

CHAPTER IV

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Early in 1975 permission was granted by the Director-General of Education in Queensland (see Appendix A) for the author to conduct an opinion survey in the Darling Downs Region on the composition and functions of school boards. With the co-operation of the Regional Director and his staff, the principals of the state schools and their staffs, and members of the Parents and Citizens associations, the questionnaire was distributed and returned during July and August of that year. Permission was also granted to distribute questionnaires to two groups of primary teachers attending in-service courses at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education.

The purpose of the survey was to obtain opinions of relevant groups, i.e. principals, teachers and Parents and Citizens representatives, on the following three aspects of school boards, if they were to be established in the Darling Downs Region along similar lines as outlined in Chapter 2.

1. The composition and functions of a school board.
2. Whether such structures of governance would be desired.
3. The kinds of support services that should be delegated to the Regional Office if boards were to act autonomously.

The opinions of the two groups of in-service teachers were obtained to determine if prior discussion on these points would result in a different pattern of responses to those of the three primary groups.

Procedure

The underlying assumptions in all existing proposals, referred to in Chapter 2, are to involve teachers and the community in decision making at the school level and to decentralize the administration of the education system. An analysis of these proposals has therefore revealed many basic similarities in their composition and functions. The variations that do occur are largely a response to local conditions.

The opinion survey undertaken for this study has attempted to incorporate the variations of other proposals while also allowing for the local geographic and demographic characteristics of the Darling Downs.

Such factors as the uneven distribution of population throughout the region (the population of the regional centre, Toowoomba, is 62,000 but the largest number of urban settlements are the small hamlets on the western plains), the remoteness of some settlements, and the variety of human activities have all been taken into account. The author's own thoughts on the functions of boards have also been explored (see for example questions 23, 27 and 28). To determine the teaching experience and qualifications of those responding to the survey a brief personal history was requested.

With these points in mind, a draft opinion questionnaire was composed. Copies were then forwarded to the Department of Education in Queensland and the University of New England for approval before being distributed. This was granted by both organizations with only minor modifications in the wording of some questions being required.

A covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey and stating that permission had been granted by the Director-General to distribute the opinion questionnaire (see Appendix C) was written and forwarded with the instrument. Prior to distribution discussion with people concerned in education revealed a lack of

understanding of the Australian concept of school boards. Views held were based largely on the American models. In an attempt therefore to put the Australian proposals in their right perspective, the bases for these were briefly explained in the letter. Also, what the author considered to be some of the advantages that might be obtained by establishing such boards were listed. Copies of both the covering letter and the questionnaire were posted in July to all state schools in the Darling Downs Region. Respondents were requested to post their replies back to the author at their earliest possible convenience.

The Sample Population

In all, 140 schools were approached with a total of 445 copies of the questionnaire being sent out. The break-down of this total figure was as follows:-

Principals	140;	9 secondary and 131 primary.
Teachers	110;	(There were 30, one teacher schools).
Parents & Citizens;	140.	
In-service, (2 groups of 24)	48;	(These groups discussed the issues before answering the questionnaire).
Regional Office;	7	
Total	...	445

Of these 187 replies were received and when allowances are made for four returns from the assistant teachers who gave combined opinions this represents at 34 per cent return of surveys. The principals returned 44 copies of the survey, or 33 per cent of those posted; the assistant teachers 71 with 4 combined returns representing 33.6 per cent of those posted; the Parents and Citizens representatives, 25 or 18 per cent; in-service group one, 24, or 100 per cent, group two, 22, or 92 per cent; and Regional Office 1 or 14 per cent. The total of returns for the three primary groups of principals, teachers and Parents and Citizens representatives was 28 per cent of the total posted.

In the group of principals, the years of experience with the Queensland Department of Education covered the full range as indicated on the questionnaire with the largest number, 8, in each of the 6 to 10 years and 30+ years categories. The largest number, 15, had been principals for 1 to 5 years, closely followed by 13 with 15+ years. By far the largest group, 37, had a Teachers Certificate only. This is to be expected with such a large proportion of primary schools included in the sample. Eleven principals had a uni-

versity degree at the pass level, 1 had an honours degree, and 9 had formal training in educational administration.

In the group of assistant teachers, excluding the two in-service groups, 16 had been with the Department from 1 to 5 years, and 14 from 6-10 years. The remainder had from 11 to 25 years of experience. Again, the majority, 32, had a Teachers Certificate only, 4 had a university degree at the pass level, 2 at honours level and 2 had formal training in educational administration.

The Parents and Citizens representatives, as could be expected from a rural centre, had very little experience as teachers. Only 3 had a Teachers Certificate and one had formal training in educational administration. However, quite high proportions had long service as a member of the association. Ten had 1 to 5 years; 9 had 6 to 10 years; and 8 had 11 to 15 years.

In group one of the in-service groups, 9 had 16 to 20 years teaching experience, and 5 in each of the 6 to 10 years and 11 to 15 years categories. The remainder had between 21 and 30+ years of experience. All 24 had a Teachers Certificate only and none had formal training in educational administration. In the

second group 8 had 6 to 10 years teaching experience and 6 had 30+ years. The remainder were distributed evenly between the other categories. There were 21 with a Teachers Certificate and only one with a university degree at the pass level, but none had formal training in educational administration.

The one respondent from the Regional Office had two university degrees at the pass level, had formal training in educational administration, 26 to 30 years teaching experience and 15+ years experience as a principal.

The Evaluation

The responses to the questions were first counted to obtain a raw score and these were then expressed as a percentage of the total responses to each question. Not all respondents answered all questions so that a percentage figure in relation to the number of responses to each question was considered more valid than expressed as a percentage of the total number in each group returning the survey. Data for each group and for the combined totals of the three primary groups are reproduced in Appendices E to H. Further statistical analysis was considered but the only possible technique that would have been of value

was chi-square. This method had to be rejected on the grounds that there was no similar survey with appropriate figures to provide an "expected" value, and second, comparing the statistics obtained in this survey with a normal distribution would be of doubtful validity.

The data for the two in-service groups have been kept separate and not included in any total grouping. This format has been followed so that comparisons can be made with other groupings to see if the chance to discuss the relevant issues prior to answering the survey has made any significant differences in the pattern of responses.

Perhaps the most valuable set of data is that of the combined results of the three primary groups. With a total of 139 responses incorporating the views of principals, teachers and community these figures give the best overall picture of the opinions of those vitally interested in the education of today's children in the Darling Downs Region. These results are therefore interpreted below giving the option preferred and the percentage indicating that option and the number of alternative responses available if these exceeded two.

The minimum size of the board should be 5; 11 per cent selected this option; there were 5 alternatives.

The maximum size of the board should be 11; 14 per cent selected this option; there were 11 alternatives.

The composition of the board should consist of:- 4 lay members, 3 teachers, 1 principal, 1 Departmental representative; 37 per cent selected this option; there were 5 alternatives.

The number of professional educators should be greater than the number of lay personnel; 48 per cent selected this option; there were 3 alternatives.

The principal should be an ex-officio, voting member of the board; 47 per cent selected this option; there were 4 alternatives.

Lay members should be any member of the community in which the school is located; 46 per cent selected this option; there were 3 alternatives.

The Director-General should have a nominee on the board; 55 per cent selected this option.

The chairman of the board should not be a lay member; 55 per cent selected this option.

The chairman should have a casting vote; 68 per

cent selected this option.

Grade 12 students could be non-voting members; 37 per cent selected this option; there were 3 alternatives.

The board should be able to co-opt non-voting members when necessary; 94 per cent selected this option.

The board should be advisory only; 63 per cent selected this option.

The board should be concerned with making decisions in the following areas:-

school policy, 85 per cent selecting this option.

financial matters (not salaries), 87 per cent.

staffing, 32 per cent.

maintenance and improvements to buildings and equipment, 92 per cent.

The board should have the responsibility to establish the aims and objectives of the school; 53 per cent selected this option.

The board should:-

be consulted on teacher staffing,	YES	61 per cent
have an equal say with the Department,	NO	74 per cent
make the selection of teaching staff,	NO	83 per cent

have no say in staffing,	NO	51 per cent
appoint ancilliary staff.	YES	77 per cent

In curriculum matters the board should be able to set down broad areas and allow teachers to follow their own curriculum; 76 per cent selected this option; there were 3 alternatives.

The board should be able to control and staff the use of school facilities outside school hours, 76 per cent selected this option.

The board should have the responsibility for drawing up a proposed budget; 83 per cent selected this option.

There should be an appeals committee with the Regional Director as chairman, and with lay and teaching personnel (not from the school concerned) to settle matters on which lay and professional members of the school board cannot come to agreement; 63 per cent selected this option.

The board should be accountable for all its actions to the Director-General through the Regional Director; 87 per cent selected this option.

The board should be elected every three years; 45 per cent selected this option; there were three alternatives.

A total of 62 per cent of respondents indicated that they were in favour of school boards being formed as outlined on their survey.

The Regional Director should have the authority to administer his region within the broad aims and objectives of the Department of Education; 94 per cent selected this option.

The respondents indicated that they would like to see the following functions centred in the Regional Office:-

1. the allocation of finance to all schools on a pre-determined formula; 73 per cent.
2. the Regional Director responsible for all matters educational within his region; 72 per cent.
3. the additional functions of research officer, public relations officer, resource officer, and educational consultants be included in the Regional Office; 83 per cent.
4. responsibility, in co-operation with school boards, for adequate staffing in all schools; 83 per cent.
5. placement of teachers on promotions lists; 65 per cent.
6. provision of all recurrent supplies to all

schools within the region; 87 per cent.

7. a regional curriculum advisory service; 93 per cent.

The patterns of responses in all sub-groups were very similar to those described above.

Limitations

As explained above, in the covering letter it was thought necessary to explain briefly the concept of school boards in the Australian setting and include some advantages that might be forthcoming from such structures. It was recognized that this approach might influence some respondents to answer in favour of boards. However, it was felt that this influence would not be as "contaminating" as allowing respondents to think in terms of the American style boards when answering the survey.

Although the proportion of returns for a postal survey was typically low, it is also acknowledged that non-returns could indicate a lack of interest in, or apathy towards, the formation of school boards. However, in this exploratory stage when school boards in Queensland are far from a reality the percentage of returns is as good as, if not better than, the proport-

ion of people taking part in the elections for school boards in the Australian Capital Territory as indicated in Chapter II. The extent of agreement among these returns is accepted as sufficient to justify general recommendations for the formation of school boards in the Darling Downs.

The fact that there are no other studies of a similar nature in Australia providing data with which the results of this survey can be compared has severely restricted the weight that can be given to this information. For example, is 62 per cent in favour of school boards a significant proportion? One leading authority¹ in educational administration in Australia has commented to the author that a return of 10 per cent in favour of boards would be a promising figure. Similar comments could apply to other questions, particularly those relating to more controversial issues such as staffing arrangements. On the other hand, a high proportion of respondents would be expected to be in favour of the board being responsible to the Director-General but as to what level the proportion must drop before it becomes significant in the negative is not able to be determined.

Discussion

The responses to the opinion survey ranged from complete rejection, for example "resigning on the spot if introduced", to very much in favour of such boards being formed. By far the majority of opinions indicated that some form of management committee for the state schools would prove beneficial to all concerned.

The combined results for the three primary groups reveal a very strong support for further decentralization of administration on a regional basis. A total of 94 per cent of respondents indicated that they would like to see the Regional Director administering his own region within the broad guidelines laid down by Head Office. There is a very strong implication here in that the bureaucratic structure now existing is not satisfying the needs of the schools sufficiently either because it is too inefficient or too remotely removed to correctly determine the needs of the local schools. The principals felt so strongly on this issue that 100 per cent of the respondents indicated that they would like to see more decentralization in the administrative structure introduced. The strong support for

the additional support services to the Regional Office provides further evidence of the desire to decentralize the administration.

Support for the composition of the boards, although not as unanimous as that on the issue of decentralization, is sufficiently common among the three groups to enable some generalizations to be made on the preferred structure of the board. It was indicated that the number of elected members should approximate nine, with a minimum of five and a maximum of eleven. The responses to both questions eight and nine clearly indicated that there should be a majority of professional educators on each board. The only dissenting group were the Parents and Citizens who gave the greatest proportion of votes in question nine to having lay and professional members equal in number. However, although 48 per cent indicated "equal to" with a raw score of 12, there were 44 per cent indicating "greater than" with a raw score of 11. As further evidence, in question eight the greatest proportion (40 per cent) selected a combination of 3 lay, 3 teachers, 1 principal, and 1 Departmental representative, giving a majority of professional educators. The next largest

proportion, 32 per cent selected alternative A which also gave a majority of professionals. The principals voted strongly in favour of alternative B, whereas the assistant teachers voted strongly in favour of alternative A. The conclusion, however, remains that the opinion was expressed that the professional educators should be greater in number than lay members, but not by any significant margin.

The rights of the principal with regard to membership were also clearly expressed. It was felt that he should be an automatic member of the board with full voting rights. Of significance in the responses to this question, the parents group indicated, 44 per cent, that they thought he should be the chairman with full voting rights. This pattern was reinforced in their responses to question 13 where there was a strong no vote for a lay chairman but an even stronger indication to give the chairman a casting vote. These trends provide clear evidence that it is the expressed opinion of those surveyed that the management of the schools should be largely in the hands of the professionals, but with an opportunity for lay people to have a significant say in these matters. A board with a majority of professionals and one of these as chairman

with a casting vote, clearly indicates this feeling.

The majority of respondents felt that lay membership should be drawn from any member of the community in which the school is located. There was a definite rejection of drawing lay membership from only the parents of students enrolled at the school. There was also very strong agreement in all groups to permit the board to co-opt non-voting members for special occasions.

The position of senior students on the board did reveal quite different attitudes. Although the combined figure indicates a preference for them to be eligible as non-voting members the proportion in favour was a low 37 per cent. This position was supported by the principals with 63 per cent, but the assistant teachers felt they should be voting members, 51 per cent, and the parents groups with 48 per cent felt they should not be eligible for membership. With regard to the composition of the board this was the only issue that caused any real division in the opinions surveyed.

It is in the area of the functions of the board that the greatest disagreement in opinions appears. The highest proportion of respondents in the

three primary groups, 63 per cent, felt that the board should be an advisory body only and this was strongly supported by the parents group with 72 per cent. However, the number of people not answering this question from each group and the types of questions asked by the two in-service groups indicate that difficulty in answering this question was experienced. The fact that a clear-cut division between advisory only and executive only was required of the respondents caused the problem. A broader question including some combination of these two functions may have produced a different result.

Questions 17 and 19 introduce the most controversial issue, that is the matter of staffing. There is agreement that the board should be concerned with school policy including the aims and objectives, although the assistant teachers did show some objection to question 18. However, in Question 17, 90 per cent of teachers agreed with alternative (a), i.e. the board should be concerned with school policy. There was also strong support from the three groups that the board should be concerned with financial matters including the preparation of a budget and the maintenance and improve-

ment of buildings. However, there was a significant rejection of the idea that the board should be capable of making staff appointments.

This particular issue was investigated further in question 19 which was designed to determine if it was thought that the board should have any say in the matter of academic staffing. As a group 61 per cent indicated that the board should be consulted on staffing but with the principals dissenting to the extent of 54 per cent. There was complete agreement that this should be the extent to which the board should be involved in this matter. The question can be asked that if the board is expected to determine the aims and objectives of the school but only have a minor say in staffing how can they then be assured that new appointments will suit the basic philosophy of the school?

There was also general agreement that the board should be able to set down broad guidelines for the curriculum but allow teachers to follow their own paths within these guidelines. It is not to be assumed here that the board would design the curriculum programme. It would adapt the Departmental syllabuses to

suit local conditions and then permit the teachers to use this programme to the best of their ability. A similar proportion of agreement was reached on the school board being able to control the use of school facilities outside school hours. This could be a means of providing additional recreational and educational facilities for the community while at the same time provide the opportunity for additional revenue for the board.

The general feeling for the length of the term of office was three years, but only 45 per cent indicated this. When the other two alternatives are examined it becomes apparent that one year was considered to be too short a term and that either 2 or 3 years would be preferable. A strong "yes" vote, in all except the assistant teachers' group, was obtained for the board being responsible to the Director-General for all its activities.

The idea of an appeals committee also obtained support from all groups except the assistant teachers, their "no" vote being 49 per cent. The idea of such a body is not merely to resolve deadlocks in voting but also to provide an avenue for either lay or profess-

ional members to voice their disapproval of the manner in which their school is being operated. It would be up to the Regional Director to determine whether there was a genuine case to be heard and then convene a meeting of the committee to hear the case. At no time should this committee be thought of, or used as, a political instrument for the personal gains of any individual or group.

So far the results of the three primary groups have been discussed and the general pattern of the preferred structure of school boards has been indicated. The purpose of surveying the two in-service groups was to determine whether any variations in structure or functions would appear if given the opportunity to discuss the issues beforehand. Although some variations in responses did appear they largely reflected a fear of losing their professional status. Both groups indicated that they would like to see a larger maximum number on the board, 9 or 11, and 10 or 15 respectively, and the second group would like to see a clear majority of professionals on the board, selecting B and D alternatives in question 8 with an equal proportion of 37 per cent. Both groups also preferred to see the principal as chairman of the board with full

voting rights.

In the matter of staffing, group one would not like to see the board involved in any way, rejecting the suggestion with a 71 per cent vote to question 19(a), and 79 per cent to question 19(d). Group two were only slightly in favour of the board being consulted on staffing and were nearly equally divided on the issue of whether the board should have no say in staffing.

These were the only issues where any divergence in opinions appeared. It therefore appears that of the five groups surveyed the general structure and functions of school boards preferred for the Darling Downs Region would closely approximate that outlined above in the evaluation. It is now possible to combine the information obtained from this survey with that obtained from reviewing proposals in other states and design a model for school boards in the Darling Downs Region. First, however, some earlier thoughts on aspects of the composition and functions of boards, for example those on staffing and board chairman, will need to be revised in the light of the results obtained from this survey. This is undertaken in the following chapter.

NOTES

1. Personal communique with Professor W.G. Walker.