



Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

As the entity charged by law with governing a school district, each school board sits in trust for its entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes some fundamental duties on the board:

1. The Board Clarifies the District Purpose.

As its primary task, the board **continually defines, re-defines and articulates district goals**.

- *Goals* define the vision of the school district and provide the entire organization with clear direction.
- The district's purpose, direction, priorities and desired outcomes are recorded in statements of core values/beliefs, mission, vision and goals.
- In effective school districts, each and every part of the organization is aligned with the *goals* adopted by the school board.
- Well-crafted *goals* enable the school board to monitor district performance (Principle 5) and hold the organization accountable.

2. The Board Connects with the Community.

The school board engages in an **ongoing two-way conversation with the entire community**. The purpose of the conversation is to enable the board to hear and understand the community's educational aspirations and desires, to serve effectively as an advocate for district improvement and to inform the community of the district's performance.

- Community engagement is the process by which school boards actively involve diverse citizens in dialogue, deliberation and collaborative problem solving around common concerns.
- Effective community engagement is essential to create trust and support among community, board, superintendent and staff.
- The school board typically must be assertive in reaching out to the community to engage people in conversations about education. In contrast, people who bring customer concerns to board members should be directed to the superintendent and appropriate staff.
- A board in touch with community wide concerns and values will serve the broad public interest and be less influenced by narrow special interests.

3. The Board Employs a Superintendent.

The Board **employs and evaluates one person—the superintendent—and holds that person accountable** for the performance of the school district. The board delegates authority for employing and evaluating district staff to the superintendent.

- The employment relationship between a school board and superintendent consists of sincere mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles and expectations. The basics of this relationship should be reflected in a thoughtfully-crafted employment contract, a job description, and procedures for communication and ongoing assessment.
- Although the board is legally required to approve all employment contracts, the board delegates authority to the superintendent to select and evaluate all district staff within the standards established in board policy.

4. **The Board Delegates Authority.**

The Board **delegates authority to the superintendent to manage the district** and provide leadership for the staff. Such authority is communicated through written policies that designate board goals and define operating parameters.

- Ultimately, the school board is responsible for everything, yet must recognize that everything depends upon a capable and competent staff.
- Delegating authority empowers the staff to pursue goals single mindedly and without hesitation. Boards that do (or re-do) staff work, disempower the staff.
- Delegation is difficult for anyone accustomed to direct action. However, to adequately see the big picture and avoid confusing the staff, members of the school board must discipline themselves to trust their staff and not involve themselves in day-to-day operations.

5. **The Board Monitors Performance.**

The board uses data to **continuously monitor progress** toward district goals and compliance with written board policies.

- A school board that pursues its goals through the delegation of authority has a moral obligation to itself and the community to determine whether that authority is being used as intended.
- Unless the board is clear about district goals, there is no valid way to measure progress and compliance.
- The constructive use of data is a skill that must be learned. The board should have some understanding of data but will typically require guidance from the staff.
- A distinction can be made between monitoring data (for board accountability) and management data (of more use to the staff for day-to-day operations).

6. **The Board Takes Responsibility for Itself.**

The board, collectively and individually, takes full responsibility for board activity and behavior. Individual board members are obligated to express their opinions and respect others' opinions; however, board members understand the importance of the board ultimately speaking with one clear voice.

- The school board's role as trustee for the community is unique and essential to both the district and community.
- While the board operates within restrictive legal parameters, good governance requires the board be responsible for itself, its processes and contributions. Avoidance of staff work, for example, depends upon its own discipline. Board deliberations and actions are limited to board work, not staff work.
- The board seeks continuity of leadership, even as it experiences turnover in membership. The board accomplishes this by using written board policies to guide board operations, by providing thorough orientation and training for all members, and by nurturing a positive and inviting board culture.

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