



Public Money, Private Priorities: Impact of Education Policy Shifts on Democracy, Equity, and Local Governance in Saskatchewan

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Context

- In a democracy, governments are granted power to protect rights, interests, and welfare of people
- Saskatchewan's public education system reflected such democratic values
- Policy changes shifted local school control to centralized authority
 - Education property taxes now flow to province's General Revenue Fund
 - School boards have lost local control of their budgets
 - Province justifies changes on basis of efficiency, equity, strategic alignment
 - Consolidation and loss of control occurred in the 2006-12 period

Considerations

- School boards are responsible for student outcomes
- Now lack authority to raise funds needed to meet expectations
- School districts no longer set education property tax rates
- Government argues centralization creates greater equity
 - Previously more affluent school districts had greater financial capacity
- School divisions claim chronic underfunding
- 2013-2020 Saskatchewan had lowest increase in public school funding
- Meanwhile funding for private schools increased
- Distance learning has also been centralized into a Crown corporation

Questions

What are the competing arguments for and against:

- Local control of school divisions?
- Centralization of public-school education funding?
- Public funding of private schools?
- Does centralization weaken democratic control and public trust?
- How should wealth inequity between school districts be addressed?