

Eliminating school boards could better education — but not necessarily save money, says analyst

Thunder Bay's Charles Cirtwill says fewer school boards can give cities and towns more direct say in education

[CBC News](#) Posted: Mar 10, 2017 11:55 AM ET Last Updated: Mar 10, 2017 12:05 PM ET



'How many school boards does one province need?' a Thunder Bay policy analyst asked in a recent op-ed. (Shutterstock/Syda Productions)



Superior Morning

Charles Cirtwill - School Boards

A policy analyst in Thunder Bay, Ont. is asking a familiar question about the necessity of multiple streams of school boards in the province, but he says the benefits aren't necessarily financial.

Charles Cirtwill, the president and CEO of the Northern Policy Institute, penned a personal opinion piece where he looked at two other jurisdictions — namely, the City of Edmonton and New Zealand — and how they administer education.

The main argument around amalgamating school boards is usually monetary, Cirtwill said, but that misses the point.

"I don't think we're going to save all that much money, no matter what kind of restructuring we do on the school board side," he told CBC News.

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"Even if we eliminated all Catholic boards tomorrow, for example, I don't think we'd suddenly see hundreds of millions of dollars pouring back into individual classrooms."

When asked why by CBC Thunder Bay's morning show, *Superior Morning*, he said that's because "I've been promised in my 25-year career that government restructuring is going to save me money and it never does."

He did say, however, that some savings could be found on the infrastructure side by amalgamating under-populated schools of different streams.

Cirtwill said his argument for fewer school boards has more to do with communities having more direct control over education and what services are offered in each town or city.



Charles Cirtwill penned the personal opinion piece on how Ontario administers education. He's also the president and CEO of the Northern Policy Institute.
(<http://northernpolicy.wordpress.com/>)

For me, it's about the effectiveness of the educational program," he continued.

Cirtwill pointed to the public school board in Edmonton, which has a number of schools under its umbrella, offering standard secular, Christian-based and several bilingual options for schooling in addition to specialized academies for arts and sports.

New Zealand took it a step further, he said, with local communities running schools under a national curriculum.

"That was one of the ways the schools used to be structured when we first started building [the system]" he said.

"It was around community structures, appropriate to the individuals in that community or town."

The discussion over having multiple streams of publicly-funded education comes up frequently in Ontario, he added, which prompted him to pen his op-ed. Still, he said, it's unlikely things will change.

"I don't think it's on anybody's agenda," he said. "I think in the end, absent some real passionate leadership or continuing demographic change, we'll probably end up with the same structure we have."