

## Chapter 2

# School Boards in Denmark

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**Abstract** The Danish state is successively moving towards global competition and European collaboration and, consequently, numerous changes are being made to the public sector and the way it is governed. Relations between the state and public institutions are becoming less defined by democratic, public sector governance and more defined by business-like, market place governance. As well as this, new forms of governance are emerging. Another significant change is the trend towards treating schools as freestanding, self-governing institutions that are monitored directly by the ministry and not indirectly by municipalities. Simultaneously, municipal administration is becoming increasingly hierarchical. This move to the three-layered corporate model, in which power is made more hierarchical but is less subject- or cause-oriented, is viewed by some as professionalisation. The transformation of the public sector produces new relations, positions and influences. An example of this is the task and composition of political boards and their future expectations. School boards are engaged in adjusting structures and finances and educational concerns.

Our theoretical bases for analysing positions and relations are neo-institutional theories (March 1995; Meyer and Scott 1983; Røvik 2007) and post-structural theories on educational governance (Foucault 1983, 1991; Pedersen 2005).

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## 2.1 Where: Reforms of the Danish Educational System

Denmark has 6.5 million inhabitants and a high rate of employment for both men and women. Danish society used to be characterised by *democracy* and *equality* (a little power distance) and an *inclusive* attitude towards other cultures (a little uncertainty avoidance) (Hofstede 1980). Over the past decade, the image of a firm, homogenous culture may have changed as Denmark has experienced an influx of people with a native language other than Danish.

Fifty years ago, the main source of income shifted from agriculture to industry, and now it is changing from industry to information and knowledge production.

In the 9-year period between 2001 and 2010, the Act on the Folkeschool was amended 18 times.

The most significant change is that, before 2006, the ‘aim clause’ emphasised preparing pupils for participation in a democracy, whereas, since 2006, the clause has pointed more towards making students employable in a competitive economic market.

Following this decision, a number of relatively new tools and social technologies for accountability were introduced. Parallel to the reforms from the Ministry of Education, we have witnessed a number of reforms from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior: the restructuring of the public sectors. This latter reform has been more influential for the political board and superintendent level than the educational reforms.

Over the past 30–40 years, Denmark – like most other Western states – has changed from being a primarily welfare state to being a competitive state (Pedersen 2010). This is not the result of a ‘natural’ development or inherited from social forces. It is because global and transnational influences are becoming a fundamental part of globalisation. In the years following the Second World War, we witnessed the emergence of welfare states, where areas of civil society were taken over by the state in an attempt to protect citizens and thus further social justice, political equity and economic equality as a means of reproducing the population. Full employment was a major social democratic/welfare state goal, and the public sector was seen primarily as serving citizens; in other words, citizens were supported in times of unemployment or illness, and they also received free education, health care and cultural services.

From the 1970s, transnational agencies<sup>1</sup> were the driving force behind the opening of national economies to global competition (this increased from the mid-1990s onwards). The economic aims shifted from growth by means of full employment and increased productivity (of the labour force and technology) towards growth by means of international trade and investment. National governments operated increasingly through their membership of international organisations on regional markets.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, WTO, World Trade Organization; OECD, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; GATT, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; IMF, International Monetary Fund; EU, European Union (especially ‘the Inner Market’ and the ‘Europe 2020’ statement) and the World Bank.

From 1970 onwards, governments successfully oriented economics towards neo-liberalism, which relies on the principles of rational choice, increased market influence and minimal state intervention (namely, deregulation, privatisation and outsourcing). Citizens are increasingly seen as participants of the labour force, with full responsibility for their situation, and as consumers (Bauman 2001). The public sector is viewed primarily as serving production and trade in the national, innovative system. The state influences the availability and competencies of the labour force and of the capital (Pedersen 2010).

The new ways of managing public sectors are in line with these emerging neo-liberal economic politics: New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991). Fundamental to this very broad and diverse tendency are the notions of marketplace and management; e.g. the idea that the public sector is best governed in the same way as the private sector, i.e. by competition and consumer choice as well as managerial transparency. One example of this is free school choice across both school and day care institution's catchment areas and municipalities.

### ***2.1.1 Decentralisation of the Educational Governance System in Denmark***

The regulation of the Danish school systems has changed in many ways over the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a strong and general move to decentralise finances, personnel management and other areas from a state level to a local (municipal) level and, in many cases, even to a school level. These changes were introduced at a time when several countries were experiencing difficult economic situations, especially at a national level. At the end of the 1990s, a re-centralisation of school target setting and evaluation was also observed (Tanggaard 2011).

A few examples can illustrate this, including the increased role for parents at school level (in organising school boards), parents' free choice of school as well as the influence for parents at the school level by organising school boards and also parents' free choice of schools, 'management by objectives' and result-oriented system, which focused on the professional ability and responsibility at different levels in the steering system, especially on teachers and principals. It was argued that, if the state decentralised tasks to schools, it could cut down on local education administrative staff (Torfing 2004). In 2007, a restructuring of public management was made when 171 municipalities were merged into 98 larger units.

As municipalities have been merged into larger units, many large municipalities have established a new middle layer: districts. A superintendent can govern 4–5 districts, whose leaders each take care of 5–6 schools and other institutions. Within the new municipalities, many schools have been shut down or merged into departmental schools: in 2011, there were 1,317 folkeskoler (primary and lower secondary schools, students aged 6–15), compared with 1,708 in 1996, which represents a decrease of 23 %.

Whenever the educational system is decentralised, the balance between professional and political power on all levels in the system is changed. Principals and teachers have more responsibility and must demonstrate their ability, as evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing: 'In using more control and in seeing the educational system as being in a global competition, the politics of education will be more and more reactive in its scope' (Official Journal C 318 2008/C 319). In a period of intense re-centralisation of the school's content (both the syllabus and accountability), schools find themselves in charge of finances, human resources and day-to-day management, and, at the same time, the municipalities have become an important factor in the ministry's 'quality assurance system'.

A municipality has to base its operation on objectives and frameworks established by the government and parliament. However, there is a certain amount of discretion allowed in determining how the operation should be organised in order to achieve these objectives, for example, which resources should be used, how it should be organised, how the premises should be designed and, to some extent, what staff should be employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to run and organise its work, it must guarantee all children and students the same standard of education.

In the Nordic countries, legislation introduced at the beginning of the 1990s abolished all detailed task lists concerning the work of leading educational officials in municipalities (Official Journal C 302 2009). The municipality can decide for itself how to best organise the administration for education. Over the past few decades, the deregulation of the political board and the superintendent was one of several decisions made in parliament regarding different aspects of the school system, from preschool to vocational education. These governmental bills and regulations are supposed to be implemented in the municipality and, in this respect, are responsibilities for the local political board and the superintendent.

### ***2.1.2 The Contemporary Picture of Educational Governance***

Political boards and superintendents are seen as major agents in the contemporary national quality assurance system. However, it is difficult to establish their precise function because of many changes in the governance of public sectors and education over the past 20 years.

As the sole country in the project, Denmark has two school boards. Firstly, it has a political board representing the municipal council, which consists of members of the municipal council represented according to each party's relative weight in the council for the given political term. The task of this political board is to decide on the overall policies for school and education within the municipal's jurisdiction. Secondly, Denmark has a local school board with parental majority and with the principal as the school board's secretary, as well as representatives of teachers and students. The function of this board is to establish overall principles for the organisation of teaching, the cooperation between school and home, the communication of students' results to parents, the work distribution between teachers and

the common arrangements for the students (“Lov om folkeskolen” 1993, § 42–44; Moos 2003).

The Political board and the superintendents used to be positioned in the middle of a straight line, a chain of governance from national to institutional level: from the political board (Parliament) and the administrative agency (Ministry) at national level to municipal level. The first level is the political board (Municipal Council) and administration (Municipal Administration), and the second level is a school board and superintendence. Finally, at the institutional level, there is a school board for each school with parental majority and a school leadership. In the middle of this chain, one will find the superintendent, who is positioned in the municipal administration and thus accountable to municipal principles and national regulation, while servicing and monitoring schools.

The Danish educational system is part of, and thus influenced by, transnational tendencies, but it is also built on Danish structures and culture, and so, in its own way, it is unique. Traditionally, municipalities have been important factors in the governance of public sectors, and, according to the Danish ‘free/independent school’ tradition, decentralised educational governance has been an integral part of the Danish educational self-understanding and, to some extent, of the practice.

This is in line with the systemic evaluation regimes that have been established throughout all Nordic countries, in which local government, schools, teachers and pupils are subjected to external evaluation and self-evaluation (Day and Leithwood 2007). Moreover, the state uses active financial resource allocation in combination with reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument, where municipalities have to report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a yearly basis. Finally, accountability is strengthened by making results from national tests and evaluations available on special websites.

Taken together, the present governance model appears to be a joint regulatory enterprise between the state, through a range of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ steering instruments and quality control, and the municipality sector, through direct ownership and decentralised decision-making power. There is a ‘mixed mode’ of regulation that is important for understanding the current context of superintendent leadership in different municipalities in Denmark (Moos 2009).

### ***2.1.3 From ‘2-Layers’ Towards ‘3-Layers’: Public Governance and Self-Governance***

As mentioned above, a structural reform in 2007 reduced the number of municipalities from 271 to 98 because Parliament wished to have at least 30,000 inhabitants in each municipality (Interiour 2005). This brought about new relations and positions as well as governance chains: many municipalities are now structured as concerns/groups with a steep hierarchy and a unified string of management.

Approximately 60 % of all municipalities combine a traditional structure (described above) with a new businesslike/enterprise structure. Only four political boards, each with its own director, govern all institutions (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012a). This means that each board is responsible for a broader field of activities; for example, in the survey, we can see combinations of school, preschool, and leisure-time institutions, social affairs, Danish education for immigrants, adult education and culture (Moos 2011).

In many municipalities, new layers of middle management emerge, for example, district leaders, who lead 4–6 schools.

In 1999 and 2007, vocational schools and general upper secondary schools (respectively) were restructured. They were previously governed by regional councils, but they are now self-governed institutions with direct links to the Ministry. This arrangement is similar to the governance of free/independent schools. In 2011, there were 509 basic, freestanding schools (an increase of 18 % when compared to the 429 schools in 1996). In 2011, 580,000 students attended folkeskoler and 96,000 attended freestanding schools, representing 14.2 % of all students (Bang 2003).

The overall picture has become more complex than it was 20 years ago, as there are now several main chains of governance: the public chain from government by municipal agencies (whether two or three layered) and the enterprise model, in which schools are made self-steering, reporting directly to the ministry. This can be seen as decentralisation of power over local management of finances, staff and operations from national level to an institutional level, but also as a move to circumvent local, municipal influences and interference. This builds on long a tradition with independent schools, when it comes to free, primary schools, and on new tendencies also seen in the governance of higher educational institutions, such as universities, when it comes to higher secondary schools. This ‘bypass’ of municipal democracy in the municipal councils and administration is a trend that is also seen in initiatives and regulations to govern the curriculum and quality assurance from the national level.

### **2.1.4 The Survey**

The following analysis is based on a national study of all Danish school board members and chairs from 2012 with a response rate of 60.2 % for chairs and 42.1 % for members. Grounded on a response rate analysis, we can say that the material is valid for Denmark. The survey is part of the Nordic study.

## **2.2 Who: Members and Chairs of the Political Board**

*Gender:* The majority of chairs are male (73 %), while the distribution of members (55 % male and 45 % female) is closer to the national average distribution.

*Age:* Distribution of age of chairs is very equal, while members are generally younger than chairs.

Years of age	20–48 (%)	49–57 (%)	58– (%)
Members	46	32	22
Chairs	32	32	36

*On the board:* 55 % of chairs have been on the board for 6 or more years, while only half as many members have served for this amount of time. *Years in politics* is more complicated. ‘Novices’ (0–10 years in politics), 63 % members and 44 % chairs; ‘experienced’ (11–15 years in politics), 13 % members and 27 % chairs; and ‘seniors’ (more than 15 years in politics), 35 % members and 28 % chairs. This means that the majority of chairs are in the ‘novices’ and ‘seniors’ category, while the majority of members are in the ‘experienced’ category. One reason for this uneven image could be the political priority given to the chairpersonship by the Socialist People’s Party (see below).

*Employment:* The proportion of publicly employed policy board members is much higher than the national average – 57 % for members and 65 % for chairs as compared to 43 %<sup>2</sup> – and the number of privately employed members is lower than the national average. The overwhelming proportion of municipal politicians are publicly employed. Almost half are employed in the education sector.

*Education:* The educational level of members and chairs is slightly higher than the national average,<sup>3</sup> since the percentage having completed basic school education is lower (approximately 20 % compared to 30 %) and the percentage having completed higher secondary is higher (20 % compared to 10 %). The percentage having completed tertiary education is almost the same (around 60 %).

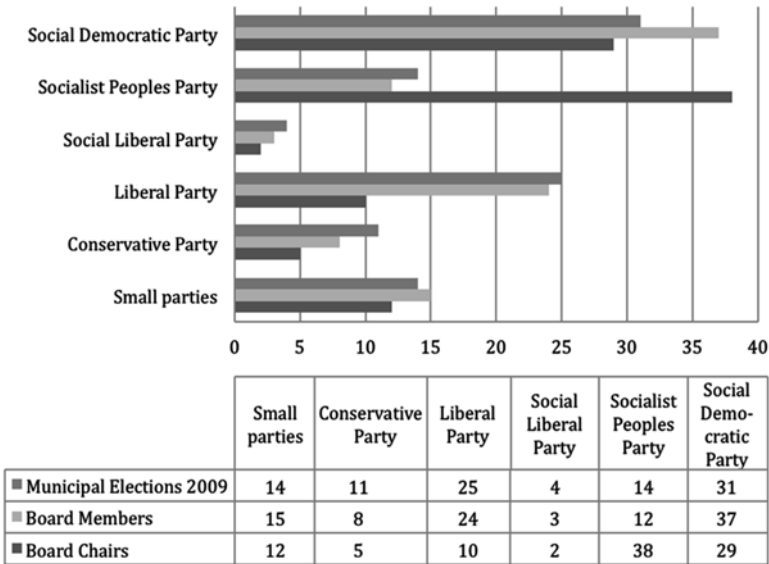
*Political representation:* Members of the political board are politically appointed by the city council and by the members of the city council following a rule of proportionality. This means that political parties are represented on city councils and on political boards according to the distribution of votes they receive in the election. Therefore, in principle, the composition of the political board reflects the election result. Formally, the board elect their chair; however, in reality, these elections are governed by the agreements negotiated by the political parties when the city council is constituted following the election: if no single party receives the majority required to govern (which often is the case), they negotiate and agree on coalitions that distribute positions (which party gets the mayor,

<sup>2</sup>Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik, Dec. 2012: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2012/NR657.pdf>. The numbers are corrected by removing students and retired people, etc. approximately equal to the national numbers out of employment (30–40 % of the total population).

<sup>3</sup><http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkningens-uddannelsesnivea/befolkningens-hoejstfuldfoerte-uddannelse.aspx>. December 2012.

which party gets the chair, etc.). So the composition of the board is, in principle, decided by the voters, but the chairs are decided by the political coalition. Sometimes the result is surprising. In this graph, we see that the number of votes in the municipal election of 2009 (that created the board in our survey) is similar to the member composition, roughly following the pattern given by voters. The proportionality system slightly favours the Social Democrats and slightly disfavors the Conservative Party.

### Political Representation



The most interesting figures, however, are the distribution of chairs: according to the poll, the Socialist People’s Party has more than doubled its influence, the Social Liberal Party has halved its influence, and the Liberal Party has reduced its influence by two thirds. This is surprising because Social Liberals and Liberals used to see education as a major battlefield of political values, whereas, until 2009, this was not the case with the Socialist People’s Party. However, they succeeded in winning almost 40 % of the chairs in the coalition negotiations with only 18 % of the votes.

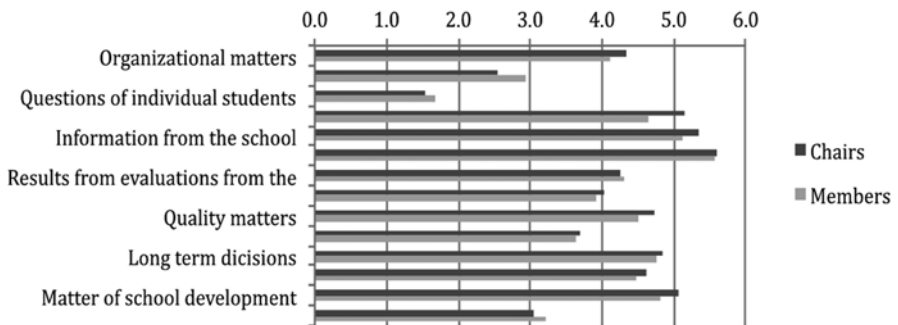
*Why joined the School Board:* When asked why they accepted a position on the political board, two main reasons stood out. Firstly, that education was their personal interest – and often occupation – and a high priority for their political party (approximately half of the members and chairs answered this). Secondly, that these positions provided them and their political party with an important opportunity to influence the development in the municipality (approximately one third of the members and chairs answered this).



### 2.3 With Whom: The School Board as an Institution on the Municipal Level

The issues most frequently processed on the school board are ‘economy, resources and budget issues’, ‘information from the school administration’ and ‘information from the superintendent’. These priorities can be explained by the fact that the school board is primarily an economic board that listens to the information from the administrative managers. It is very seldom that the school board deals with isolated questions.

**Q 19: How often have the following questions been on the agenda in the committee**



#### 2.3.1 Comment

Chairs and members of the school boards identify that many boards now have a wider area of responsibility, as shown in the range of titles of the board: 66 % of the names mentioned by the chairs and 78 % of the names mentioned by the members have the word ‘children’ in the title of the school board. 42 % of the chairs and 45 % of the members mention the title as ‘something’ with school or education. These titles encompass a broad field, signalling that the board in general covers the whole range of children’s lives and education.

There seems to be a political wish to have the board oversee the whole range of education, from 1 to 18 years and across the whole spectrum of day care and school life: children and family, childcare, leisure time and secondary schooling. It is particularly preschools and primary schools that are mentioned, which is to be expected, since day care and primary schools are part of the municipality’s responsibility.

When asked about their perception of the school board’s political influence on municipal governance, chairs and members believe they are indeed influential and particularly influential in strategic decisions and economic prioritising within their

area of responsibility. Regarding the assessment of the school board members and the chair's influence on the board's decisions, the chairs feel they have a larger influence than the members, which is arguably to be expected, since the chairs often command a majority on the board behind them. They also consider themselves able to set the agenda for how schools prioritise. However, this was not prioritised as highly as the former items.

The chairpersons and members of the school board think the board is very important for the development of schools, which is part of the board's area of responsibility. They also believe that the municipal council takes the board's views on educational matters into consideration. The board members and chairs thus consider themselves to be important for the municipal development of the schools. On the other hand, the chairpersons and members think that the municipal school administration can only exercise moderate influence over the boards' decisions and that the school administration is only moderately able to lead the dialogue with the schools about the quality reports, to suggest solutions on problems in the school sector and to analyse the national tests. The board members and chairs do not hold the school administration in the same high esteem.

The chairpersons and members think that the school leaders can only partially influence the school board's decisions. This is consistent with the fact that, in many municipalities, there is a wide decentralisation of decision competences to the individual school. There is rarely close contact or tight organisational couplings between the school board and the schools, so there is no significant direct influence either way (Weick 1976).

Only a relatively small proportion of the responses claim that the workflow processing in schools is a matter of selecting between different party political alternatives. Instead, it is apparently a matter of administrative logics. This underlines the fact that municipal politics appears to be characterised less by party politics and more by finding solutions to practical problems; compared to parliament, there are fewer ideological debates in municipal politics.

Regarding tensions in educational politics between the state and municipal level, around 40 % of both chairs and members of the board answer that they do in fact perceive such tensions. On the other hand, twice as many chairs as members think that there are no tensions. And 30 % of the members did not answer the question.

These results suggest that there is a widespread feeling among municipal politicians that the state interferes too much in the decentralised public school. However, this appears to be more the feeling among members than among chairs. The members left many more questions unanswered than the chairs. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that the chairs have more daily responsibility in this area and, therefore, have a strong awareness on their large influence locally through their collaboration with the superintendents. Because of this, they are able to set the agenda regarding daily work within the area. On the other hand, the answers reflect the fact that, in recent years, the state level has centralised a number of issues at the expense of the influence at municipal level, particularly regarding centralised tests, comparisons between schools through publishing school exams results and numerous

alterations of the law of the comprehensive school (17 alterations in 10 years). These issues may result in the feeling that there are tensions between the state and the municipal level regarding educational issues.

The chairpersons and members spend a significant amount of time preparing themselves for board meetings. Almost two thirds of the chairpersons take between 2 and 5 h and more than two thirds of the members take between 2 and 5 h to prepare for each meeting. The preparations for the board meetings seem to be a very individual matter. Less than 8 % use more than 4 h together with their party group for preparation of the board meetings.

There appear to be very few examples of municipalities in which there is a contact politician from the board to the schools. The formal contacts are on the administrative level. In spite of this, the chairpersons and members have a good knowledge of the schools. Ninety per cent of the chairpersons and 74 % of the members visit the schools at least once during the semester. However, we are unable to establish whether this is for private or professional reasons.

## 2.4 How: The School Board's Governing Function

Members and chairpersons of the board emphasise the need to have knowledge about local school politics, the budget procedure of the municipality and the national school policy in order to be able to influence the board's decisions. On a scale of 0–6, these three issues score highly (between 4.7 and 5.6). All three issues are general issues within the board's work area. In addition to this, knowledge of national politics has become even more important for chairs and members of the board because control of the municipality's ownership of schools has been centralised. Lower priority was given to items such as delegation principles of the municipality, labour law/work time conditions, principal's and teacher's function as described in laws and regulations and curricula and students' work environment.

*Political decisions* in the school board are characterised by unanimity to the extent that 61 % (nearly two thirds) of the chairs and 41 % of the members say that the decisions are unanimous. The difference between the chairs and the members can be explained by the fact that chairs often represent a majority in the board and, therefore, are more focused on the unanimous aspect than the members and that it is minority members that focus on the majority decisions. In Danish municipality rule, there is a tradition for broad decisions. If too many decisions were majority decisions, it could be interpreted as an inability of the board chairs to create broad majorities behind their politics and, therefore, as a breach with the tradition of broad majorities and as a sign of bad political workmanship.

*Regarding who decides* the school board's agenda for its meetings, the answers are relatively clear: the decisions are being increasingly taken over by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administrations. Again, there is a difference between the chairpersons' and the members' opinions, since 55 % of

chairpersons and 35 % of members think the superintendent determines the agenda; however, a similar percentage in both groups (31 and 34 %) claimed that the chairperson decides. Municipal politics is becoming increasingly professionalised or depoliticised in the sense that the popular, elected feature in the administration and strategic thinking is being played down.

*From whom do you get the most important information* for your work on the political board was a question that could indicate how important other actors or networks are to chairs. In order of priority, these actors are teachers, other political parties, national evaluations, the internet, and students and media reports on schools. The least important informants are the school administration and the superintendent. It is difficult to interpret this picture, but one could assume that chairs and members are ‘blinded by proximity’, since the professionals and the administration are their main formal sources of information. However, the response rate for this question was very low, so it is not possible to infer a great deal from these figures.

## 2.5 Why: Important Policy Issues

*Which – three – issues/areas are the most important for the board for this office period?* This was an open-ended question – three answers for each – that we have categorised into five categories:

1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, including learning environment and teaching
2. *Structure and economy*: reforming the structure of schools and day care institutions and economy
3. *Day care and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions
4. *Inclusion* of all students into schools and institutions
5. *Special needs education, coherent politics* (attention to children age 3–18) and ICT

Important issues	Members (%)	Chairs (%)
1. Quality and curriculum	<b>33</b>	<b>15</b>
2. Structure and economy	27	34
3. Day care and youth	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>
4. Inclusion	12	12
5. Special needs, Policies, ICT	14	20

Members emphasise quality and curriculum twice as much as chairs. Structure and economy is high for both groups, while chairs stress institutions outside schools more than members.

The focus on structure certainly reflects the fact that, at the time of the survey, political boards were in the second election period and had recently experienced extensive municipal restructuring. As well as this, in recent years, the government

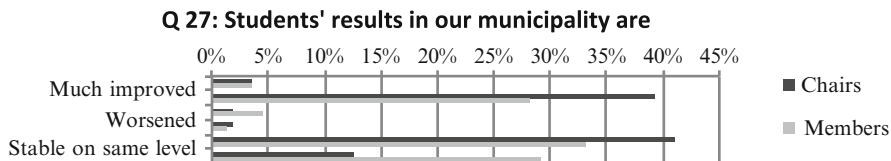
has been cutting funding to municipalities, so finances remain a challenging issue for the political board. Therefore, a lot of detailed structuring and planning was needed at this level.

*Importance of board's work:* Weighted averages from a Likert scale 1–6 question give an image that is very much in line with the answers to the former, open-ended question. *The important group* of issues are overarching issues: finances, school development, long-term issues, quality and strategy; issues one would expect a municipal board to concern itself with. *The next group* of issues are quality issues, in a little more detail, while the third group are issues that are perhaps not considered as interesting for a political board. *The last issue* – individual students – is very low and thus not a matter for the board.

It is worth noticing that chairs and board members are in consensus on these important matters.

## 2.6 What 1: Perception of Educational Capabilities

If one looks at the development of the schools' results, the general trend is that the chairpersons (80 %) and members (60 %) judge the school's results as stable or improved. However, it is thought provoking that almost 30 % of members either did not answer the question or claimed they did not know about the school's results.



Both chairs and members of the school board believe that the school administration has sufficient competence to lead the development of the schools and that the superintendent leads the principals' work with the school development competently. Although board chairs and members claim there is a difference between the various principles' professional capacities, they nevertheless believe the principles have the competence to lead the development of their schools. Regarding the students, the chairs and members estimate that the principals prioritise students' learning and create supportive conditions for students with special needs. On all of these criteria, both chairs and members score between 4.3 and 4.8 on a scale of 0–6.

It appears that chairs and members expressed some isolated dissatisfaction regarding the issue of high-performing students; both groups claimed that principles do not create optimal conditions for students who excel (4.4 for chairs and 4.2 for members on the 0–6 scale). This could be a reflection of the egalitarian school tradition in Denmark, where there has historically been much more focus on students with special needs than on high-performing students.

In general, the quality reports are (to a lesser extent) a pretext for the school board to act in relation to the schools, even if the members score 4.1 on a scale from 0–6, and think to a greater extent than the chairs (score 3.9) that the quality reports in fact lead to initiatives. This may be a sign that initiatives in relation to the schools are left with the superintendents. On the other hand, there is broad agreement about the valuable information content and clarity of the schools' quality reports.

Overall, chairs and members are satisfied with the municipalities' supply of schools and with the teachers' competences. On a scale of 0–6, both chairs and members evaluate the situation between 4.1 and 4.9. Both groups think that the general situation of the schools, their quality, and the variation in the quality is good. The only problem they seem to identify is the variation in teachers' skills across schools, which they rated with the lowest score of 4.0 for chairs and 3.6 for members (though we have to bear in mind that these scores are not worryingly low).

## 2.7 What 2: Demands of Accountability Towards Superintendents and School Principals

Due to the decentralisation of responsibility to the schools, which is typical for Danish municipalities, it appears as though chairpersons and members of school boards do not consider this issue part of their responsibility. The most common model of administration is the so-called company model, which is the preferred model in 78 % of the municipalities. According to this model, the school system is run administratively by a board of top management that conducts strategy, coordination and development. The responsibility for daily conduct is organised in decentred schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012b). This could explain why chairpersons do not wish to interfere in a model of administration that specifically prepares the ground for a division of the political and the individual school.

<b>Q 32: What initiatives do you think ought to be taken when a school underperforms for several years compared to the expected test/marks</b>	Chairs	Members
	% (N=37)	% (N=110)
Examine the reason	22	36
The superintendent must interfere with the management	22	27
Dialogue	16	6
Action plans	11	5
Skill development	(11)	11
Other	(19)	14
Total	101	99

The open-ended question – in which cases the political board should monitor the work of the superintendent – gave the following picture. The categories were almost identical in size – number of statements: first priority was given to *quality* (quality,

evaluation and outcomes). Second priority was given to *implementation* of political decisions, taken by the board itself. Third priority was *budget and economy*, while school *structure* and school *development* was fourth. This fourth category reflects the fact that many ‘new’ municipalities closed down schools or restructured some of them into department schools over several buildings (far away from each other) as a consequence of the municipal reform in 2007. Fifth priority was on occupational *environment* for teachers and students.

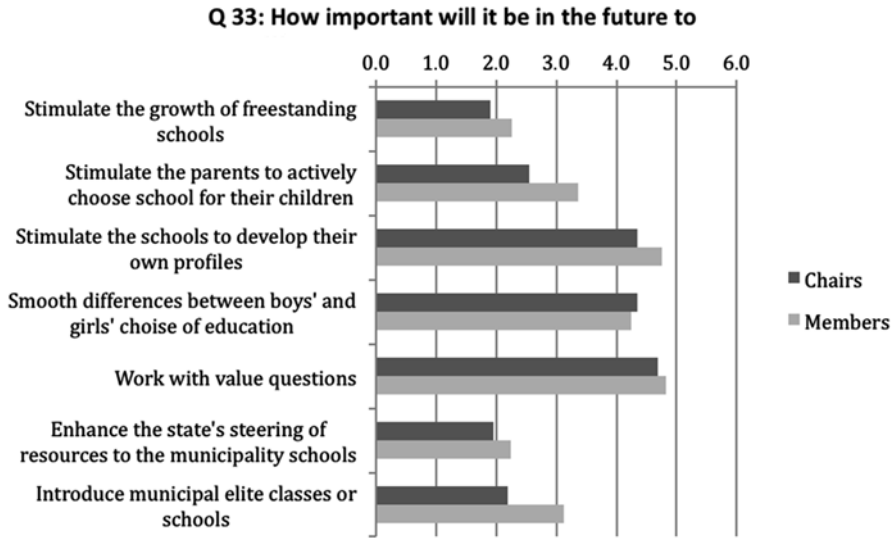
The general impression is that the chairs and members think they are governing at a middle level in the municipality with professionals between themselves and the actors in schools and other institutions. This is about economy, structures and priorities. At the same time, they occupy themselves with the welfare or well-being of the people they govern.

The chairpersons and members place great emphasis on the superintendent’s following up on the principals’ work, but they themselves emphasise more ad hoc questions than strategic questions. One interpretation could be that chairs and members of the school don’t consider it their duty to interfere with the superintendent’s work. A third interesting issue is that ‘leadership’ is rated among the lowest of all issues. An explanation for this could be that the chairpersons believe that this issue is considered a natural part of the superintendent’s prerogatives and that they therefore should not interfere in this issue. Another interpretation could be that a majority of the chairpersons and members think that, in general, there are no problems concerning this issue.

In Denmark, there is a relatively new public awareness of school quality and educational quality. However, when asked what the political board should do when presented with the facts that some schools were underperforming, the two most prominent answers were that the reason for the underperformance should be examined and that the question should be delegated to the superintendent.

## 2.8 What 3: Forecasting

We are currently witnessing a move from the concept of a *welfare state* towards what has been termed a *competition state* (Pedersen 2010), and this also applies to school matters. In this study, such an interpretation is supported by responses to a set of statements. In these responses, we see that questions about values, development of school profiles and smoothing differences between boys’ and girls’ choice of education are prioritised highly, while statements about rising state influence and stimulating more freestanding schools are prioritised less. The municipal politicians still expect focus to be on the classic school questions: values, traditional democratic *Bildung* and gender problems in school education. Perhaps as a reverence to New Public Management, they expect focus on the schools’ positioning in a market through developing individual school profiles.



The chairpersons and board members predict that the influence of students and parents will increase in years to come. Again, the chairpersons think this more than the members (chairs, 46–48 % increase; members, 40–42 % increase). Finally, 41 % of the chairs believe that the influence of school leaders will increase, whereas the figure among members is 37 %. It is expected that the ‘users’ of the schools (parents and children) and the leaders will gain a larger influence on school matters in the future. This can be interpreted as a clear indication of the neo-liberal move towards more user or consumer influence and more influence to management, while the influence of the democratic elected school board and the professional superintendent is expected to diminish.

Regarding the chairs’ and members’ views on the impact of education in Denmark, we have chosen to bypass this question because very few respondents wished to answer it, and, consequently, the replies we received were not statistically valid.

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