Board Norms: Establishing the Rules of the Road for Your Board

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Norms

- Agreed-upon expectations of one another, particularly in areas where policy is unclear or there is some need for additional guidance.
Why Do We Need Norms?

- Establish baseline civility
- Increase productivity
- Focus on Mission
- Wasted resources
Does How You Conduct Your Work Matter for Student Achievement?

- From the research, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts.

- In the most dramatic examples from this research, scholars compared districts with similar levels of poverty and disadvantage to determine factors that separate high-performing districts from those with low performance.
What Makes a Board Effective?

Eight Characteristics of an Effective School Board

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.

2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.

3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
What Makes a Board Effective (continued)?

4. Effective school boards have a **collaborative relationship with staff and the community** and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

5. Effective boards are **data savvy**; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.

6. Effective school boards **align and sustain resources**, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

7. Effective school boards **lead as a united team with the superintendent**, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.

8. Effective school boards **take part in team development and training**, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.
The Best norm is knowing your role.

- Section 22-5-4 of the New Mexico Statutes defines the scope of Board Authority:
  - Focuses on setting policy direction
  - Budgets
  - Limited role in employment matters as a reviewing body
  - Acquire, lease and dispose of property
  - Except for salaries, contract for expenditure of money
  - Acquire property by eminent domain
  - *Places limitations on the role of the superintendent.
And knowing what roles are not yours...

- Section 22-5-14 of the New Mexico Statutes: Superintendent Authority
  - Chief Executive Officer
  - Administer and supervise the school district
  - Employ, fix salaries, assign, terminate and discharge

*This also places limitations on the board.

*Statute places general administrative and all employment functions in the hands of the administration (HB 212)
A board member wants the superintendent to adjust her handling of a school/policy issue.

What questions does that board member need to ask?
- Do I individually have the authority to request such a change?
- Where do statute and regulation place the authority for accomplishing this change?
- What might be the best way to raise this issue?
- What will my actions mean for relationships?
- Am I placing improper pressure on my superintendent?
- Am I in danger of allegations of conflict of interest or violations of the Governmental Conduct Act?
- Norm for handling?
Board Communication: General Noms

- **Board:**
  - Help the superintendent anticipate problems
  - Be the “ears and eyes” of the district, not the legs, hands, and mouth.
  - Do not directly communicate with employees or community members regarding confidential problems
  - Remember that the superintendent is your CEO; all information should flow through him/her.

- **Litigation Risk**
  - **Norm:**
    - Minimize contact on non-board issues
    - Know what issues don’t belong to you
    - Agreeing to not let employees use the board for complaints
Interpersonal Norms for Meetings

- Listen more, talk less.
- No interrupting.
- Attempt to work with the ideas of others
- Seek amicable resolution
- No raised voices
- Rules for arguing?
- Put it on the agenda to see briefly discuss how you’ve done.
Other Meeting Norms

- Meetings:
  - Limiting Presentations
  - Public Comment (responding)
  - Agendas (who sets, how)
  - Board Comment (at the end of meetings)
Other Norms

- Board Requests to Administration
- Site Visits
- Letters to the editor
- Fielding criticism about the superintendent
Any group of 5 is going to have conflicts.
Challenge is not to personalize
Challenge is not to air them in front of the public
What are the impacts for the board?
Norms in this area?
Ideas: meet privately; mediation; resolve not to publicly address the other.
Norm: Acting as One Body and Supporting the Board

- Board members only have authority when acting with the board, not as individuals.
- In giving direction to the administration, the board must act as one body.
  - Speak to the superintendent with one voice, which is the majority on any one issue.
  - The superintendent cannot and should not have to pursue five agendas.
- Do not undermine the board majority decision or the administration’s attempts to implement.
  - When is your chance to voice objections?
- What should be your norm/expectation on this?
  - No comments after a board vote to the press or public.
 norms for Social Media

- Facebook/Instagram posts
- Can be a form of undermining the board
- Can be seen as circumventing the board president or superintendent’s role as representative

- Norm options:
  - No posts attacking or questioning the actions or motives of the board
  - Focus on positive posts
  - Do not speak for the board
Board Communication: Confidentiality Norms

- What norms would be wise for protecting confidentiality?
  - Carrying any documents out of executive session
  - Not generating documents in executive session
  - Not speaking of executive session content
  - Others?

- Examples Where Confidentiality is the expected norm:
  - Employment Discharge Hearings
  - Review of student appeals, high profile conduct, FERPA
  - Leaking Executive Session Discussion
  - Sharing District negotiation positions or taking open positions against the District

- Possible Negative Consequences of Confidentiality Violations:
  - Civil Rights Claims
  - Undermining the Board/Superintendent/Programs
  - Causing Recusal from Your Participation in Issues/Hearings
  - Harming the District’s legal or financial interests
  - Public Embarrassment for you and the Board
Norms for Union Matters:

- What are your obligations to the District in negotiations?
  - What are appropriate boundaries?
- What about communicating with union representatives in the context of an on-going HR matter?
  - Any risk of undermining the superintendent or HR?
  - Risk of giving the unions the impression that you can control HR matters?
- Norms for communication with the unions?
Norms: Volunteering

- Employment Barred: Section 22-5-5
  - A. The members of a local school board shall serve without compensation.
  - B. No member of a local school board shall be employed in any capacity by a school district governed by that local school board during the term of office for which the member was elected or appointed.

- Volunteering: New Rules Distinguish Between “Regular” and “Spontaneous” Volunteers
  - Regular Volunteers
    - Regulations require interviews, supervision, evaluation, and training
    - Enforcement of Code of Ethics and Professional Standards (including dismissal)
  - Spontaneous Volunteers: The same rules do not apply but such volunteers still are to be “supervised” by school staff.

- Potential Problems:
  - Supervisory problems
  - Improper use of influence
  - Public Perception of a Board Member using his/her influence

- Recommendation: No board members as regular volunteers or spontaneous volunteers. However, more flexibility about serving as spontaneous volunteers.

- Norms?
What’s the Process for Adoption and Use of Norms?

- Open Meeting
- Facilitated discussion of growth areas for the board
- Creation of a “Norms Statement”
- Vote to adopt; should aspire to a full board adoption
- Review at each meeting; a “living document”
Is there an enforcement mechanism?

- What if a board member simply says, “I’m not going to follow that one”?
- Once a norm is adopted, rogue board members are should be encouraged first, and then a board can consider more active enforcement measures such as censuring the member.
Questions?

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