

Minding the 'public' in public education

(Remarks by David King to the 2017 Annual Congress of
the Canadian School Boards' Association)

(In the course of delivery, some of this content was omitted, due to time constraints and for no other reason.)

I am delighted to be speaking to trustees from across Canada in the context of this place and time, and event.

We are on the traditional lands of the people of the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations, and we are blessed to be with them, blessed to be a beneficiary of their stewardship through the more than 14,000 years they have lived on this land.

For those of you who participated in the National Gathering (on Wednesday and Thursday), I hope you will bear in mind that experience as you consider what I offer you.

This afternoon I would like to hold public education up to some examination, and from a somewhat different perspective. My objective is to explore how we might put the public back in public education.

My primary interest is not education as an end in itself. I am interested in education as a means to an end for a civil democratic community or society. I trust teachers to look after the work of 'teaching'. My interest is based on the public's need to create and sustain the appropriate moral, civic and aspirational framework within which they can work most effectively. I will return to this, the main point of my remarks.

Sir Winston Churchill once said "the plan is nothing, but planning is everything." There is an equally important paraphrase. No particular reflection and speculation is important, but the practice of reflecting and speculating is vital.

So, think of my remarks this afternoon as an act of provocation by someone who is passionate about democracy and values public education greatly.

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My comments will be in three parts. I begin with some thoughts about public education. From there I move to community and democracy. I close with some thoughts about trusteeship. When I say "trusteeship", I am speaking to something special. I am not going to talk about all the responsibilities and work you might share with the Board of Directors of a private school, or a charter school. I want to focus on what is unique to trusteeship of public school education.

Twice during my presentation I am going to ask you to talk together at your tables, for a few minutes each time. I will also try to assure that when I have finished my presentation we will have about 15 minutes for a room-wide conversation.

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(Slide #3, and then Slide #4)

I always begin talks about education with four statements of conviction. I believe that --

1. Public school education is the most important social institution to be found in any civil democratic community.
2. Teachers are doing the most important work that is done in our community.
3. Public school trustees occupy the most important political office in our country.
4. There will be no real change in, or improvement to, public school education until, personally and as a community, we show respect for the work of teachers and trustees.

This afternoon, I am going to focus on this truth: school trustees occupy the most important political office in the country, because only trustees can put the public in public education.

We often ask, “What is the purpose of public school education?” We rarely ask, “What is the purpose of trusteeship?” This afternoon I want to explore that question, starting from my views about public school education, moving through community and democracy, and concluding with some thoughts about trusteeship itself.

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I believe that all education, however provided, is essentially about relationships, and it is essentially subjective.

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The book that has influenced my thinking about teaching, more than any other, is The Courage To Teach, by Parker Palmer. While it is not the main theme of his book, Palmer argues that what we want to accomplish with students is to draw them in to numerous, diverse, strong, and healthy relationships. At the same time, we want to make the process of relationship building and tending and mending and ending substantially conscious and self-confident, self-controlled and creative. (That is, we want students to be both imaginative and inventive). And, of course, we all need to be able to defend ourselves in all our relationships.

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How many of you remember a book published in 1986, titled: Everything I really need to know I learned in kindergarten, by Robert Fulghum? (I don’t remember that it said anything about Diploma Exams or PISA scores.)

From the first day of kindergarten, we want to draw students into relationships that they value, perhaps even feel passionate about. We want to draw them into understanding the nature and prerequisites, and cost and value of relationships – relationships with peers, with elders, with

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ideas, nature, knowledge, tools, time, virtues and attitudes. We want them to be able to live well with others.

If the essential work of education is about relationships, then it is misleading and dangerous to focus on students without reference to their relationships – with their family, their peers, their community. We are drawing students into community. Are we doing it on the basis that they conform, or are we doing it on the basis that, fully revealed, they will contribute to the transformation of the community?

Concern for the well-being of the student(s) should be the primary criterion – undoubtedly -- but it is not the only one, not even the only important one.

(Slide #8)

Public school education exists for the community as much as for the child. It exists for the next child as well as for the first child. It does exist for the teachers, and for all other workers, as well as for the students, who are also workers. It exists for posterity as well as for the present.

We are not educating students to live in splendid isolation. We are educating them to live in community. As a community, we have a vital interest in ensuring that they understand community – what the community is, what it once was, what it could be if we and they get it right and what it could be if we and they get it wrong.

Essentially, we want to prepare our students to live well in relationships and to make the most of five endowments. I borrow from Stephen Covey's list of four endowments, and add a fifth -- the endowments of (1) self awareness, (2) relationships and community, (3) conscience, (4) independent will and (5) creative imagination. These (again quoting Covey) "give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change." All of this, for better or for worse.

So we come back to the question: if public school education is about relationships and if it is for the community as well as for the student, what are the essential community characteristics of a great education?

It seems to me that there are four such vital characteristics.

(Slide #9)

First, public school education is unique because it is universally accessible, without pre-condition of any kind, and with the intention of being inclusive. Inclusion is an acknowledgement and celebration of diversity that enriches our common humanity: it is also often messy, uncertain and fragile, and occasionally dangerous.

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Public school education is universally accessible as a matter of conviction and by design. (To be accessible means that everyone can enter the dance hall: to be inclusive means that one is asked on to the dance floor. Sometimes we 'generously' issue the invitation in the expectation that the invitees will 'know their place', and not show up.)

Second, public school education is unique because the intention of inclusion is based on respect for human dignity, rather than pre-conditions or qualifications. Public schools are not inclusive in the context of a caste system, or a gender bias. They are inclusive because of the conviction on which every democracy is founded -- that every human (student and adult) is intrinsically unique, invaluable, and equally capable of unbounded goodness or evil.

Clearly, accessibility and inclusion can be encouraged for either of two quite different reasons. They can be encouraged as the means of attaining homogenization or as the fertile soil for on-going diversity – individual expression and pluralism. In our community (Canada), accessibility and inclusion are one side of the coin, the other side of which is diversity, which is the basis of surviving and thriving. In the context of inclusion, we celebrate diversity; we do not merely tolerate it.

We often think about inclusion with reference to the students. We should be equally mindful of the implications of inclusion as it draws in all adults, to nurture and otherwise contribute to the government of public school education.

Public school education is inclusive from the playground, to the classroom, to the staffroom, to the board room, to the voting booth.

In the context of these remarks universal accessibility and inclusion based on respect for human dignity is not an assumption about what is or has been: it is an ideal we project and pursue, even in the face of our experience that it is difficult, messy, and problematic.

Public school education is not only deliberately accessible and inclusive. It is not simply celebrating diversity. The third unique characteristic of public school education is that it is also deliberately democratic: it is intended to be a deliberate model of a civil democratic society. The common school is also the foundation of our commonwealth.

If every human is intrinsically unique and equal in the sight of God or nature, then our community must be democratic, and a vital part of its public work and common space must be what we know as public school education.

Let me repeat: public school education provides – operates as – a deliberate model of a civil democratic community.

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The best description of a civil democratic community that I have found is described in Paul Woodruff's book, First Democracy. Woodruff's argument is that democracy is not determined by electoral systems, or regular elections, or majority rule. In his view, and I adopt his view, democracy is the process of living together in a community that is characterized by:

- freedom from tyranny;
- harmony (and particularly, the rejection of violence);
- the rule of law;
- natural equality;
- citizen wisdom;
- reasoning without knowledge; and,
- a general education that prepares us for living together in the natural and social world.

Public schools provide the first experience, for most children, of a stable, enduring community that is not based on family ties or choices. The public school is the means by which the community seeks to draw students into an understanding of, and then an engagement with, and a deep, abiding commitment to, the ideas of community and democracy and the very community and democracy in which they live. By means of public education we hope to inspire children – students – into the kind of personhood and citizenship we value, the kind of personhood and citizenship that will sustain our community and keep it resilient. (This is not to suggest, for a moment, that the purpose of public school education is compliance, and a thorough understanding of the *status quo* so as to be content with it. Quite the contrary, but that is the topic of another talk.)

Public schools are also the place where we experiment with ideas and practices that push the boundaries of community, democracy, critical and appreciative inquiry, and knowing and knowledge.

To build on Woodruff's work, the premise of democracy is that all people will be included and respected in the course of political dialogue and decision-making, and the aim of democracy is to have the community affirm pluralism on the one hand and to respect the positions of reasonable people on the other hand. Of course, reasonable people can have different positions, and the work of democracy is to reconcile differences in the least oppressive way possible while maintaining optimum pluralism.

That said, the fourth unique characteristic of public school education is that accessibility must be treated as both a right and a responsibility: inclusion must be held up as the aspiration of the community, for all. In a democracy, accessibility and inclusion are not only a right – the right of a citizen: they are also the responsibility of every citizen. Discharging the responsibility to provide accessibility and striving to be inclusive makes the community and each citizen wiser and better, and stronger.

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I have made four claims about public school education –

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I would like to add your energy to this work. Could we take 10 minutes for conversation at each table about any one of these four claims. There will be no reporting back, but I would like someone at each table to leave a note identifying which of the four claims you talked about. Just talk about why you chose to discuss the claim, whether you affirm it or question it or reject it, or want to state a different claim. This discussion may lead to questions or comments at the close of our session.

(Seven or eight minutes: ●●●●●●●●)

I now turn now to my central question. What is the purpose of trusteeship?

I find it interesting that, in Europe, the common label for universally accessible schools is “state school”, while the common label in North America is “public school”.

To me, the different labels represent two quite different perspectives, histories, and aspirations.

My belief is that community, on the one hand, and State, on the other hand (in Canada, the provincial and federal governments) are profoundly different, one from the other. Perhaps because I am a former politician I see this most clearly in the context of politics.

We all live, simultaneously, in two quite different kinds of communities – sometimes more than two communities but every community is somewhere on the spectrum of trust and skepticism. To put this another way, I see provincial and federal governments as being instrumental and formalistic. I see local government as being substantial and organic.

(Slide #12 here: 2 column comparison of trust- and skepticism-based systems.)

Basically, I see local communities as being trust-based. I see States (provinces) as being skepticism-based. To use ideas popularized by people like Jurgen Habermas and Tom Sergiovanni, I see local communities as embodiments of the lifeworld, and provincial Departments of Education as embodiments of the systemworld.

This is one of the primary reasons that parents and others see public schools in Canada in a very different light than their counterparts are seen in many other countries, where people see State schools without considering them to be public schools.

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The question is this: if we have a choice between a trust-based community and a skepticism-based one, why on earth would we ever choose a skepticism-based system? The answer has two parts.

First, we live on a little blue marble, in a global community, a very complex community – and we must learn to live together. The complex community is not “cynicism-based”: it is ‘skepticism-based’. We are acting in good faith, cautiously trying to figure out how to think globally and act locally. At the same time, we want to remain grounded. We are trying to figure out how to be inclusive without being push-overs about vital matters.

So the second part of the answer is that we don't choose one or the other. We live constantly with one foot in each, and we are constantly trying to reconcile the two, because each has value.

In public education, we are trying to figure out how to raise our children well, in the community, so that they can go anywhere in the world and understand it and do well.

This afternoon I hope I can provoke you to think about public school education somewhat differently than perhaps you do now, and then consider some new acts of imagination, will, and grit if not courage.

Our local community is where we first understand democracy, and this is where your role is grounded.

I relate community to trusteeship with five propositions. I urge you to consider that:

1. the school district is a political jurisdiction as well as an educational enterprise;
2. the educational enterprise exists for the benefit of the community as well as the students;
3. the Board of Trustees is nearer to a representative assembly than a Board of Directors; and
4. the work of trustees is explicitly political and more like a Board of Trustees (in the commercial world) than a Board of Directors. (The value of their work does not flow to the advantage of the enterprise: it flows to the advantage of grantors of the trust [the public] and the students.)
5. democracy is an unfinished revolution, and you are on the front lines of the unfinished business. (There is a difference between democracy and subsidiarity.)

General Eisenhower famously quoted – with approval – Georges Clemenceau, the great leader of France in World War I. Clemenceau said, and General Eisenhower agreed, that “war is too important to be left to generals.” Obviously, Eisenhower was not disparaging generals, or soldiers. He was, after all, Supreme Allied Commander. But if war is the extension of foreign policy to its ultimate ends then I believe it is fair to say that public education is the creation of community by essential means. As a citizen, I have no interest in telling teachers how to undertake their professional work. They know their potential better than I, and I trust them.

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However, I also believe that teachers cannot do their work well if they do not understand clearly their mandate from the community. And, often, we are considerably less than clear, to them or to our public.

This is hard work. In order to have value, it needs to have some "resolution". Your staff, as well as your public, need to be able to recognize some detail and some direction. You tell your staff and your public that the purpose of the district's work is "to prepare students for the world of work" or "to prepare students to be good citizens". Do you mean the world of work as it once was, or the world of work as it may be in 20 years? Do you mean good as in obedient, or good as in moral and challenging? The key statements you give your staff and the public need to be more than 'fluff'.

Every school trustee is a politician, although many wring their hands and protest the label. I think such protesters are really trying to avoid guilt by association with partisan politics. My suggestion is simple and loaded with possibilities. Let's always refer to trustees and municipal councilors as "citizen politicians". Let's always refer to M.L.A.s as "party politicians". Let's rediscover, and draw citizens back into valuing "citizen" politicians.

It is certainly true that local politics pre-dates provincial (or, state) and federal politics. Provincial (state) and federal governments exist because of the constitution: they were, by definition, artificial creations. Local government pre-dates the constitution and exists outside the constitution: local government is a natural creation. Go into any province or state and you will almost invariably find that some community, somewhere, initiated the education of children before any law ordained it or provided a structure.

Local politics is therefore, in some respects, more important than provincial (state) and federal politics. **The health of the entire political system depends upon the health of local politics and the ongoing capacity of the local political system to nurture every citizen's commitment to democracy.** In other words, the evolution of local democracy is a desirable prospect, because this strengthens the proposition that the grassroots should determine how close to the grassroots decisions get made and implemented.

We can't get provincial politics right unless we first get citizen politics right, and we can't get citizen politics right if we force it to conform to party politics.

- It is essential that the evolution of local, citizen-politics conform to its own unique model: not the model of the provincial and/or federal systems.
- It is essential that the evolution of democracy promote a respectful partnership between the provincial community and local communities, because local communities are the source of vitality for the provincial community.

Why is this part of a conversation about public school education?

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The answer, of course, is that both the provincial government and the local community are politically involved with public school education. There is constant tension which, in the present time, seems always to move the marker closer to the provincial government.

In order to be an effective participant in local government, whether as a citizen or as an elected "office-holder", it is always helpful to have an idea about why things are as they are, and how things work.

For example, in the face of constant tension between the provincial government, in almost any province, and local government, why not simply defer to the provincial government? In fact, why don't we do away with trusteeship?

I have already tried to answer that question in one way. Let me offer the answer somewhat differently. If we do away with trusteeship we will lose our public schools. They will inevitably be replaced with State schools on the one side and private schools on the other side. In our current circumstances, around the world, neither is a good bet for surviving and thriving.

I want to emphasize, as I say this -- I do not believe for a moment that the provincial government has no role to play, or only a marginal role, in providing public school education. I spent almost 30 years as an activist in provincial politics, both in the Opposition and in Government, including almost 15 years as an M.L.A. and almost 7 years as Minister of Education. Believing in public school education, I believe in some provincial goals, and standards, and the equitable distribution of resources.

Both the constituted community and the natural community must be served.

But, there are two reasons why public school education should be more grounded in the local community than in the remote community (the provincial government). One reason is generic and one reason is at the heart of public school education.

The generic reason is this. In times of turmoil (which these times arguably are), the best way to assure substantial continuity – and success -- is to foster differentiation (diversity) and redundancy. If you want to increase the likelihood that the space shuttle will return to Earth, you do not install one ever bigger computer. You install redundant computers and you lodge intelligence in many different places – on the shuttle and on the ground. You only want to centralize when you can be 100% certain, 100% of the time, that the central authority will be 100% correct. Otherwise, one failure is catastrophic, and one such failure is almost inevitable.

In this vein, even when you are unhappy with a decision made locally, you should be constant in your support for decentralized decision-making. Innovation comes from the margins far more often than it comes from the centre – that is the lesson we learned from Isaac Asimov's

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Foundation trilogy, or from the invention of Canadian medicare in Saskatchewan rather than in Ontario, or in Parliament – and the cumulative effect of many small but sound decisions has been, by far, the most important driver of social and community development.

The particular reason why we should be concerned about the relationship of the local community to the remote community is this.

All education is about relationships. Therefore, education must be provided in a natural environment, not a mechanistic one. It must be provided within a community, not within what I call an instrumental system. The natural community is the place of relationships: the State is the place of instrumentality. Relationships are the essence of education as much as they are the essence of democracy. To have education dominated by instrumentality makes the development of numerous, diverse, healthy relationships extremely difficult for the moment: they may be stifled forever.

Yet, we all want the considerable admitted benefits provided by good systems. So, how can we maintain the lifeworld (as Jurgen Habermas called it) and the systemworld side by side, within a single model that allows free passage of the healthy while obstructing the unhealthy.

Both the State – the bureaucracy of the provincial government – and the community – which is Halifax or Sidney – must be related, involved and committed.

However it happened – consciously or unconsciously – we are the beneficiaries of genius. Through the length and breadth of the early European settlements in North America people governed the local community substantially independent of the government of the colony. Out of our rebellions and our town hall meetings and our many clubs and associations, we found a way of maintaining strong civil communities that were in, but not of, the State. And, as we moved from parochial education to public education in the 1830s and '40s, we created a government for public school education which was parallel to, and complementary of, but not entrenched in, municipal government. (I like to think that our forebearers instinctively knew that the government of a transformational activity, such as public school education, required different civic leadership than the government of streets and sewers.)

Of course, at the same time, we were ensuring that the government of public school education could be well-grounded in the natural community rather than in the constituted community. We were also creating a kind of membrane which, as long as it is healthy, will allow the good part of the system-world to bring nutrients into the school experience, without allowing the bad part of the system-world to suffocate the public school experience.

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Let me return to my earlier description of a democracy: the premise of democracy is that all people will be included and respected in the course of political dialogue and decision-making, and the aim of democracy is to have the community affirm pluralism on the one hand and to respect reasonable people on the other hand. We want to achieve an on-going:

- freedom from tyranny;
- harmony, and the rejection of violence;
- rule of law;
- natural equality;
- citizen wisdom;
- reasoning without knowledge

and provide – and depend upon -- a general education that prepares us for living together in the natural and social world.

The necessity of these conditions raise innumerable difficult and fine-grained questions that are generally best answered locally rather than provincially because they tend to be negotiated locally and imposed by provincial governments. (Impositions are counter-productive of deep democracy.) For example, on the question of gender self-identity, who are the reasonable people, and are their attitudes the same in a metropolitan centre as they are in an isolated community? How much pluralism will reasonable people accept with genuine understanding, and if the boundaries need to be pushed, who should do the pushing, using what language and what examples?

Conversely, provincial M.L.A.s are never going to hear about provincial exams or international comparisons in any meaningful way, unless they hear from trustees – and parents, and others in the community -- that the community has other priorities.

A great current reference would be reconciliation of First Nations and colonizing cultures. Federal or provincial edicts can make a contribution, but reconciliation will not happen unless and until the process is politicized locally. Reconciliation is not a matter of becoming more welcoming, and making it easier for others to become like us. Reconciliation is a matter of making a deep acknowledgement that we can be changed by our relationship with others, and making ourselves vulnerable to such change, in the expectation that we might be better on the other side. Adopting and including is a matter of appropriation or a matter of humility, depending upon what we believe about others, ourselves, and the prospective outcome of transformative change.

My key message is this. Democracy is not a possession: it is a process. It is not seasonal: it is continual. It is not mechanical: it is organic. It is not macro: it is micro. It is not instrumental: it is attitudinal. It is the fruit of conversation and the meaningful conversation takes place locally. The meaningful conversation is – or should be – lead by trustees.

This is why we have trustees.

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This is the fourth unique characteristic of public school education. It is governed at the front lines by people who are locally elected and responsible to the local electorate. This is not only necessary and good governance: this is also an essential component of the model of civil democracy which we present to students. And, it connects the work of relationship building to the natural community, which is the community that affirms and supports relationship-building because it is the community that depends upon and reflects relationship-building.

In this context, it is important to remember that, no matter what label provincial legislation attaches to school jurisdictions, they are not corporations. They are what our forefathers called “bodies politic”. School boards are boards of trustees, not boards of directors. School boards are representative assemblies of democratically self-governing political communities: they are not executive committees.

In my experience, trustees are the agents of the community to the provincial government and they are also the agents of the provincial government to the community. They are the go-betweens, the Sherpas, the absolutely indispensable agents of way-finding, reconciliation and leadership. They are the story-tellers, the culture framers, the overseers, the accountables.

Yesterday evening and this morning we saw illustrations on the screen, and I have done it this afternoon. Illustrations are frames. They are metaphors.

We who care about the politics of public education must think more deeply about our metaphors. Trustees, in my view, need to be very careful – always – to use illustrations and metaphors that reveal the community ecology within which public education operates. You can’t get the politics right if you start with insufficient metaphors.

After the keynote presentation yesterday evening, this question was asked, “The system needs to change, how can the attitudes of the public be changed?”

You are the answer. The public’s attitude toward education will not change without provocation. In almost every province there are five to seven times as many trustees as there are M.L.A.s. In addition, in many provinces M.L.A.s spend far more time in the provincial capital than they do in their own constituency.

Provincial school board associations need to shift the focus of their political attention. I am not advocating that you abandon your attention on M.L.A.s and Ministers of Education, but I am urging you to understand that you will not have nearly as much impact on them with direct attention as you will with reflected attention. **(Explain the mirror of the public).**

A favourite relevant story is about F.D. Roosevelt whistlestopping across the U.S. mid-west in advance of the 1936 Presidential election. The train stopped in a small community, and

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Roosevelt got off to give a speech and work the crowd. One of the town's prominent dowagers button-holed him and urgently pressed the need for a great new social program that would alleviate the worst conditions of the Great Depression. Roosevelt listened for a moment and then interrupted. "Madam," he said, "I agree with you completely. Now you must create the public demand that will force me to do what I want to do."

If trustees would accept their non-partisan but very political role, with conviction, and work through provincial associations to develop a new purpose statement for public education, a new vision of what that could mean for any province, a clear mandate statement for their teachers to understand, a clear mission, a clear values statement, clear principles, and develop a comprehensive political plan to be worked from one end of the province to another, I have no doubt that, within 5 years of commencement, the public's view of education (and of PISA tests) would be transformed.

The transformation of public education does not depend on what happens provincially. It depends on what happens locally.

May I call on you again, to do some table work? Take about 10 minutes to talk about your political work as trustees, and your Board work as a representative assembly rather than a Board of Directors.

7 - 8 minutes.

I doubt very much that our forebearers appreciated the significance of what they were putting in place. But the fact remains, it has served us well. It is also, always, at risk, especially if we fail to understand its significance – its potential.

Conclusion

We face two great risks to-day. The first is that we are retreating from political discourse and visioning and decision-making. The second is that the essence and vital importance of community has been almost lost to us as we consider public school education. Certainly, we have lost the ability to speak of it with compelling stories and imagery. Community is being marginalized, generally and especially with respect to public school education. The State claims to be nothing more or less than a larger community, but more legitimate because it is larger. This is not what the State is. In the meantime, community may be eviscerated before we discover the alternative is unworkable for the purposes of public education.

While we still talk about public school education, and are still extensively engaged in that myth, our actual circumstance is more like State education and the State school, and we must recover our balance.

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Public school education is “public” because it is the vitals of a civil democratic community. It is the only reliable way by which we reprint the DNA of our community. We might also say that public school education is like the neurological system, or the circulatory system, of the community.

I argue that public school education is an intrinsic part of a civil democratic community. Our community can no more give it up than I could surrender my circulatory system and carry on as though nothing had happened.

The community has nothing else – literally, nothing else – that it can rely on to demonstrate the value of respect, accessibility, diversity, and pluralism. If we, the community, demand that the public school system express these values then teachers cannot do anything else than educate rather than instruct, individualize their relationship with students, encourage passion, and exploration, and risk-taking, and failing, and exalting in achievement.

Even a global citizen, perhaps global citizens especially, are not prepared to rely on any artificial system -- the mass media, corporate culture, or imperialism – to guarantee the future of community or to educate their children. Is there any one of us who believes that reality television, or the Fox network, or testing corporations, or any other creature of corporate culture, including State School education, is a reliable – a better – transmitter of values to our children than the public school is?

Public schools take care of children, transform them into students, educate them for life, and thereby renew our community.

Public schools transform students and they transform communities. Such a word is no exaggeration, and such transformations are not merely interesting. They are vital.

Parents are concerned about whether or not their children will be successful as adults. The elderly are concerned about the young people they pass as they walk up the street in the evening. Employers are concerned about future employees. Politicians are concerned about future citizens. Community leaders are concerned about future volunteers. Ordinary people are concerned about whether the next generation, and the one after that, will be colleagues and equals, or arrogant superiors and (perhaps) keepers, or jealous, perhaps unreliable, and perhaps angry and disinherited dependents.

Who will be our trustees and M.L.A.s in 20 years? Will the public policy they promote value each one of us? Will they have wisdom, integrity, dreams, and skills for communities that should be the envy of the world?

In light of current American politics, I can't resist a brief digression. For thirty years or more, American party politics and electorate segmentation (and big data) have fed off each other.

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(Remarks by David King to the 2017 Annual Congress of
the Canadian School Boards' Association)

We have seen the growth of identity politics and the dissolution of "the public" wherever party politics operates. One of the major contributing factors, I would argue, has been the widespread undermining of the argument for public education, followed by the humiliation of public education as a social institution. The current American political situation offers a salutary object lesson for what happens when the public ceases to exist, replaced by identity politics and the politics of instrumentality and ideology.

Nevertheless, when I consider the questions, no matter how daunting they seem, I am filled with hope, because I see the public -- and public school education -- at the centre of the response.

Public school education which is accessible and inclusive as a matter of conviction and choice, as a matter of respect and celebration. Public school education which is a deliberate model of a civil democratic community. Public school education which is embedded in natural communities through the agency of locally elected public school trustees. Public school education that is a trust, not a corporation.

I would like to close with a quote from Marianne Williamson. It speaks to individuals. It also speaks to Trustees and school boards. It is something to keep in mind when we think of students.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are we not to be?
You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fears,
our presence automatically liberates others."

Thank you.