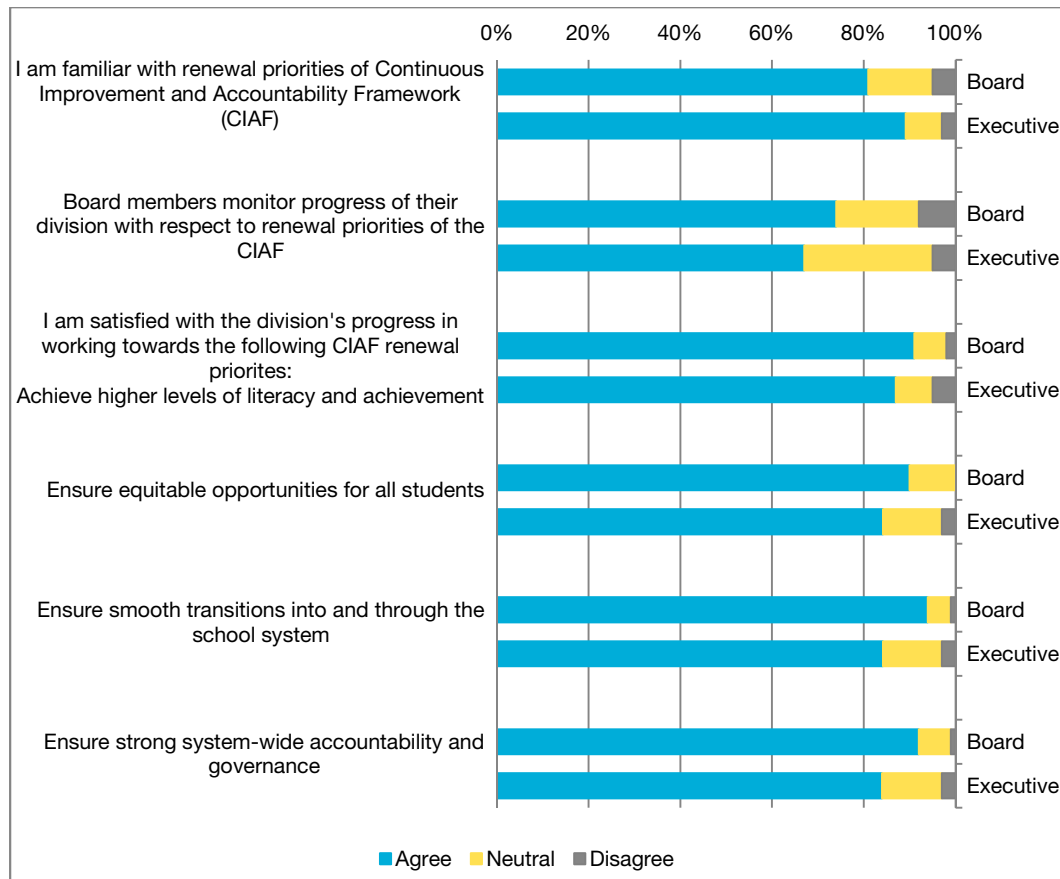
The survey found that:

- › The board often refers to the strategic plan in making decisions, according to 86% of board members and 70% of executives.
- › Most board members (89%) and executives (80%) agree their board is actively involved in setting the strategic direction of priorities of the school division.
- › The majority of board members (83%) and executives (77%) state that their board identifies specific performance goals and objectives it expects the school division to achieve.



- › 87% of board members and 77% of executives are satisfied with the performance of the school division in achieving the goals and objectives established by the board.
- › Boards are able to focus on what really matters in improving education outcomes, according to 82% of board members and 68% of executives.
- › 17% of board members and 8% of executives agree their board gets adequate and timely feedback from the Ministry on their strategic plan.
- › The majority of board members (86%) and executives (79%) are satisfied with the strategic planning process utilized by their board.
- › Just under one-third of board members (31%) say that their board generally approves its strategic plan without many changes to management’s draft, while about one-half of executives (51%) agree.
- › 14% of board members and 21% of executives feel that, since board members are not education experts, it is difficult for them to have substantive input into the strategic/business plan.

Figure 1.2b – Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013



The survey found that:

- › Most board members (81%) and executives (90%) agree they are familiar with the renewal priorities of the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework (CIAF).
- › 74% of board members and 67% of executives think that board members monitor the progress of their division with respect to the renewal priorities of the CIAF.
- › Most board members (91%) and executives (87%) feel satisfaction with their board's work in achieving higher levels of literacy and achievement.
- › Most board members (90%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring equitable opportunities for all students.
- › A large majority of board members (93%) and most executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring smooth transitions into and through the school system.
- › Most board members (92%) and executives (84%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring strong, system-wide accountability and governance.

1.3 CONSIDERATIONS

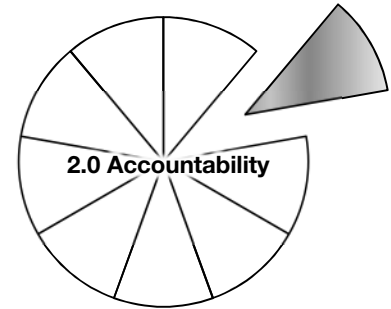
Nearly half of executives (46%) and more than one-quarter of board members believe that some board members do not understand their role and responsibilities. Clarification of the respective responsibilities of boards and the Ministry is clearly an important task. The Ministry and boards will want to ensure that this fundamental area is covered in orientation and board continuing education.

Few executives (8%) and a small proportion of board members (17%) are of the view that their board receives adequate, timely feedback from the Ministry on the board's planning. This indicates an area for increased attention and improved communication from both boards and the Ministry.



2.0 Accountability

School boards have multiple accountabilities. They are accountable to their electorate, to the Minister of Education as well as to other stakeholders in the education system, including students and parents.



It is important that the school boards understand their accountability relationship with the Minister, but also that the Minister provides clear messages about the Government's expectations and priorities for school boards and for the education sector.

The first two parts of this chapter address board member and executive understanding of accountability in the education system, while the last part acts as a check-up to see how board members and executives think they are doing with respect to meeting their responsibilities.

Key Observations

Almost all board members indicate that as school board members, they are mostly responsible to the residents of the school division rather than to the Minister. Most board members and executives state that their board is accountable for all actions of the school division.

Board members and executives express satisfaction with the work of their board in fulfilling its accountability requirements. Two-thirds of board members and executives agree that shared accountabilities and responsibilities between the board and government have created difficulties at times. Around one-third of board members and one-quarter of executives think that the Minister and/or Ministry provide their school division with consistent messages about government expectations and priorities. 40% of board members and around one-third of executives indicate that their board has been unfairly held accountable for decisions made by the Minister and/or Ministry.

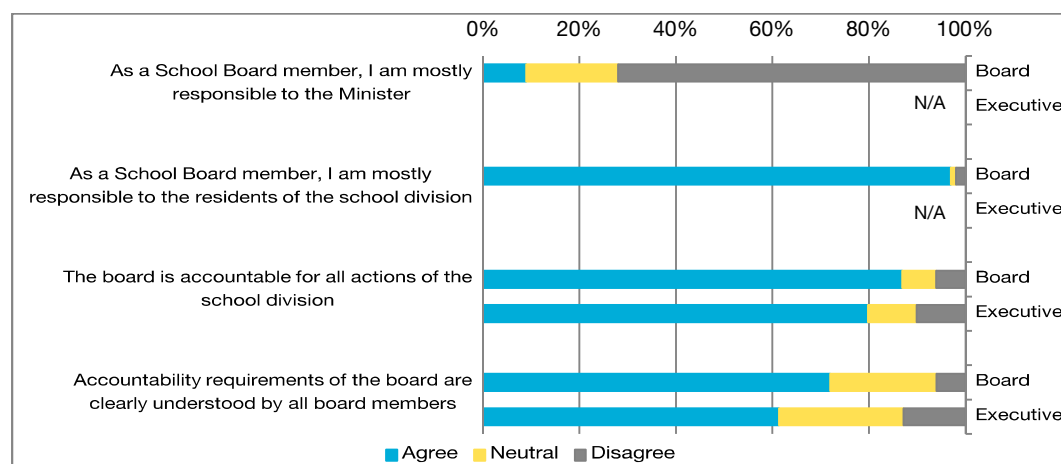
2.1 UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Board members require a clear understanding of their multiple accountabilities within the education system. The respective responsibilities of boards and the Ministry, as well as school community councils, are set out in *The Education Act, 1995* and in regulations and Ministry directives.



Detailed Results

Figure 2.1—Understanding Accountability



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 9% of board members indicate that as a school board member, they are mostly responsible to the Minister.
- › 97% of board members are of the view that, as a school board member, they are mostly responsible to the residents of the school division.
- › Most board members (86%) and executives (79%) agree that their board is accountable for all actions of the school division.
- › The accountability requirements of the board are clearly understood by all board members, according to 72% of board members and 62% of executives.

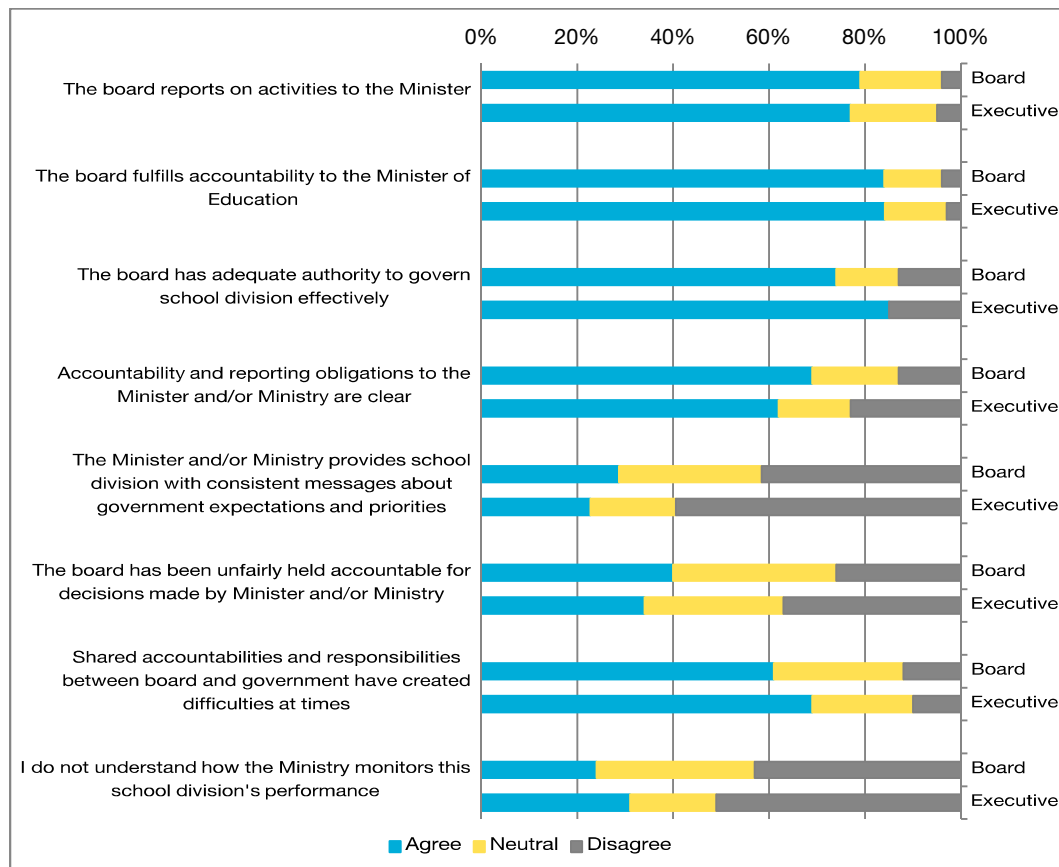
2.2 ACCOUNTABILITY AND RELATIONSHIP WITH MINISTRY

For school boards to work effectively with the Ministry of Education, boards and the Ministry must be clear on their respective responsibilities and ensure they fulfill them. Boards should be clear on Ministry expectations and understand how the Ministry monitors school division performance.



Detailed Results

Figure 2.2—Accountability and Relationship with Ministry



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 79% of board members and 77% of executives are satisfied with the reporting of school division's activities to the Minister.
- › Most board members (84%) and executives (85%) indicate they are satisfied that their board fulfills its accountability to the Minister of Education.
- › Boards have adequate authority to govern school divisions effectively, according to 74% of board members and 85% of executives.
- › Around two-thirds of board members (69%) and executives (62%) believe that the accountability and reporting obligations to the Minister and/or Ministry are clear.
- › 29% of board members and 23% of executives think that the Minister and/or Ministry provides their school division with consistent messages about government expectations and priorities.
- › The board has been unfairly held accountable for decisions made by the Minister and/or Ministry, according to 40% of board members and 34% of executives.



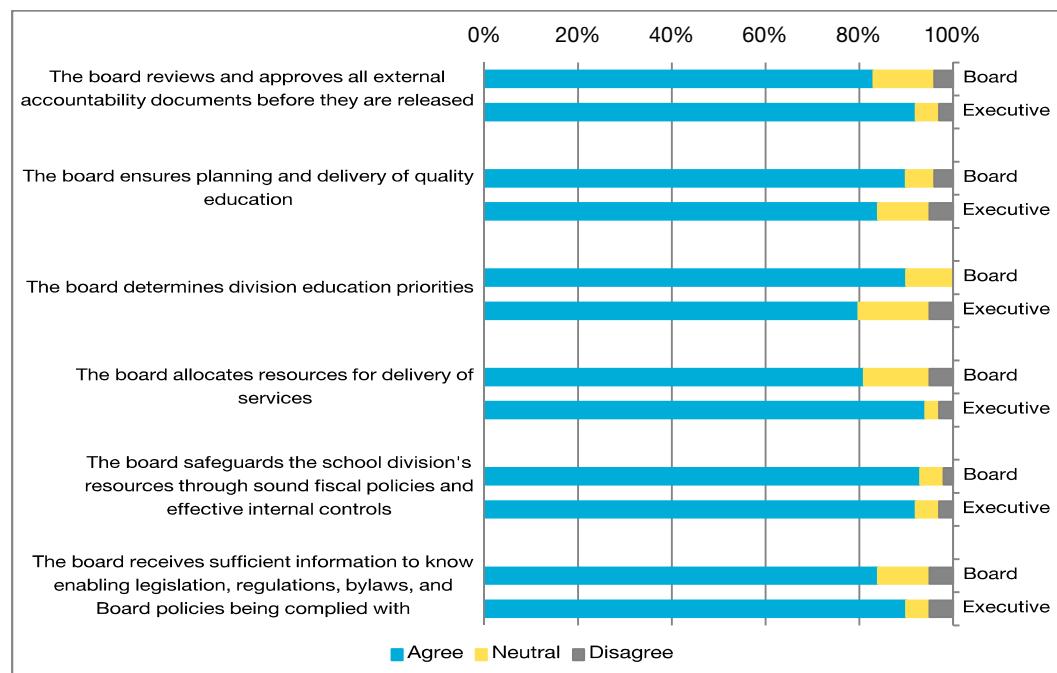
- › About two-thirds of board members (61%) and executives (69%) feel that shared accountability and responsibilities between the board and government has created difficulties at times.
- › 24% of board members and 31% of executives do not understand how the Ministry monitors their school division's performance.

2.3 MEETING ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

This section describes some of the accountability requirements of school divisions and shows the extent of board member and executive satisfaction with how these requirements are being met.

Detailed Results

Figure 2.3a—Meeting Accountability Requirements



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

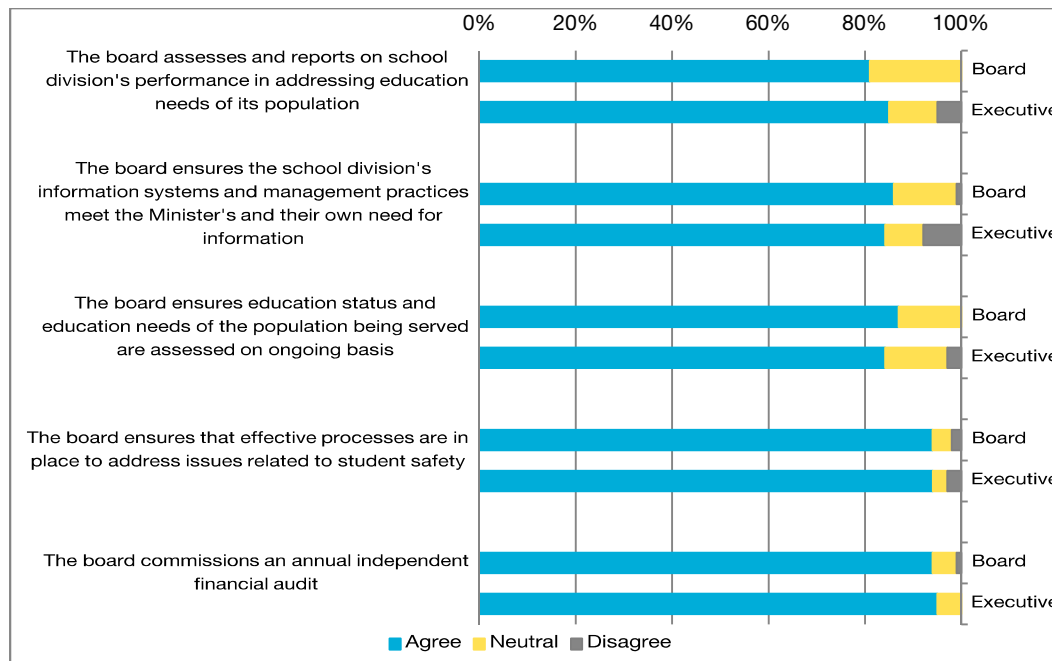
The survey found that:

- › Boards review and approve external accountability documents (e.g., annual reports) before they are released, according to 83% of board members and 92% of executives.
- › Most board members (89%) and executives (84%) are satisfied with the work of their school division in ensuring the planning and delivery of quality education.
- › 90% of board members and 79% of executives are satisfied with the work of their school division in determining division education priorities.



- › Most board members (81%) and executives (95%) are satisfied with the work of their board in allocating resources for the delivery of services.
- › Almost all board members (93%) and executives (92%) are satisfied with the work of their board in safeguarding the school division's resources for the delivery of services.
- › Boards receive sufficient information to know that enabling legislation, regulations, bylaws, and board policies are being complied with, according to 84% of board members and 90% of executives.

Figure 2.3b—Meeting Accountability Requirements



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Most board members (81%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in assessing and reporting on the school division's performance in addressing the education needs of its population.
- › A large majority of board members (86%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring that the school division's information systems and management practices meet their and the Minister's need for information.
- › Most board members (87%) and executives (85%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring that the education status and needs of the population being served are assessed on an ongoing basis.
- › Almost all board members (94%) and executives (95%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring that effective processes are in place to address issues related to student safety.



- › Almost all board members (94%) and executives (95%) are satisfied with their board's work in commissioning an annual independent financial audit.

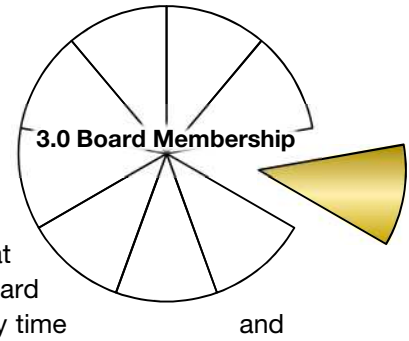
2.4 CONSIDERATIONS

The results suggest that there is room for clarification with respect to the accountability relationship between school boards and the Ministry. As elected members, board members regard themselves as accountable to their electorate. They also state that the shared accountabilities and responsibilities between boards and government have created difficulties at times. A significant minority of executives and board members believe that they have been unfairly held accountable for decisions that are made by the Ministry. Further, most executives and the majority of board members indicate that they do not receive consistent messages about government expectations and priorities. Greater attention could be paid to ensuring that accountability and reporting obligations are clear and that the Ministry's expectations and priorities are clearly communicated.



3.0 Board Membership

School boards are comprised of representatives elected by residents of their respective school divisions. Elected boards are not able to recruit new members to address gaps in skills and abilities. However, boards can identify gaps and ensure that they have the advice they need to govern effectively. Board members should be committed to their role, put in the necessary time effort, and know that their work is valued.



Key Observations

The composition of a board can be a key element in its effectiveness. The survey shows that the large majority of board members and executives think that the current composition of their board provides the necessary skills and experience to effectively lead the school division. Board members and executives agree that leadership and the representation of community values/ethics are some of the most important skills and characteristics for board members to possess. They also agree that these are some of the skills and characteristics currently most represented on their boards.

There is some divergence between board members and executives in terms of board member time commitment and meeting attendance.

The large majority of board members report very positively on their experiences as board members; 70% agree they would run again as a school board trustee.

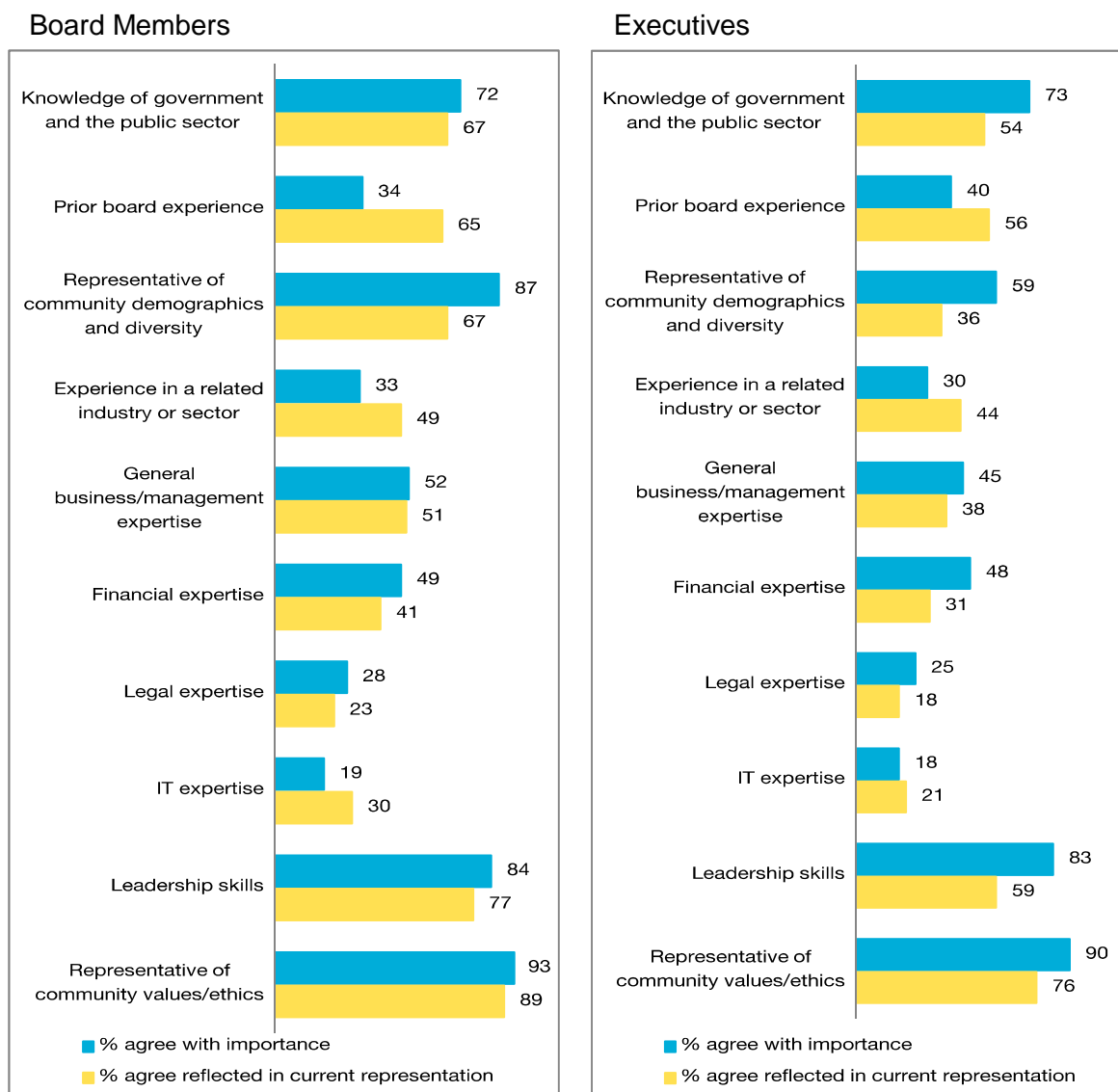
3.1 BOARD COMPOSITION

Survey participants were asked to rank a list of skill sets and characteristics, both in terms of their perceived importance and the current representation of these traits on their board. Survey participants were also asked whether the current composition of board membership provides the necessary skills and experience to lead their school division effectively, and whether members are qualified to be on a school board.



Detailed Results

Figure 3.1—Importance and Current Representation of Board Member Skills and Characteristics



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

› The most important skills and characteristics for board members to possess, according to board members:

- Representation of community values/ethics (93%)
- Representation of community demographics and diversity (87%)
- Leadership skills (84%)

› The most important skills and characteristics for board members to possess, according to executives:

- Representation of community values/ethics (90%)
- Leadership skills (83%)
- Knowledge of government and public sector (73%)



- › The least important skills and characteristics for board members to possess, according to board members:
 - IT expertise (19%)
 - Legal expertise (28%)
 - Experience in a related industry or sector (33%)

- › The least important skills and characteristics for board members to possess, according to executives:
 - IT expertise (18%)
 - Legal expertise (25%)
 - Experience in a related industry or sector (30%)

- › According to board members, the skills and characteristics currently most represented on boards are:
 - Representative of community values/ethics (89%)
 - Leadership skills (77%)
 - Knowledge of government and the public sector (67%)
 - Representation of community demographics and diversity (67%)

- › According to executives, the skills and characteristics currently most represented on boards are:
 - Representation of community values/ethics (76%)
 - Leadership skills (59%)
 - Prior board experience (56%)

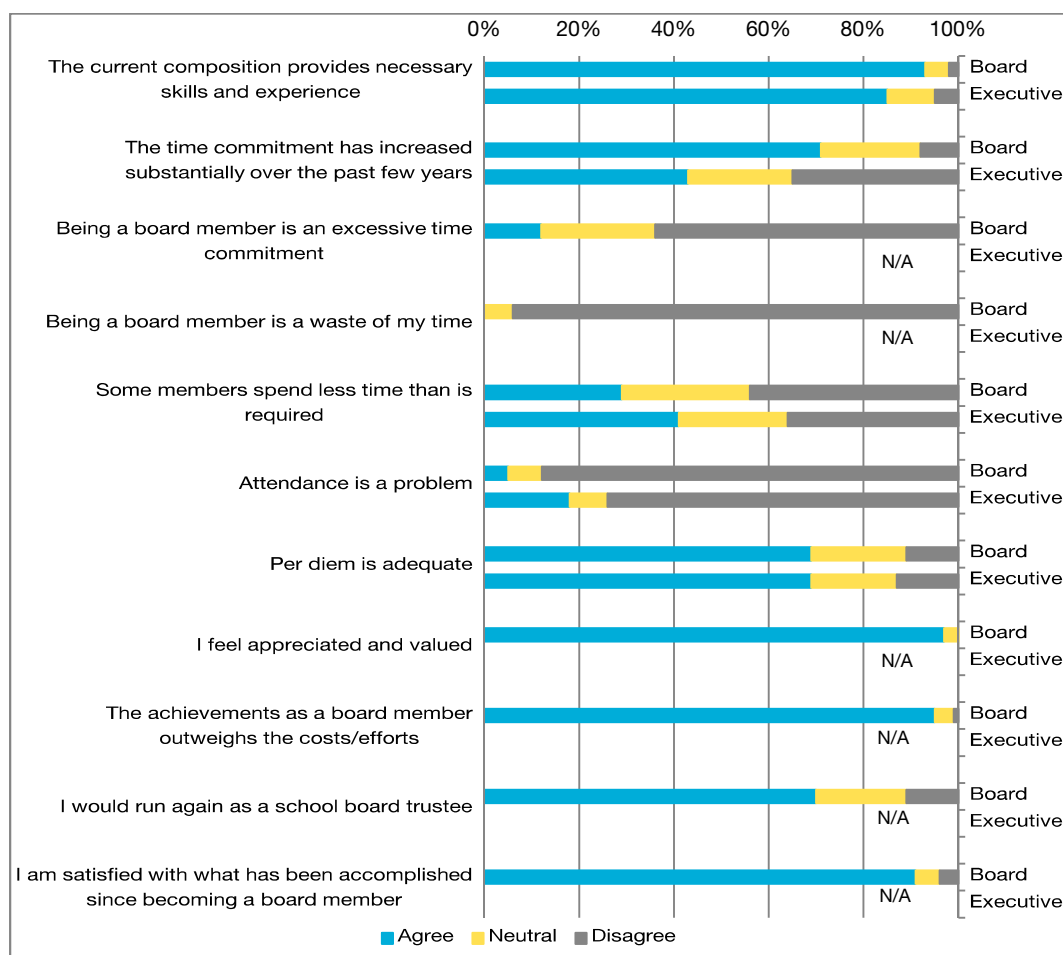
3.2 BOARD MEMBER COMMITMENT AND SATISFACTION

To maintain a positive board culture, it is important that members are committed to their role as board members, do not find the time commitment to be excessive, feel satisfied with what they accomplish, and work with other committed board members.



Detailed Results

Figure 3.2—Board Member Commitment and Satisfaction



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › The large majority of board members (93%) and executives (85%) think that the current composition of their board provides the necessary skills and experience to effectively lead the school division.
- › Significantly more board members (71%) than executives (43%) feel the time commitment required to be a member of a school board has increased substantially in recent years.
- › 12% of board members sometimes feel that being a member of a school board is an excessive time commitment.
- › No board member believes that serving on the board is a waste of their time.
- › According to 29% of board members and 41% of executives, there are some members on their board who spend less time than is required to do an adequate job.



- › Only 5% of board members think that attendance by board members at board meetings is a problem for their board; however, 18% of executives consider this a problem.
- › 69% of board members and executives agree the per diem board members receive for their board involvement is adequate.
- › Almost all board members (97%) feel appreciated and valued as a member of their board.
- › 95% of board members indicate that what they can accomplish as a board member outweighs the costs/efforts.
- › 70% of board members say they would run again as a school board trustee.
- › 91% of board members feel satisfied with what has been accomplished since being a board member.

3.4 CONSIDERATIONS

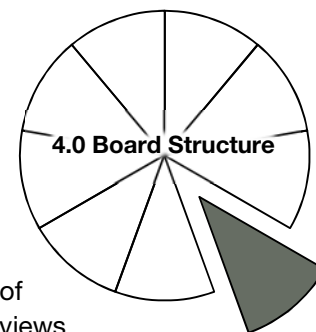
The survey results indicate that board member and executive views regarding desired and represented skills and characteristics are very similar. The results show that some board members and executives think that their board membership lacks some of the key traits they have identified as being important. Nevertheless, almost all board members and executives believe the current composition of their board provides the necessary skills and experience to effectively lead the school division.

Although only a small number of board members state that being a board member requires an excessive time commitment, nearly three-quarters of board members indicate that, in recent years, the time needed to fulfill their duties has increased substantially. Interestingly, fewer executives—about one-half—are of the same view. Furthermore, almost a third of board members and nearly half of executives think that some board members do not dedicate enough time to the board to do their job adequately. While very few board members indicate that attendance is a problem, significantly more executives suggest it is an issue. These different perspectives will have an impact on the relations between board members and executives and will influence areas such as board information and lead time before meetings (see chapter 6 regarding information for decision making).



4.0 Board Structure

A board's structure forms the framework within which board governance takes place. Thus, an important step in ensuring that a board is capable of good governance and decision making is setting up and maintaining an appropriate structure and organization. Well-organized boards hold an adequate number of meetings each year, have accurate and timely minutes, conduct reviews of board bylaws and work plans, ensure sound conflict of interest policies are in place, and have appropriate agendas.



Committees are also an important part of a board's structure and organization. They are able to examine and debate issues in a more focused way than the full board due to the fewer number of people, and the interests and expertise of these people in a specific area. Committees report their findings and recommendations back to the board, which can then make a decision that is informed by the committee's work.

Without proper structures and organizational procedures in place, boards run an increased risk of confusion, inefficiency and lack of effectiveness.

Key Observations

The survey results indicate that most board members and executives are positive about meeting minutes, their board's bylaws, and the setting and content of agendas. Few board members think their board meetings deal with too many trivial matters, although over one-quarter of executives think their board meetings deal with too many trivial matters.

Although few board members agree, one-quarter of executives say that on occasion they have felt uncomfortable with how their board handled conflicts of interest.

The majority of board members and executives appear to be satisfied with their board's committee work, stating that the mandate and authority of each committee have been clearly articulated and are periodically reviewed, and that the process for selecting committee members is appropriate. Less than one-third of board members and less than one-fifth of executives say that their board conducts a formal evaluation of the performance of each of its committees.

4.1 BOARD PRACTICES

Boards have a certain degree of flexibility in deciding what is best for their board with respect to the timing and frequency of board meetings. Some boards find fewer but longer meetings work better, while other boards prefer holding shorter meetings more often.



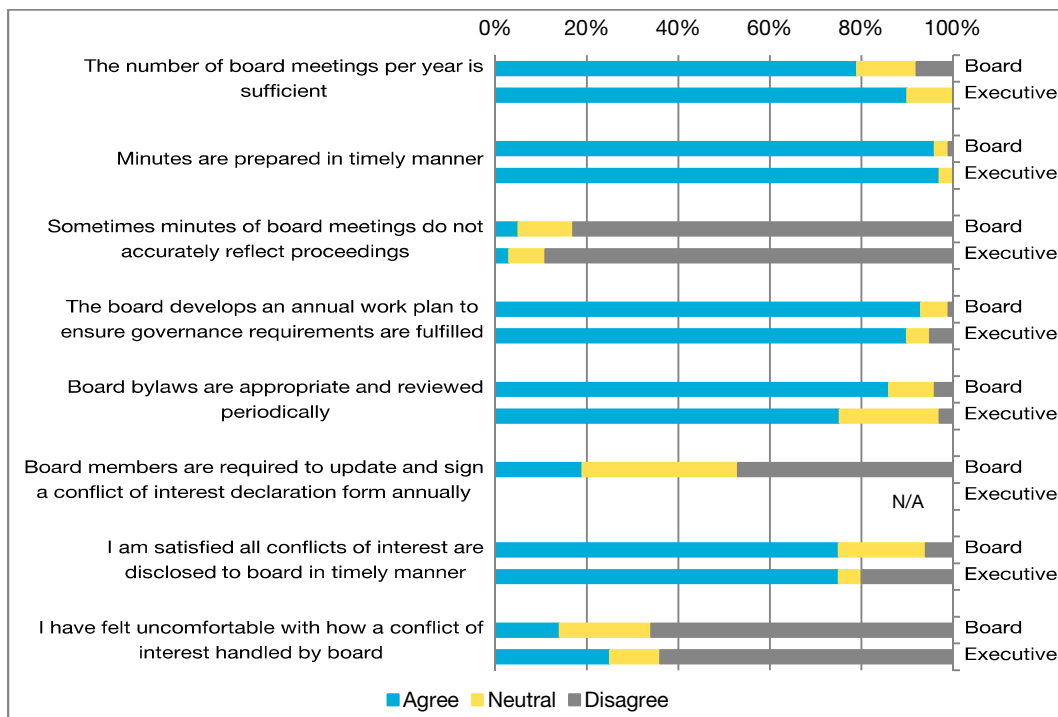
Board minutes provide an important record of meeting proceedings. It is the responsibility of all board members and also in their best interest to ensure the accuracy of the minutes, as they serve as the record of board actions and decisions.

Board bylaws guide board operations. Annual work plans, meanwhile, help ensure the board's focus on working towards specific governance requirements or responsibilities.

Boards must be able to identify and handle conflict of interest issues as they arise.

Detailed Results

Figure 4.1—Board Practices



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › The number of board meetings per year is sufficient according to 79% of board members and 90% of executives.
- › Almost all board members (96%) and executives (97%) agree the minutes of board meetings are prepared in a timely manner.
- › Very few board members (5%) and executives (3%) think that sometimes the minutes of board meetings do not accurately reflect proceedings.
- › Most board members (93%) and executives (89%) are satisfied with their board's work in developing an annual work plan to ensure governance requirements are fulfilled.



- › Board bylaws are appropriate and reviewed periodically, according to 86% of board members and 76% of executives.
- › About one-fifth of board members (19%) indicate that they are required to update and sign a conflict of interest declaration form annually.
- › 75% of both board members and executives are satisfied that all conflicts of interest are disclosed to the board in a timely manner.
- › 14% of board members and one-quarter of executives agree that on occasion they have felt uncomfortable with how a conflict of interest was handled by their board.

4.2 AGENDA SETTING

The Chairperson is responsible for setting the board's meeting agenda, and he or she should work with management in performing this task. It is important that board members do not play a passive role, and that they have the opportunity to add to the agenda as needed.

The size of the agenda must be large enough to ensure that all matters requiring attention are included. However, it is important that agendas do not waste time with trivial matters, contain too many items, or force some matters to be rushed through without providing adequate time for discussion.

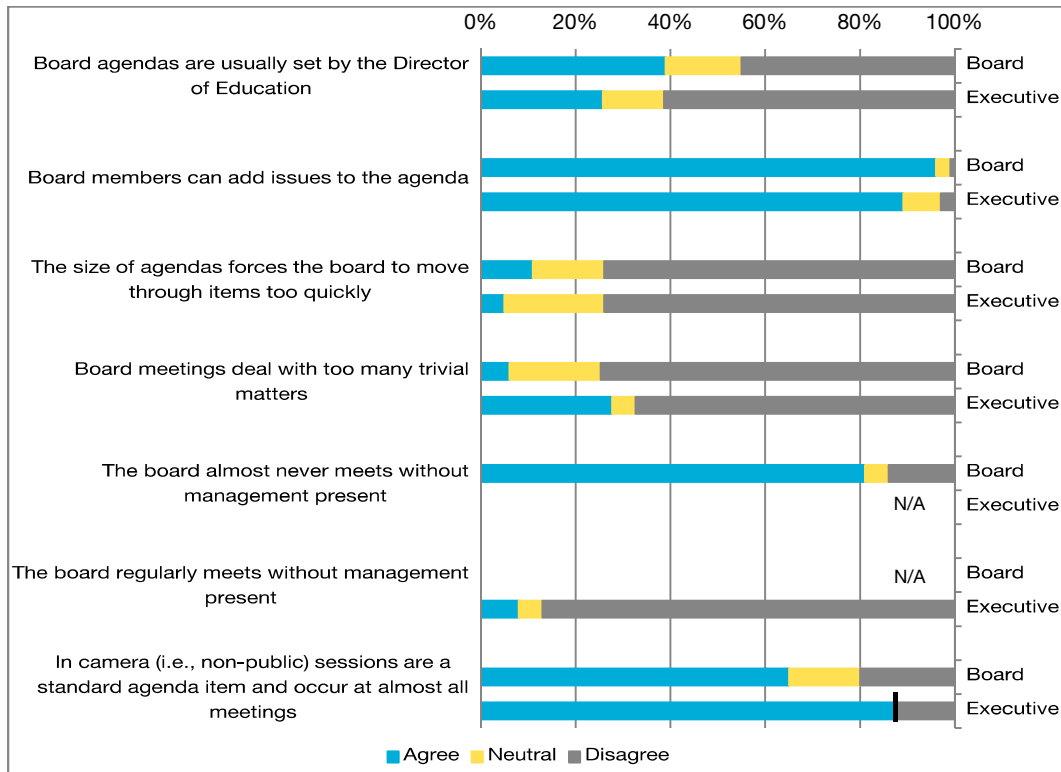
Boards should have the opportunity to discuss matters without management present to allow for frank and open discussion. Scheduling such discussions on a regular basis helps eliminate possible tension with management if such a meeting is specifically requested, and it eliminates the possible discomfort of board members requesting such a meeting.

In addition, boards may decide to hold a meeting or part of a meeting in camera (i.e., non-public) in specific circumstances. Decisions reached during in camera, private sessions must still be dealt with by resolution in public meetings.



Detailed Results

Figure 4.2—Agenda Setting



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 39% of board members and 26% of executives state that board agendas are usually set by the Director of Education.
- › Almost all board members (96%) and executives (90%) indicate that board members can add issues to the agenda.
- › A small proportion of board members (11%) and very few executives (5%) feel that the size of agendas forces the board to move through items too quickly.
- › 28% of executives believe that board meetings deal with too many trivial matters; 6% of board members agree.
- › 81% of board members indicate that their board almost never meets without management present.
- › 8% of executives agree their board regularly meets without management present.
- › 88% of executives state that that in camera sessions (i.e. non-public) are a standard agenda item and occur at almost all meetings; only about two-thirds of board members agree (65%).



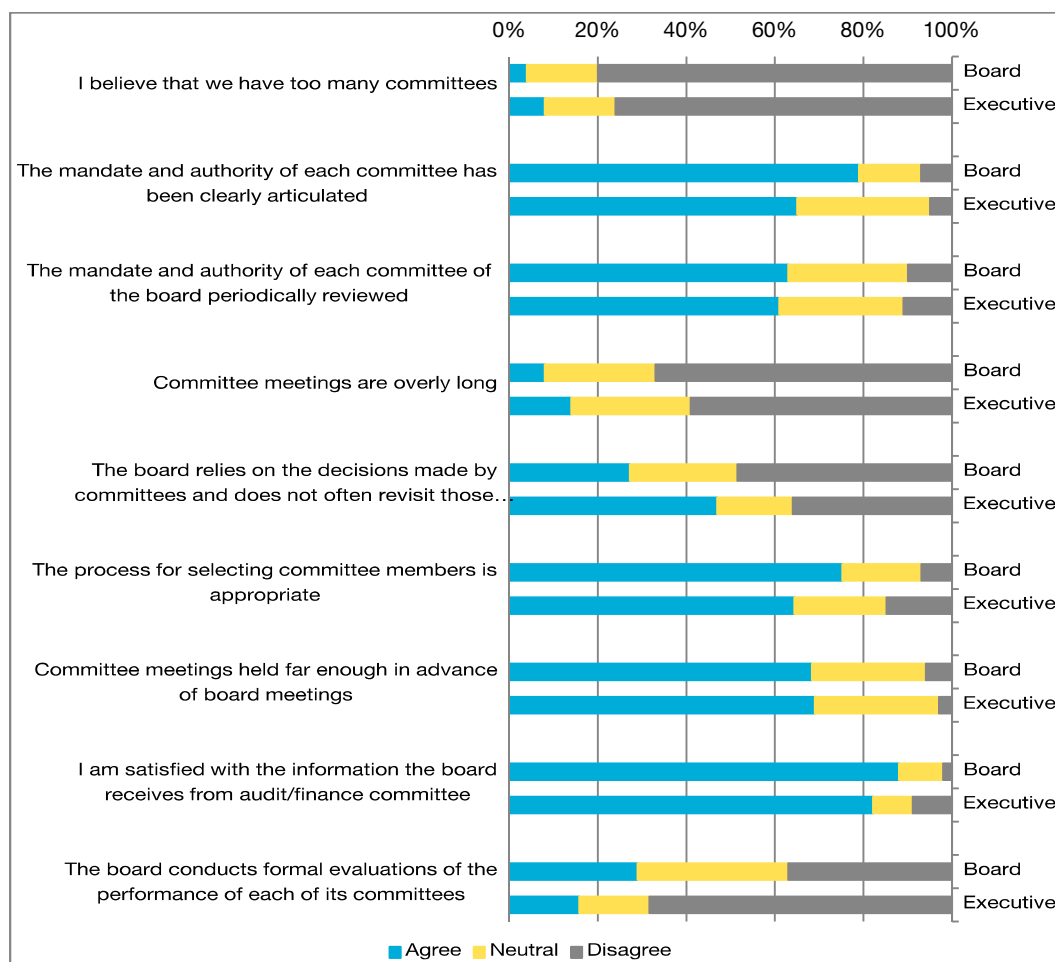
4.3 COMMITTEES

The mandate and authority of each committee should be clearly articulated and periodically reviewed so that the work of committees can remain focused. Without focus, committees run the risk of taking on unnecessary work or not accomplishing what they should. Boards should carefully consider the number and composition of committees. An annual evaluation of the performance of each committee can help ensure the effective functioning of committees.

In some cases, boards may decide to revisit decisions or recommendations made by committees if members are not comfortable with the work of the committee. Committee meetings should be held far enough in advance of board meetings so that relevant information brought up in committee meetings can be included in pre-meeting information for board members.

Detailed Results

Figure 4.3—Committees



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013



The survey found that:

- › Very few board members (4%) and few executives (8%) believe that their board has too many committees.
- › The mandate and authority of each committee has been clearly articulated, according to 79% of board members and 65% of executives.
- › Close to two-thirds of board members (63%) and executives (61%) report that the mandate and authority of each committee is periodically reviewed.
- › Only 8% of board members and 14% of executives feel that committee meetings are overly long.
- › Over one-quarter of board members (27%) agree their board relies on the decisions made by committees and does not often revisit those issues; close to one-half of executives (47%) agree.
- › The process for selecting committee members is appropriate, according to 76% of board members and 65% of executives.
- › 69% of board members and executives agree committee meetings are held far enough in advance of board meetings.
- › A large majority of board members (88%) and executives (83%) are satisfied with the information that their board receives from the audit/finance committee.
- › 29% of board members and 16% of executives indicate that their board conducts a formal evaluation of the performance of each of its committees.

4.4 CONSIDERATIONS

Board members and executives are satisfied with most board practices. One area that boards could work on relates to handling of conflicts of interest. While few board members express concern with how conflicts of interest were handled by their board, more executives indicated concern. This suggests a further area for board education.

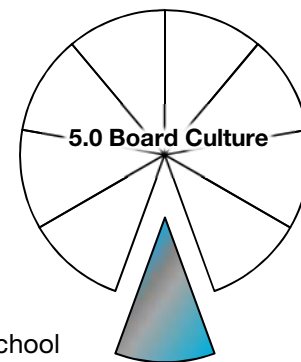
It is interesting to note that while few board members think their board meetings deal with too many trivial matters, over one-quarter of executives think their board meetings deal with too many trivial matters. It is important that board meetings focus on what really matters to the school division.

The views of board members and executives differ regarding work of committees. Significantly more executives than board members are of the view that the board relies on decisions made by committees and does not often revisit those issues. This difference of opinion could be explored to ensure that the work of committees meets both management and board expectations.



5.0 Board Culture

Board culture refers to the dynamics of how people within a board work together to achieve the goals of an organization. The importance of ensuring effective teamwork that allows for informed decisions cannot be overstated. “Even if boards have the right structure, their success is often determined by simply how well board members work together.”⁴



Board members need a clear understanding of issues facing their school division. They should participate in discussions and feel comfortable asking questions, taking opposing views, and voting against motions or proposals they disagree with, so that discussion and debate can lead to clear and informed decisions. At the same time, once boards reach a decision, it is important that board members put their differences aside and assume collective responsibility for the decision made. Without the benefit of active debate and the sharing of different opinions, boards run a greater risk of simply “rubberstamping” management’s recommendations.

The leadership of the chairperson is critical in establishing and maintaining a positive board culture. A capable chairperson can encourage the participation of all board members, resolve conflicts that may arise, and ensure the productivity of board meetings.

Key Observations

Almost all board members and executives agree that their board works well together as a team, that most board members participate in the discussion at board meetings, and that their board makes clear and informed decisions all board members can support.

Almost all board members and executives think that their board’s decision-making process facilitates considered and informed decisions, and that their board generally makes good decisions. While just under one-fifth of board members state that decision making is difficult because board members represent special interests, over one-third of executives make this indicate. Few board members and executives can think of an instance where the Director of Education did not act in accordance with a decision of the board.

Most board members and executives think their chairperson does a good job of facilitating board meetings and resolving conflict and achieving consensus on the board.

5.1 BOARD MEMBER PARTICIPATION

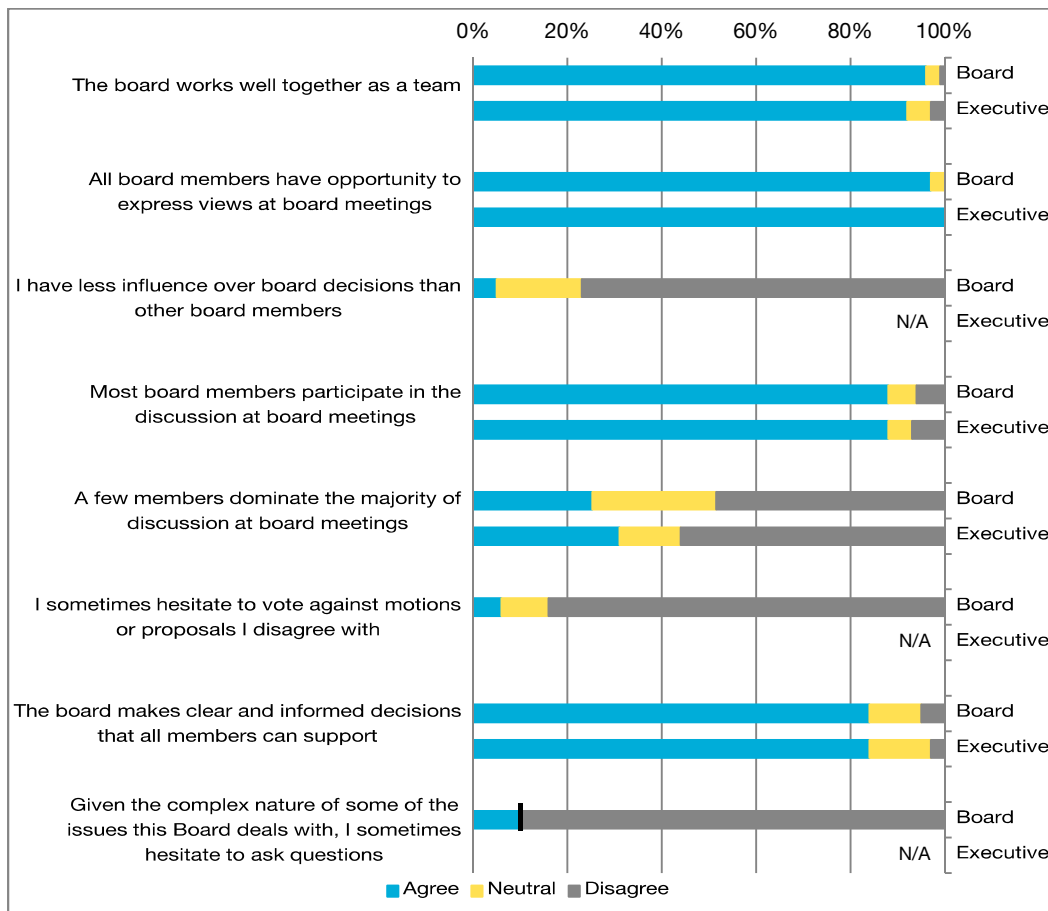
Boards should foster a culture of participation. Board members should not feel constrained or reluctant to ask questions or participate in discussions. Individual members should know that they can influence board decisions.

⁴ LeBlanc, R. & Gillies, J., (2005) Inside the Boardroom: How Boards Really Work and the Coming Revolution in Corporate Governance, p. 248, cited in Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba (2009).



Detailed Results

Figure 5.1—Board Member Participation



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Almost all board members (96%) and executives (92%) believe that their board works well together as a team.
- › All executives and nearly all board members (97%) agree that all board members have the opportunity to express their views at meetings.
- › Only 5% of board members feel they have less influence over board decisions than other members.
- › A large majority of both board members (88%) and executives (88%) agree most board members participate in the discussion at board meetings.
- › One-quarter of board members and 31% of executives indicate that a few members dominate the majority of discussion at board meetings.
- › Very few (6%) of board members say that they sometimes hesitate to vote against proposals or motions that they disagree with.



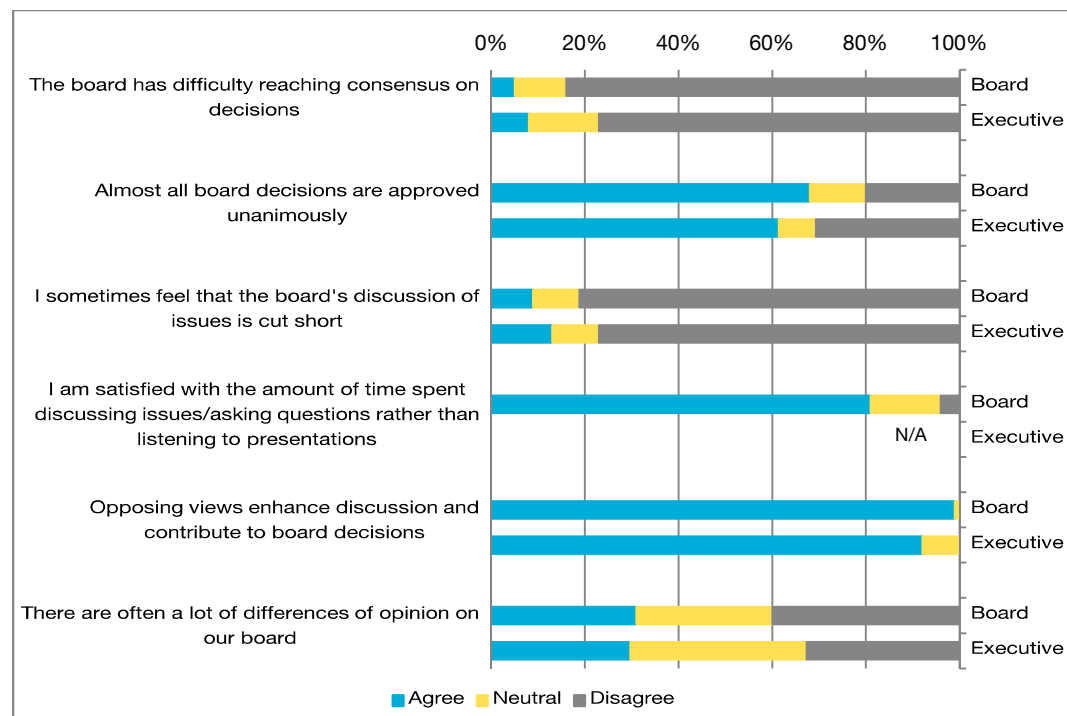
- › 84% of board members and executives indicate that their board makes clear and informed decisions that all board members can support.
- › Only 10% of board members state that they sometimes hesitate to ask questions.

5.2 BOARD DEBATE AND DECISION MAKING

To carry out their role, boards need to draw on the views of all board members. Differences of opinion and opposing viewpoints should be expressed to allow the board to come to informed decisions.

Detailed Results

Figure 5.2a—Board Debate and Decision Making



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

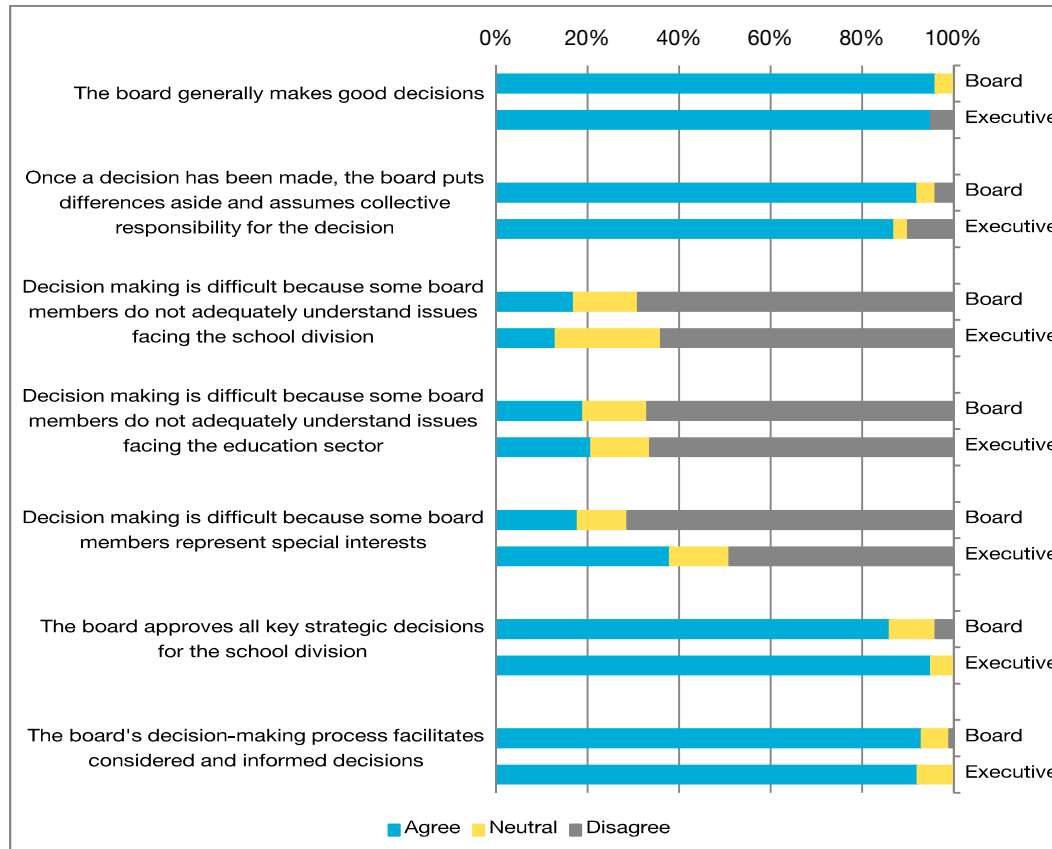
The survey found that:

- › Only 5% of board members and 8% of executives think their board has a difficult time reaching consensus on decisions.
- › About two-thirds of board members (68%) and executives (62%) think that almost all board decisions are approved unanimously.
- › Only 9% of board members and 13% of executives sometimes feel that their board's discussion of issues is cut short.



- › Most board members (81%) are satisfied with the amount of time spent discussing issues and asking questions, rather than listening to presentations.
- › Almost all board members (99%) and executives (93%) think opposing views enhance discussion and contribute to board decisions.
- › Just under one-third of board members (31%) and executives (30%) indicate that there are often a lot of differences of opinion on their board.

Figure 5.2b—Board Debate and Decision Making



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Almost all board members (96%) and executives (95%) believe their board generally makes good decisions.
- › A large majority of board members (92%) and executives (87%) think that once a decision has been made, their board puts differences aside and assumes collective responsibility for the decision.
- › 17% of board members and 13% of executives feel that decision making is difficult because some board members do not adequately understand issues facing the school division.



- › About one-fifth of board members (19%) and executives (21%) believe decision making is difficult because some board members do not adequately understand issues facing the education sector.
- › 18% of board members indicate that decision making is difficult because some board members represent special interests; a larger number of executives (38%) agree.
- › Most board members (86%) and executives (95%) agree their board approves all key strategic decisions for the school division.
- › 93% of board members and executives think their board's decision-making process facilitates considered and informed decisions.

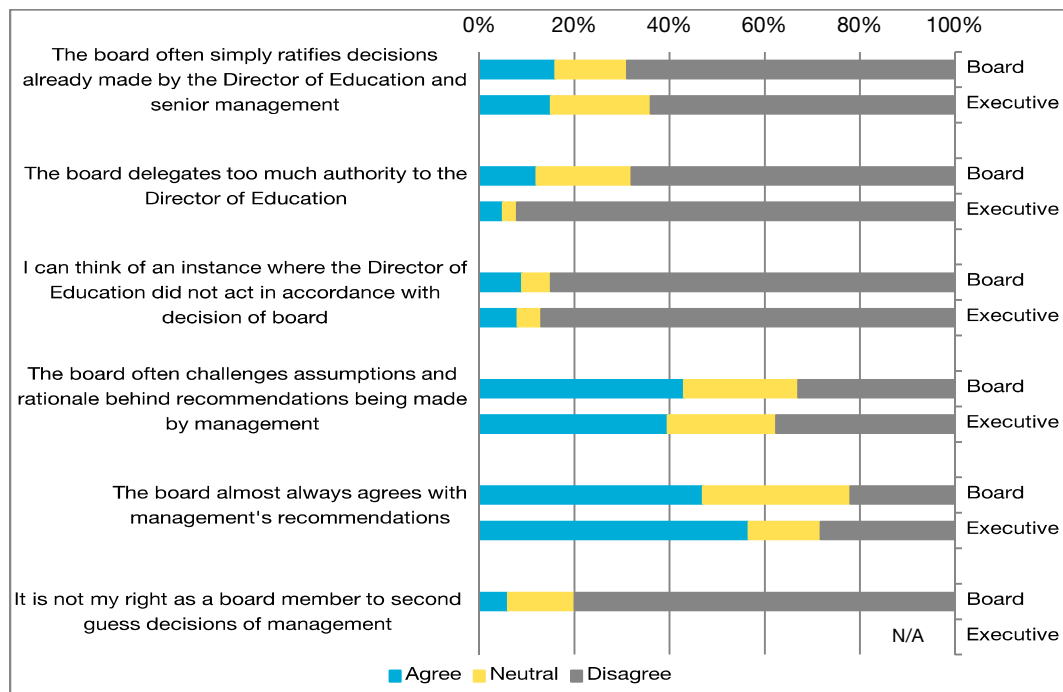


5.3 MANAGEMENT'S ROLE IN BOARD DECISION MAKING

Passive boards are a key issue in board governance. While management is responsible for making day-to-day decisions for the school division, it is the board's responsibility to make governance decisions. Because of this, boards must ensure that they are comfortable evaluating management's suggested solutions and alternatives, and that they do not merely "rubberstamp" management decisions.

Detailed Results

Figure 5.3—Management's Role in Board Decision Making



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 16% of board members and 15% of executives think their board often simply ratifies decisions already made by the Director of Education and senior management.
- › Boards delegate too much authority to the Director of Education, according to 12% of board members and 5% of executives.
- › Only 9% of board members and 8% of executives can think of an instance where the Director of Education did not act in accordance with a decision of the board.
- › 43% of board members and 40% of executives think their board often challenges assumptions and rationale behind recommendations being made by management.
- › About one-half of board members (47%) and executives (56%) think their board almost always agrees with management's recommendations.



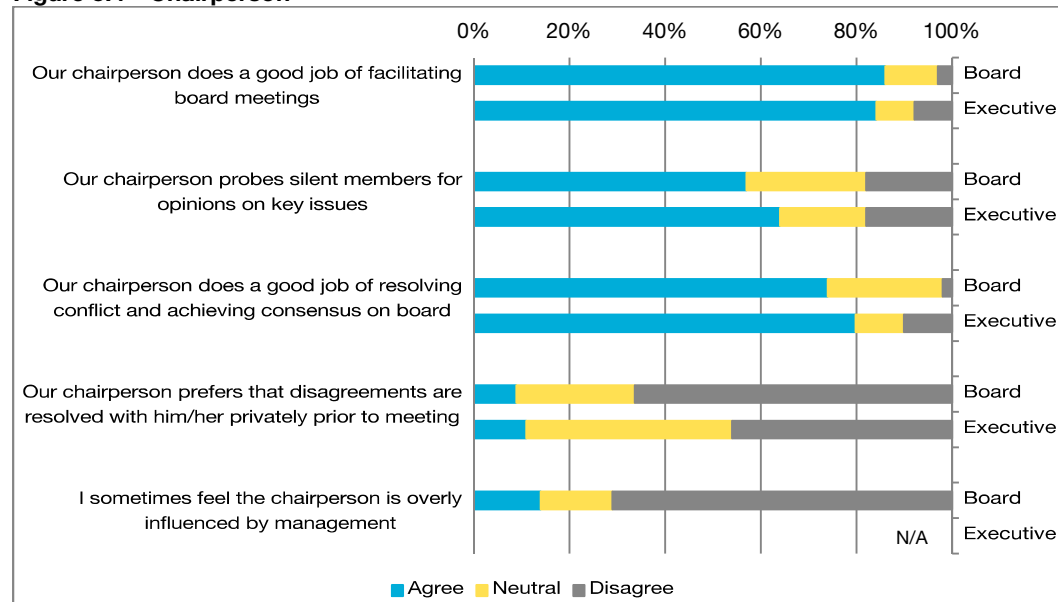
- › Only 6% of board members agree it is not right as a board member to second-guess decisions made by management.

5.4 CHAIRPERSON

A capable chairperson is necessary to facilitate board meetings and ensure the business of the board is being appropriately conducted. While the chairperson works closer with management than the other members of the board, the chair still represents the board. The chairperson plays a key role in maintaining positive team dynamics, managing conflict on the board, and ensuring that all board members participate in productive discussions and debates.

Detailed Results

Figure 5.4—Chairperson



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Most board members (86%) and executives (85%) think that their chairperson does a good job of facilitating board meetings.
- › 57% of board members and 64% of executives agree their chairperson probes silent members for their opinions on key issues.
- › The chairperson does a good job of resolving conflict and achieving consensus on the board, according to 74% of board members and 79% of executives.
- › Few board members (9%) and executives (11%) agree their chairperson prefers that disagreements are resolved with him/her privately prior to the start of meetings.



- › 14% of board members sometimes feel that their chairperson is overly influenced by management.

5.5 CONSIDERATIONS

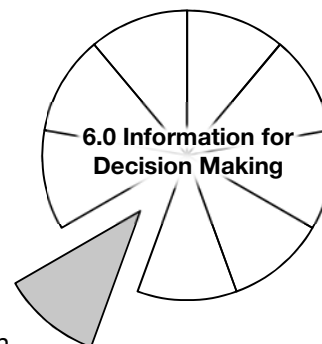
Board members and executives think their board works well together as a team and are satisfied with the leadership of their chairperson.

One area of concern is that almost one-fifth of board members indicate that decision making decision making is difficult because some board members represent special interests. While that proportion is significant, the number of executives indicating their concern on this issue is even higher, at 38%. The need for board members to set aside their individual issues to work, as one board, for the good of the division is an area that may require reinforcement in education and in policies.



6.0 Information for Decision Making

Board decisions are based on the information its members receive. Due to its control over what, when and how boards receive information, management has a certain degree of influence over boards. Therefore, boards must ensure they are not passive in accepting information. Rather, boards should assess their information needs on a regular basis, communicate these needs to management and ensure that management meets these needs.



As many board decisions have financial implications, it is important that board members become comfortable with examining budgets and financial statements and understand the financial ramifications of their decisions. If board members are unclear about financial information presented to them, they must ask for clarification from management, consult their audit/finance committee, or seek external advice.

Boards also play a critical role in managing risks. Timely, accurate and relevant information from management is critical in ensuring effective risk management.

Key Observations

Timely, clear and accurate information is critical for boards to make well-informed decisions. The survey results show that the majority of board members and executives are confident about the content of the information that management provides, although about one-fifth of board members say that they want more information than is provided.

Most board members and executives state that management provides adequate information on finances and sufficient reports on internal controls and any breakdowns that occur. The majority of board members and executives are confident that management openly shares negative or difficult information with their board, and are generally satisfied with the advice and recommendations received from management. However, less than one-fifth of board members and less than one-third of executives say that the Minister and/or Ministry provides their board with appropriate information to do an adequate job, and only about one-fifth of board members and executives say that their board receives information from the Minister and/or Ministry in a timely fashion.

While almost all board members and executives agree that the material required for board meetings is pre-circulated to board members in reasonable time, one-third of board members and about one-fifth of executives think that members are sometimes required to make immediate decisions received at the meeting itself. Less than one-half of board members have specified what risk reports they receive from management.

6.1 INFORMATION NEEDS

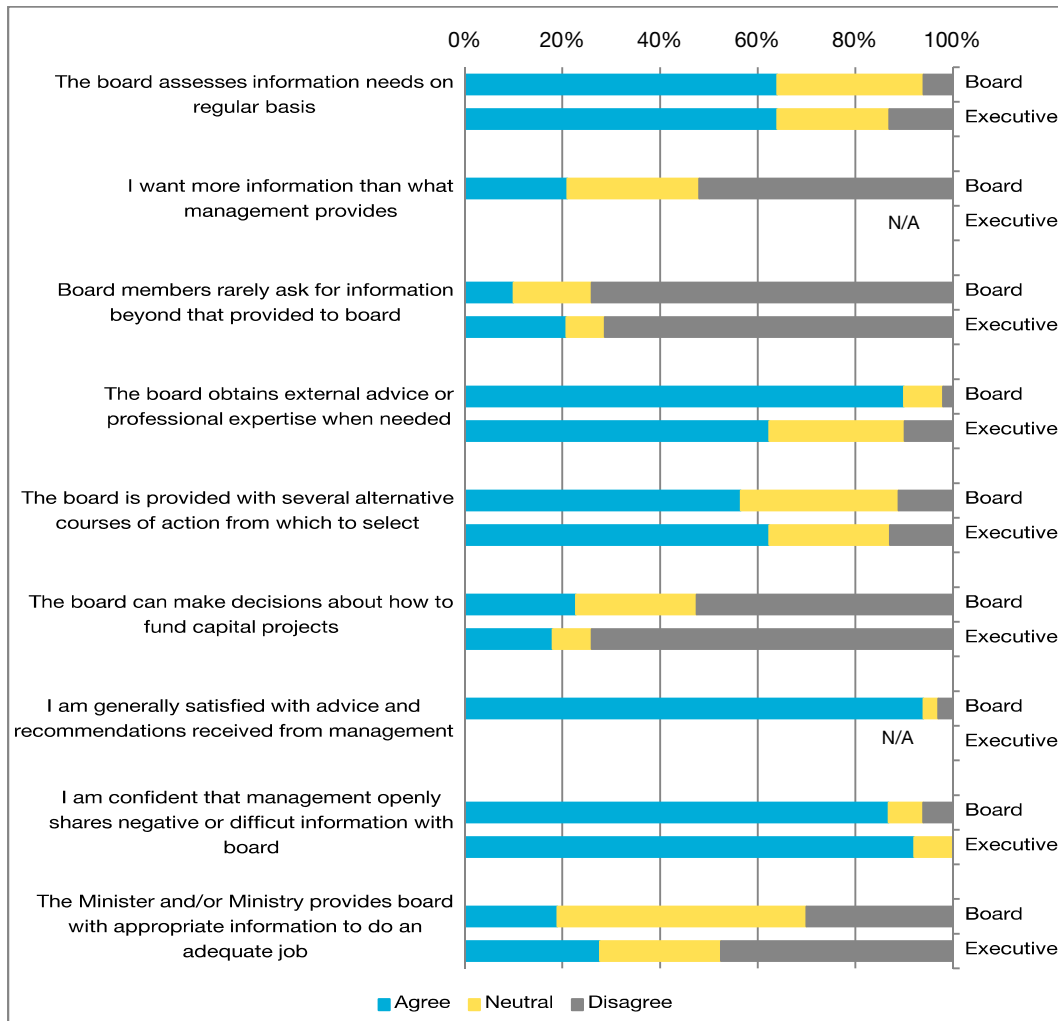
The information provided to boards should enable board members to make well-informed governance decisions and allow them to monitor the performance of their



school division. In providing a complete picture, management must share negative or difficult information with boards. As well, management should ensure that recommendations regarding decision items are accompanied by alternatives.

Detailed Results

Figure 6.1 – Information Needs



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 64% of board members and executives say their board assesses its information needs on a regular basis.
- › About one-fifth of board members (21%) want more information than what management provides.
- › 10% of board members and 21% of executives think that board members rarely ask for information beyond what is provided.



- › The large majority of board members (90%) indicate that their board obtains external advice or professional expertise when needed; 63% of executives agree.
- › Board members are provided with several alternative courses of actions from which to select, according to 56% of board members and 63% of executives.
- › 23% of board members and 18% of executives say their board can make decisions about how to fund capital projects.
- › Almost all board members (94%) agree that they are generally satisfied with advice and recommendations received from management.
- › The large majority of board members (86%) and executives (93%) are confident that management openly shares negative or difficult information with their board.
- › 19% of members and 28% of executives say the Minister and/or Ministry provides the board with appropriate information to do an adequate job.

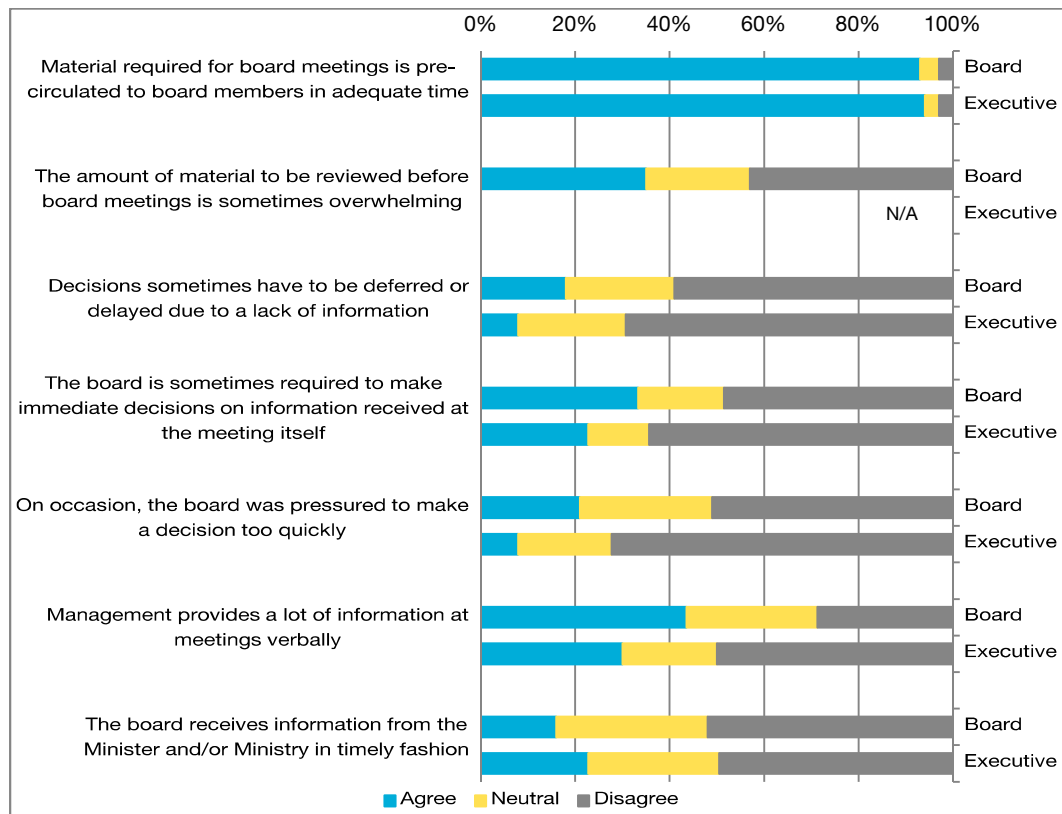
6.2 TIMING AND DELIVERY OF INFORMATION

It is important that board members receive information for meetings well beforehand so they have an opportunity to read through and understand the materials. If board members do not receive this information in advance, it is difficult for them to contribute meaningfully to the discussion and debate around issues. Board members should not be asked to make decisions based on information only received at the meeting itself. While verbal presentations are an important part of board meetings, management should also provide documentation of board members, to permit board members to evaluate and verify information provided to them.



Detailed Results

Figure 6.2—Timing and Delivery of Information



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Almost all board members (93%) and executives (95%) indicate that material required for board meetings is pre-circulated to board members in adequate time.
- › About one-third of board members (35%) say that the amount of material to be reviewed before board meetings is sometimes overwhelming.
- › 18% of board members and 8% of executives state that decisions sometimes have to be deferred or delayed due to a lack of information.
- › Board members are sometimes required to make immediate decisions on information received at the meeting itself, according to one-third of board members (33%) and 23% of executives.
- › 21% of board members and 8% of executives report that on occasion their board has been pressured to make decisions too quickly.
- › Management provides a lot of information at meetings verbally, according to 44% of board members and 30% of executives.



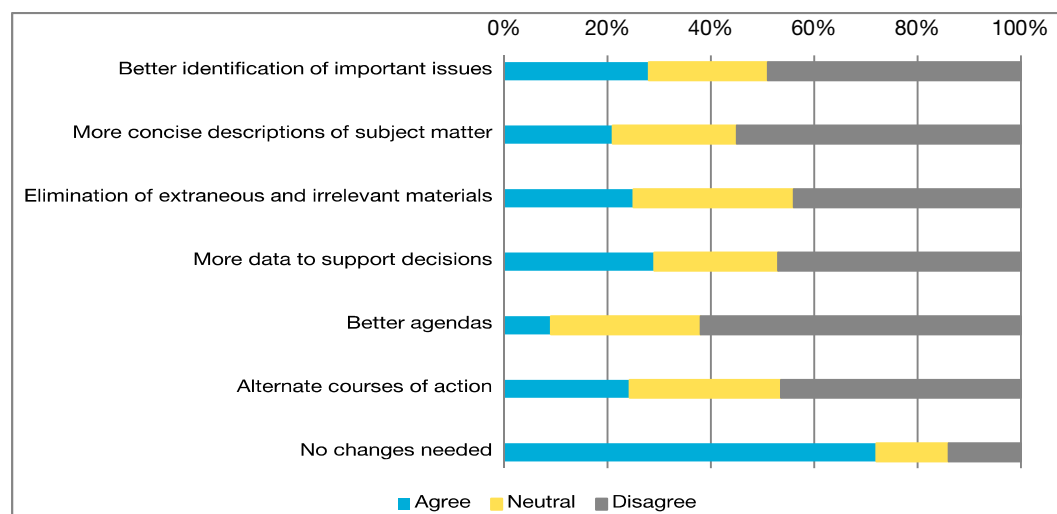
- › 16% of board members and 23% of executives say their board receives information from the Minister and/or Ministry in a timely fashion.

6.3 INFORMATION CONTENT

The content of material given to board members should have an appropriate level of detail and give a complete and fair representation of all relevant facts. Both board members and executives were asked whether information provided to their board met certain criteria. Board members exclusively were asked to comment on what improvements in pre-meeting information they would like to see.

Detailed Results

Figure 6.3a—Pre-meeting Information (i.e., agenda items received in advance)



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

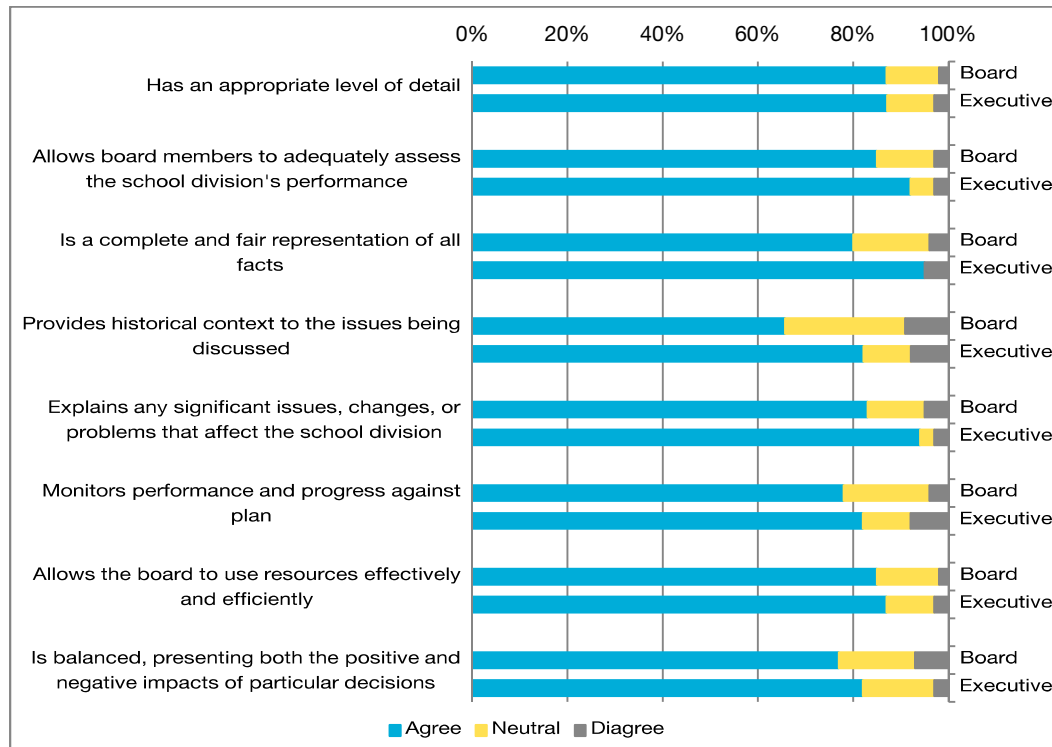
The survey found that:

- › Pre-meeting information requires better identification of important issues according to 28% of board members.
- › 21% of board members think that pre-meeting information requires a more concise description of the subject matter.
- › One-quarter of board members agree pre-meeting information requires the elimination of extraneous and irrelevant materials.
- › 29% of board members feel that more data is required to support decisions in pre-meeting information.
- › 9% of board members think that better meeting agendas should be provided with pre-meeting information.



- › Pre-meeting information requires alternate courses of action, according to close to one-quarter of board members (24%).
- › Close to three-quarters of board members (72%) indicate that no changes are needed with respect to pre-meeting information.

Figure 6.3b—Information Currently Provided to the Board



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Most board members (87%) and executives (88%) indicate that information has an appropriate level of detail.
- › Information allows board members to adequately assess the school division's performance, according to 85% of board members and 92% of executives.
- › 80% of board members and 95% of executives think that information provided to the board gives a complete and fair representation of all facts.
- › About two-thirds of board members (65%) and 83% of executives say that information provides a historical context to the issues being discussed.
- › Most board members (83%) and executives (95%) agree that information explains any significant issues, changes, or problems that affect the school division.
- › Information monitors performance and progress against plan, according to 78% of board members and 82% of executives.



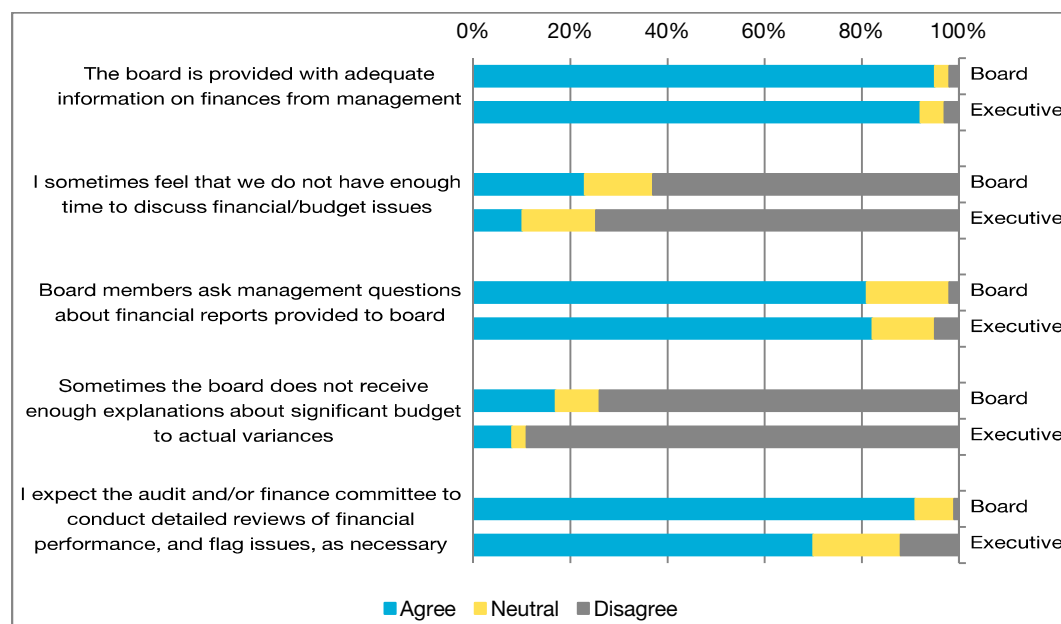
- › Most board members (85%) and executives (87%) agree that information allows the board to use resources effectively and efficiently.
- › 77% of board members and 82% of executives feel that information is balanced, presenting both the positive and negative impacts of particular decisions.

6.4 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Adequate monitoring of a school division's performance requires analysis of financial information. Because of this, management needs to provide boards with appropriate financial information. Because financial expertise varies, management must ensure that it adequately explains the financial information presented to boards.

Detailed Results

Figure 6.4—Financial Information



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › The large majority of board members (95%) and executives (93%) agree board members are provided with adequate information on finances from management.
- › 23% of board members and 10% of executives indicate that sometimes their board does not have enough time to discuss financial and budget issues.
- › Board members ask management questions about financial reports provided to the board, according to 81% of board members and 83% of executives.
- › 17% of board members and 8% of executives say that sometimes their board does not receive enough explanations about significant budget-to-actual variances.



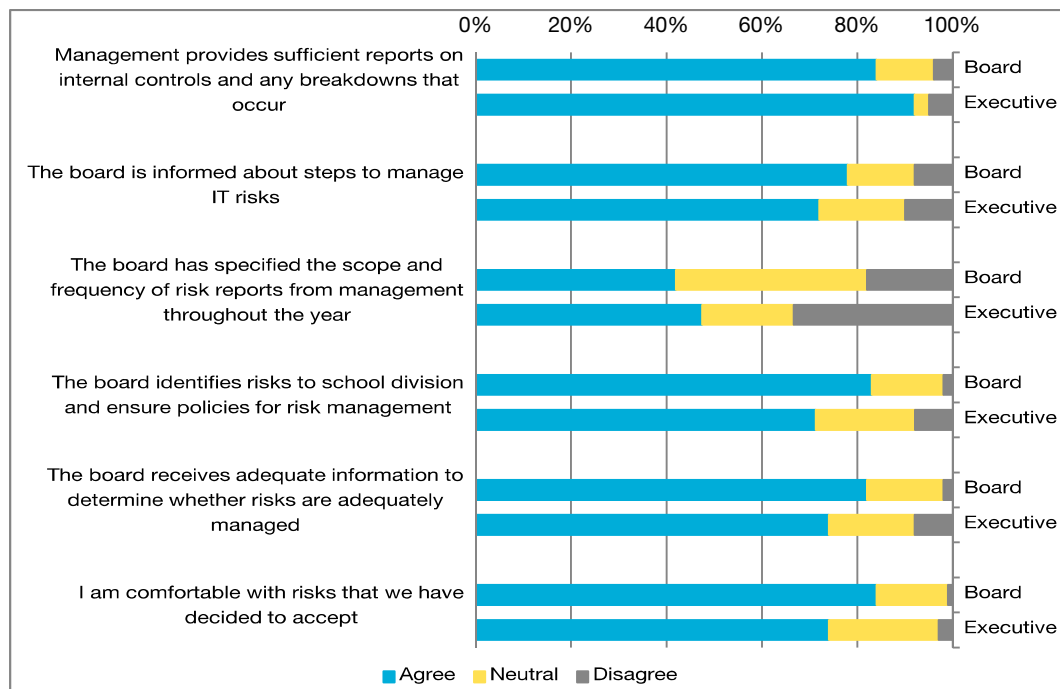
- While 91% of board members agree that they expect the audit and/or finance committee to conduct detailed reviews of financial performance, and flag issues as necessary, 70% of executives agree.

6.5 RISK MANAGEMENT

Boards should regularly include issues related to risk management on agendas and specify the scope and frequency of risk reports received from management. This helps ensure boards receive adequate information to determine whether risks are adequately managed. Given the large role of technology and its associated risks, it is important that boards are informed about steps to manage information technology (IT) risks. Since risks are always present even with effective management, boards should ensure they are clear about the risks they decide to accept.

Detailed Results

Figure 6.5—Risk Management



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- Most board members (84%) and executives (92%) indicate that management provides sufficient reports on internal controls and any breakdowns that occur.
- About three-quarters of board members (78%) and executives (72%) agree their board is informed about steps to manage IT risks.
- Boards have specified the scope and frequency of risk reports from management throughout the year, according to 42% of board members and 47% of executives.



- › 83% of board members and 72% of executives are satisfied with their board's work in identifying risks to the school division and ensuring policies for risk management.
- › Boards receive adequate information to determine whether risks are adequately managed, according to 82% of board members and 74% of executives.
- › 84% of board members and 74% of executives are comfortable with risks that the board has decided to accept.

6.6 CONSIDERATIONS

With 21% of board members indicating that they want more information than what management provides, and far fewer executives than board members indicating that the board obtains outside assistance when required, boards need to take additional care to consider and define their information needs. This includes specifying what risk reports they wish to receive from management.

Given that a relatively small proportion of board members and executives indicate they are satisfied with the timing and adequacy of information from the Ministry, it is important that they clarify their information needs and expectations, and clearly communicate these to the Ministry. The Ministry needs to seek to be responsive to these expectations.

Some areas for improvement include providing less information in verbal form and providing all information required for decision making prior to the meeting. A noteworthy minority of board members and executives state that members are sometimes required to make immediate decisions at meetings without sufficient opportunity to consider related information. Chairpersons and executives could take this into account in setting agendas.

Board members and executives hold somewhat different views on board consideration of financial information. More board members than executives say that board members do not have sufficient time to discuss financial and budget issues. More board members than executives indicate that they expect an audit/finance committee to conduct detailed reviews of financial information and flag issues. Boards and executives need to ensure that their expectations of board members and finance-related committees are aligned.



7.0 Education, Training, and Evaluations

Boards in different sectors involve unique challenges. Because of this, even people with prior board experience will not be familiar with all aspects of school board governance. It is important that all board members become familiar with how their board and division operate. Board orientation is a crucial step in building this familiarity.



Ongoing training is also important. Coming from diverse backgrounds, board members do not necessarily have knowledge in key areas. To help educate board members, the board should identify training needs and implement plans to meet these needs.

Boards should evaluate their own performance. Without review and modification, boards face an increased risk of developing poor practices that can lead to inadequate governance.

Key Observations

Over one-half of board members and three-quarters of executives assert that there should be greater governance training/capacity building opportunities for school board trustees. However, one-quarter of board members indicate that they do not have time to attend governance or industry-specific training or conferences, and about one-third of executives think that most board members would not take the time to attend these events. Just under two-thirds of board members said that they have attended governance training offered by the Ministry of Education or the Saskatchewan School Board Association; most of these board members think that the training provided was useful.

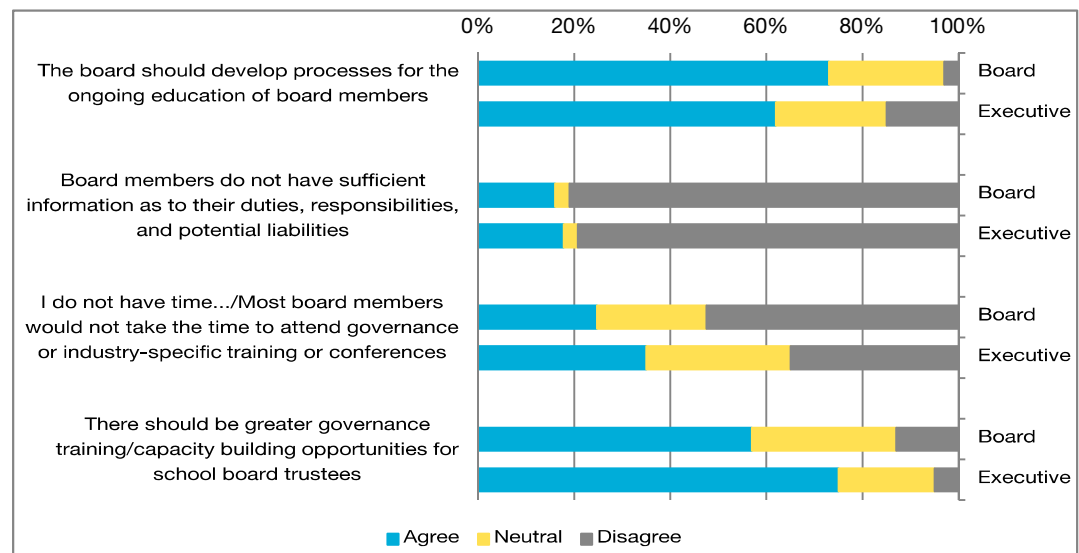
7.1 BOARD EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is important that board members receive adequate education and training. In particular, all board members should have sufficient education regarding their duties, responsibilities, and potential liabilities to help boards function effectively.



Detailed Results

Figure 7.1a—Education and Training

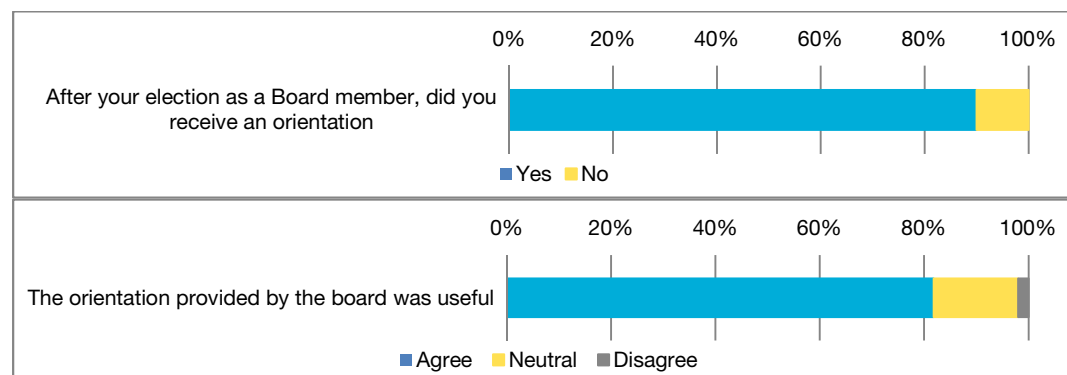


Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 73% of board members and 62% of executives are satisfied with their board’s work in developing processes for the ongoing education of board members.
- › Board members do not have sufficient information as to their duties, responsibilities, and potential liabilities, according to 16% of board members and 18% of executives.
- › One-quarter of board members say they do not have time to attend governance or industry-specific training or conferences; 35% of executives indicate that most board members would not take the time to attend these events.
- › 57% of board members and three-quarters of executives state there should be greater governance training/capacity building opportunities for school board trustees.

Figure 7.1b—Orientation



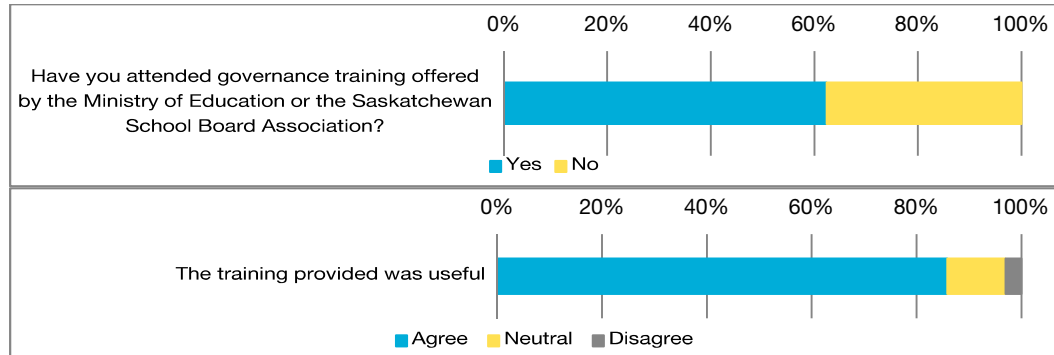
Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

- › 90% of board members stated that they received an orientation after their election.



- › The orientation provided by their board was useful, according to 81% of board members.

Figure 7.1c—Training



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

- › 63% of board members indicate that they have attended governance training offered by the Ministry of Education or the Saskatchewan School Board Association.
- › The training provided to board members was useful, according to 85% of board members.

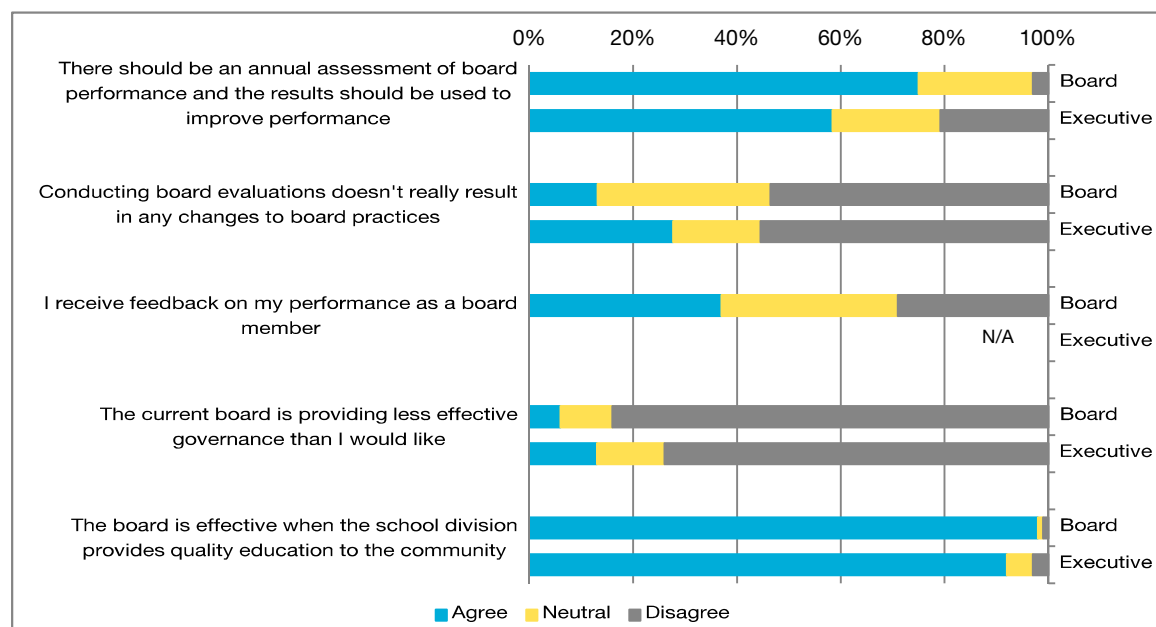
7.2 BOARD EVALUATIONS

It is important that boards conduct regular assessments of their performance and use these results to improve their performance. Individual board members could also receive feedback on their performance in order to enhance the overall functioning and capacity of the board to govern.



Detailed Results

Figure 7.2—Board Evaluations



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › While three-quarters of board members are satisfied with their board's work in conducting and utilizing annual performance assessments, only 59% of executives are satisfied.
- › 13% of board members and 28% of executives think that conducting board evaluations doesn't really result in any changes to board practices.
- › Just over one-third of board members (37%) state that they receive feedback on their performance as a board member.
- › Only 6% of board members and 13% of executives say that their current board is providing less effective governance than they would like.
- › Almost all board members (98%) and executives (92%) agree that their board is effective when the school division provides quality education to the community.

7.3 CONSIDERATIONS

Most board members and executives are of the view that their board is effective when the school division provides quality education to the community. Although the school division may be providing quality education, this does not necessarily mean that board governance is effective. With just over one-third of board members indicating that they receive feedback on their performance as a board member, there is an opportunity for boards to explore ways of providing this feedback.

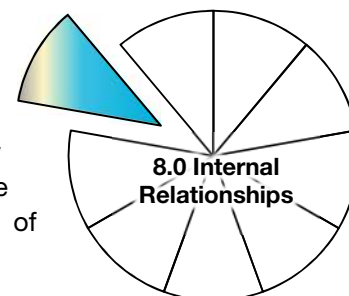


The majority of board members and executives indicate that there should be more governance training and capacity building for board members. More executives (75%) than board members (57%) hold this view. We have noted in the Considerations sections of other chapters areas where governance training and education might be warranted.



8.0 Internal Relationships

Senior management is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school division while boards are responsible for overseeing management's performance and questions of governance.



A positive working relationship between board members and senior management helps promote the success of the school division in effectively delivering desired education outcomes. Key components of maintaining a good relationship between board members and senior management include sharing a common view of school division priorities, openly communicating, and clearly defining their respective roles and expectations.

Achieving and maintaining a clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and management can be difficult. Management should be empowered to make decisions regarding day-to-day operations without interference from the board. Too much deference to management is also an issue and the relationship between a board and senior management will deteriorate if board members feel they simply “rubberstamp” the decisions of senior management. Boards must set clear expectations for management, openly communicate these expectations, and provide feedback on management's performance in meeting the board's expectations. As part of its responsibility to oversee management's performance, a board must also oversee the appointment, compensation and expenses of the Director of Education to help ensure that public money is being well spent.

Key Observations

Maintaining a positive working relationship with senior management is important for supporting effective governance. The survey results indicate that board members and executives believe that they have a good working relationship, with the large majority of board members and executives expressing satisfaction with their board's work in establishing an effective working relationship with the Director of Education and the CFO. There is some divergence between the views of board members and executives over whether the board is too involved in management decisions.

The survey results suggest that the majority of board members and executives are satisfied with their board's work in evaluating the performance of their management team. Fewer executives than board members are confident that their board requires that action be taken if the school division's performance falls below board expectations. The majority of board members and executives are satisfied with their board's work in establishing sound processes for the recruitment, appointment, and evaluation of the Director of Education and the CFO. However, only about one-half of board members and executives indicate that the Director of Education's expenses are reviewed by the board Chairperson (or delegated to a committee or board member).

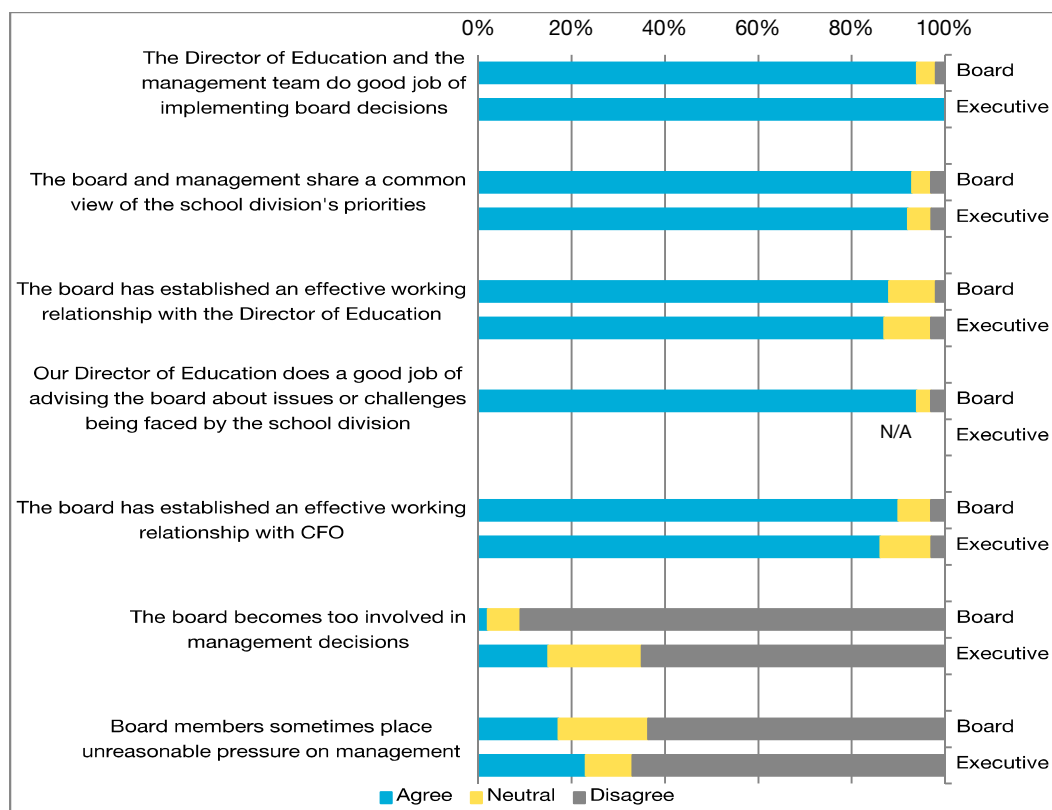


8.1 RELATIONSHIP WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT

To work well together, board members and management must share a common view of the school division’s priorities and clearly delineate their separate roles and authorities. Management must ensure it advises the board about issues or challenges facing the division, so that board members can make informed decisions. Board members, meanwhile, must ensure they focus on issues of governance and do not become too involved in management decisions.

Detailed Results

Figure 8.1 – Relationship with Senior Management



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › The Director of Education and management team do a good job of implementing the board’s decisions, according to all executives and 94% of board members.
- › A large majority of board members (92%) and executives (93%) think that board members and management share a common view of the school division’s priorities.
- › Most board members (88%) and executives (87%) are satisfied with their board’s work in establishing an effective working relationship with the Director of Education.



- › 94% of board members indicate that their Director of Education does a good job of advising the board about issues or challenges being faced by the school division.
- › The large majority of board members (90%) and most executives (87%) are satisfied with their board's work in establishing an effective working relationship with the CFO.
- › Very few board members (2%) and 15% of executives say that their board sometimes becomes too involved in management decisions.
- › 17% of board members and 23% of executives feel that board members sometimes place unreasonable pressure on management.

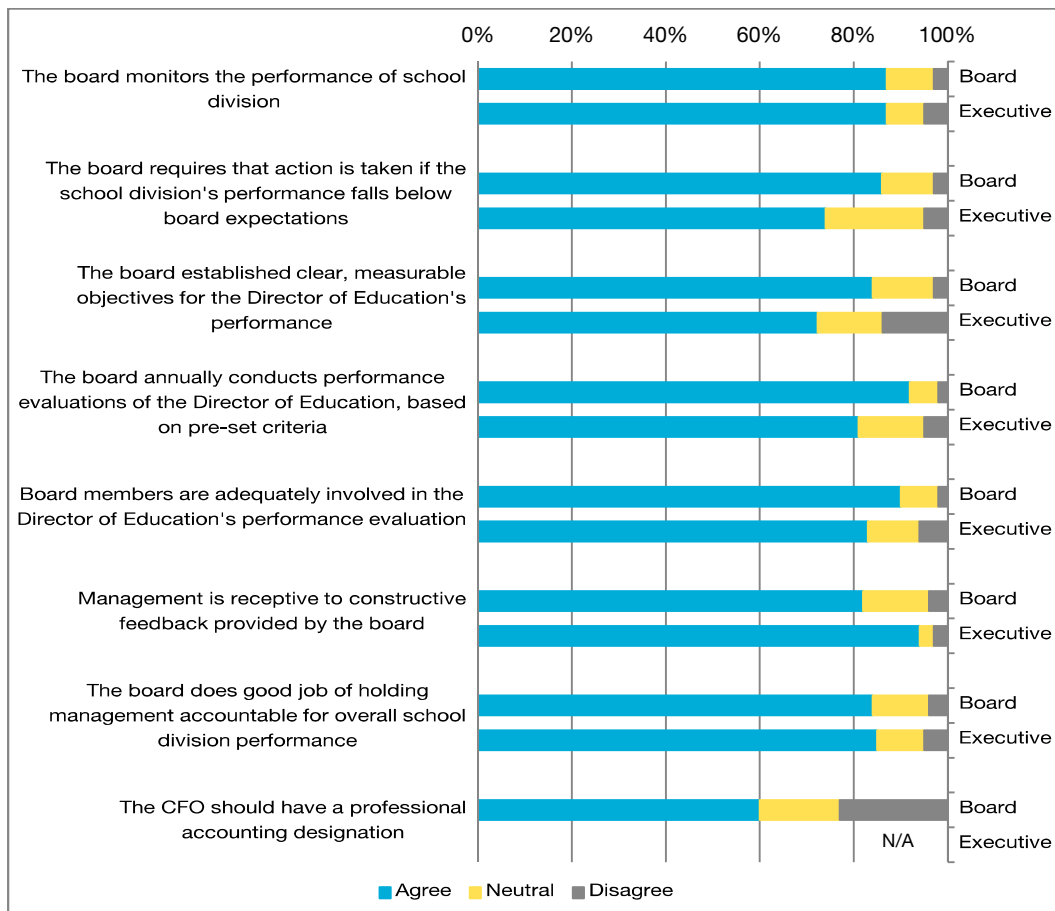
8.2 MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

With respect to performance monitoring, it is important that boards establish clear, measurable expectations for their Director of Education and perform annual performance evaluations. Boards must also take or require that action be taken if the Director of Education or school division is not meeting board expectations. Multiple board members could be involved in evaluating the Director of Education's performance.



Detailed Results

Figure 8.2—Management Performance Evaluation



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 87% of board members and executives agree their board monitors the performance of the school division.
- › Most board members (86%) and the majority of executives (74%) are confident that their board requires action if their school division's performance is below board expectations.
- › The board establishes clear, measurable objectives for the Director of Education's performance, according to 84% of board members and 73% of executives.
- › 91% of board members and 81% of executives state that their board annually conducts performance evaluations of the Director of Education, based on pre-set criteria.
- › Most board members (90%) and executives (83%) believe that board members are adequately involved in the Director of Education's performance evaluation.



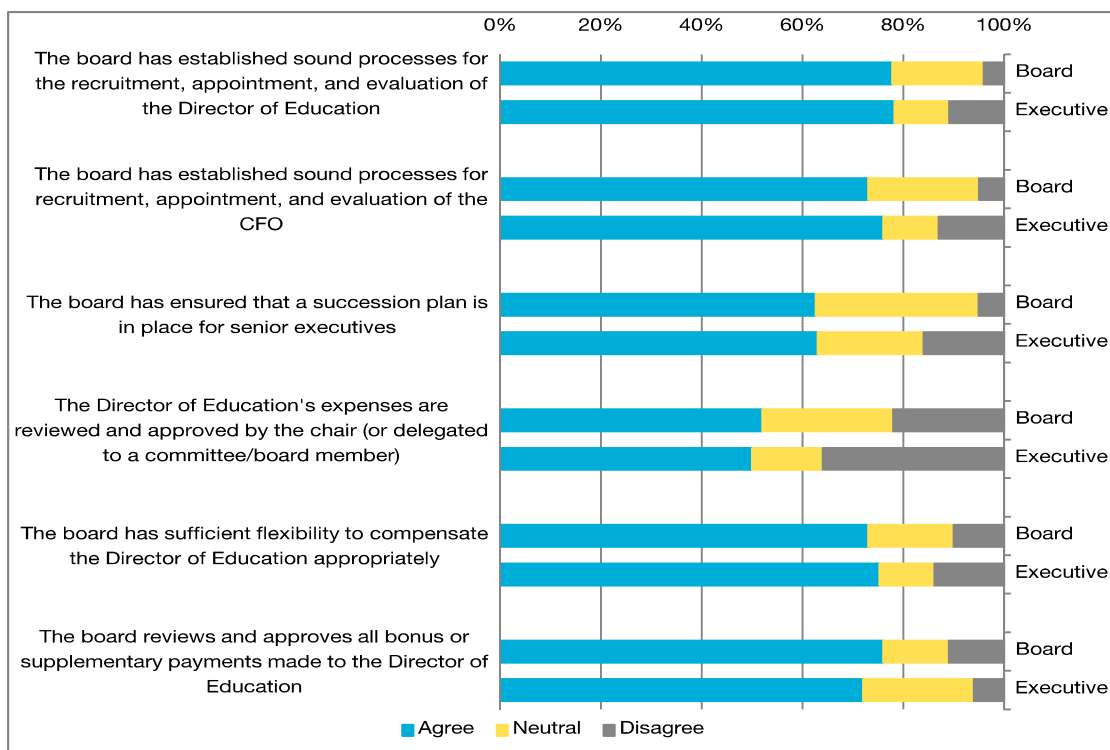
- › Management is receptive to constructive feedback provided by the board, according to 82% of board members and 95% of executives.
- › Most board members (84%) and executives (85%) say that their board does a good job of holding management accountable for overall school division performance.
- › 60% of board members think their CFO should have a professional accounting designation.

8.3 APPOINTMENT AND COMPENSATION

In addition to monitoring the Director of Education’s performance, school boards are responsible for hiring and ensuring succession plans are in place for senior management. As well, boards are responsible for reviewing and approving the Director of Education’s expenses and bonus payments.

Detailed Results

Figure 8.3—CEO Appointment and Compensation



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › 77% of board members and 79% of executives are satisfied with their board’s work in establishing sound processes for the recruitment, appointment, and evaluation of the Director of Education.



- › About three-quarters of board members (73%) and executives (76%) are satisfied with their board's work in establishing sound processes for the recruitment, appointment, and evaluation of their Chief Financial Officer (CFO).
- › Just under two-thirds of board members (62%) and executives (63%) are satisfied with their board's work in ensuring a succession plan is in place for senior executives.
- › The Director of Education's expenses are reviewed and approved by the board chair, or delegated to a committee or board members, according to about one-half of board members (52%) and executives (50%).
- › About three-quarters of board members (73%) and executives (76%) say their board has sufficient flexibility to compensate the Director of Education appropriately.
- › The board reviews and approves all bonus or supplementary payments made to the Director of Education, according to 76% of board members and 72% of executives.

8.4 CONSIDERATIONS

While very few board members (2%) say their board is too involved in management decisions, significantly more executives (15%) hold this view. Boards must ensure that they are clear on their responsibilities (a consideration noted earlier in this report).

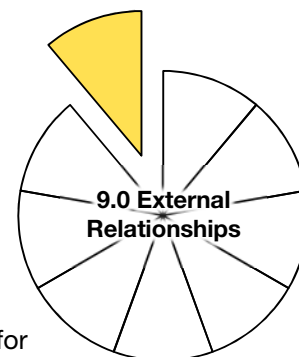
Fewer executives (74%) than board members (86%) agree the board requires action if the school division's performance is below the board's expectations. Oversight of performance is of little use if a board does not require action when performance is below expectations. Boards could consider whether they provide the direction that they should.

Only about one-half of board members and executives indicated that the Director of Education's expenses were approved by the chairperson, board committee or a delegated board member. Boards need to ensure that senior management expenses receive appropriate scrutiny.



9.0 External Relationships

This chapter considers school boards' relationships with the public, the Ministry of Education, the provincial government, and others in the education sector. The provision of quality education for Saskatchewan's youth is important for the growth and development of the province. One purpose of local boards for school divisions is to help ensure that local educational needs are considered in decisions about education. Without adequate consultation and communication with the public, the education system runs a greater risk of being unresponsive to needs.



As described in chapter two, boards of education are not only accountable to their electorates, but to the provincial government through the Ministry of Education. School divisions must seek to work collaboratively with the Ministry towards the improvement of the education system of Saskatchewan.

Since school divisions throughout the province may face similar challenges and opportunities, it is important that school divisions look within and beyond the boards of their own division to pursue opportunities to work with other divisions and education organizations.

Key Observations

Most board members and executives believe that their board adequately considers the interests of all key stakeholders in making decisions. While few board members and executives are concerned that the board does not satisfactorily consult with the public, close to one-half of board members and executives think the public does not sufficiently understand the mandate of the school division and the issues it faces.

Most board members and executives agree with the statement that the Minister and/or Ministry often makes decisions without adequately understanding how they will impact their school division. The majority of board members and executives indicate that their board understands the priorities of the provincial government and that these priorities align with decisions their board has been making. About one-half of board members and close to two-thirds of executives feel that the public policy initiatives the government expects their board to undertake are not compatible with operational performance objectives.

Most board members and executives are satisfied with their board's progress towards developing an effective working relationship with education professionals.

9.1 RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC

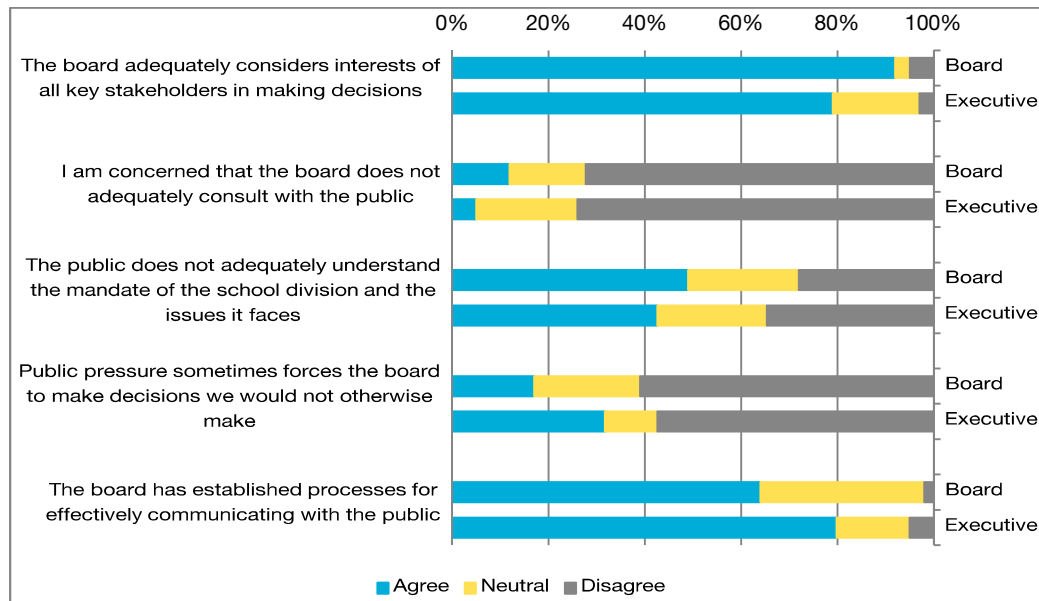
Since school trustees are elected, boards of education are accountable not only to the Ministry of Education but to their electorate—the residents of their school division. This



relationship is very important, especially given the strong interest of the public in ensuring an effective education system.

Detailed Results

Figure 9.1 – Relationship with Public



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Boards adequately consider the interests of all key stakeholders in making decisions, according to 92% of board members and 79% of executives.
- › Only 12% of board members and 5% of executives are concerned that their board does not adequately consult with the public.
- › The public does not adequately understand the mandate of the school division and the issues it faces, according to 49% of board members and 43% of executives.
- › 17% of board members and about one-third of executives (32%) feel that public pressure sometimes forces their board to make decisions it would not otherwise make.
- › About two-thirds of board members (64%) and 79% of executives are satisfied with their board's work in establishing processes for effective communication with the public.

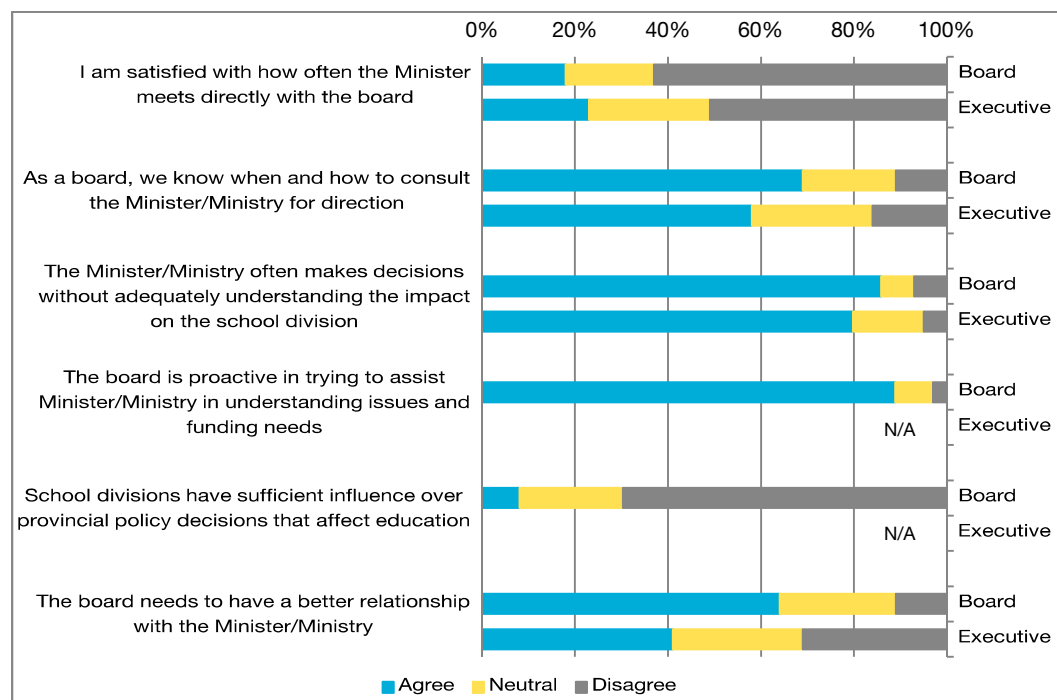


9.2 RELATIONSHIPS WITH MINISTRY AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Good working relationships between boards and the provincial government, and an understanding of the other's responsibilities, will assist in the effective delivery of education. Boards should be proactive in trying to assist the Minister and/or Ministry in understanding issues and funding needs faced by school divisions.

Detailed Results

Figure 9.2—Relationship with Ministry of Education



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

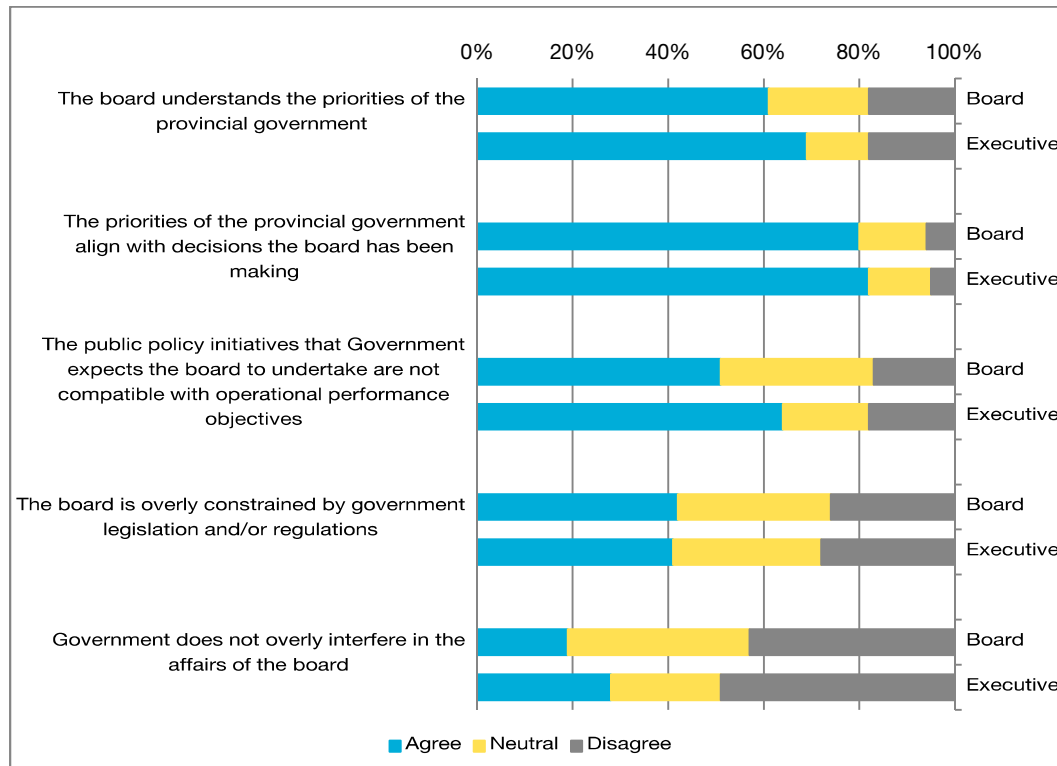
The survey found that:

- › Only about one-fifth of board members (18%) and executives (23%) are satisfied with how often the Minister meets directly with the board.
- › 69% of board members and 58% of executives state that their board knows when and how to consult the Minister and/or Ministry for direction.
- › Most board members (85%) and executives (79%) think that the Minister and/or Ministry often makes decisions without adequately understanding the impact on their school division.
- › Most board members (88%) indicate that their board has been proactive in trying to assist the Minister and/or Ministry in understanding issues and funding needs.



- › Only 8% of board members think that school divisions have sufficient influence over provincial policy decisions that affect education.
- › Boards need to have a better relationship with the Minister and/or Ministry, according to 64% of board members; 41% of executives agree.

Figure 9.2b—Relationship with Provincial Government



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Around two-thirds of board members (61%) and executives (69%) believe that their board understands the priorities of the provincial government.
- › Most board members (80%) and executives (82%) think that the priorities of the provincial government align with decisions their board has been making.
- › Public policy initiatives the government expects their board to undertake are not compatible with operational performance objectives, according to about one-half of board members (51%) and 64% of executives.
- › 42% of board members and 41% of executives feel that their board is overly constrained by government legislation and/or regulations.
- › Government does not overly interfere in affairs of their board, according to 19% of board members and 28% of executives.

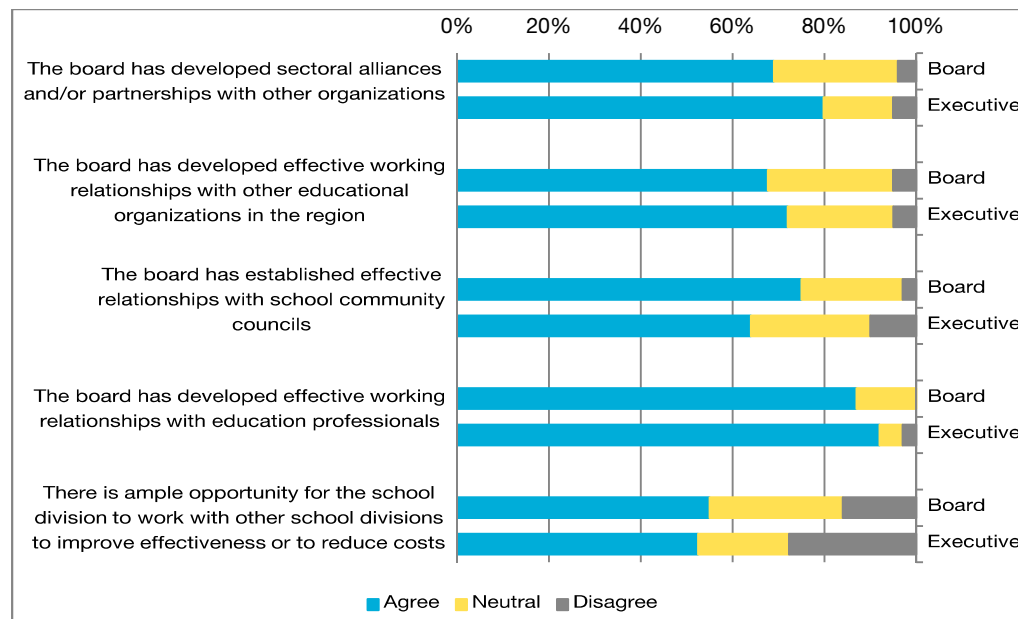


9.3 RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN EDUCATION SECTOR

Since there are many different groups that play a role in education, it is important for boards to work with other organizations to improve the effectiveness of the education system.

Detailed Results

Figure 9.3—Relationships Within Education Field



Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, School Board Governance Survey, May 2013

The survey found that:

- › Most board members (69%) and executives (79%) are satisfied with their board's work in developing sectoral alliances and/or partnerships with other organizations.
- › 67% of board members and 72% of executives are satisfied with their board's work in developing an effective working relationship with other educational organizations in the area.
- › Three-quarters of board members and close to two-thirds of executives (64%) are satisfied with their board's work in establishing effective relationships with school community councils.⁵
- › Most board members (87%) and executives (92%) are satisfied with their board's work in developing an effective working relationship with education professionals.

⁵ School boards are required by s.140.1 of *The Education Act, 1995* to set up school community councils for every school in a school division. The responsibilities of school community councils are set out in s.140.5 and include facilitating parent and community participation in school planning and advice to the school board and school staff.



- › About one-half of board members (55%) and executives (53%) indicate that there is ample opportunity for their school division to work with other school divisions to improve effectiveness or reduce costs.

9.4 CONSIDERATIONS

There is opportunity to improve communications and the relationship between school boards and the Ministry of Education. Most board members and executives share the view that the Minister and/or Ministry often makes decisions without adequately understanding the impact on their division. Also, a significant number of board members and executives feel that some public policy initiatives the Government expects the board to undertake are not compatible with their operational performance objectives.

There is also room for improvement in school division communication with the public. Although most board members and executives express satisfaction with their board's processes for communicating with the public, a significant number believe that the public does not adequately understand the mandate of the school division and the issues it faces.



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