



Chilliwack Board of School Trustees Board Orientation Notes

Introduction

Governance of a public school district is a complex responsibility; however, it is rooted in simple and profound beliefs and concepts that all trustees must adhere to in order to meet their public responsibility and uphold the oath that they take.

The Work of the Board

The Board of School Trustees is a critical component of a healthy school district and central to delivering an exceptional education for its students. The Board holds the district “in trust” and stewards it for generations to come. The Board steers, maintains and guides the school district as it grows and evolves. The Board protects the reputation of its schools and strengthens the work for future generations. On behalf of the district the Board must develop clear strategic direction, provide risk oversight, ensure leadership capacity and strength, meet all legislative obligations, ensure financial health and maintain healthy and effective relationships with the broader school community and formal stakeholder groups.

The Work of the Superintendent

The Superintendency has a profound and significant impact on the governance of the Board and the school district and his/her leadership must be used to further healthy and effective practices around the board table as well as implementing the long-term vision for the district. It is the Superintendent’s responsibility as CEO to provide guidance to the Board, to lead by example and to be sufficiently articulate and knowledgeable about the role of steward to be able to inform the views and practice of the governing Board. The Superintendency must be seen as the logical first stop for trustees to ask questions of clarification as they develop their own stewardship. The responsibility is shared with the Secretary-Treasurer and together they must offer the Board a solid foundation of healthy stewardship practices.

The Impact of Governing Practices on the School District and the Mission

The health of the governance of the school district will be felt throughout the organization. Expectations for community members’ conduct, their level of trust, transparency, respect, and commitment all flow from what is demonstrated for them, both formally and informally by the leadership of the district. School districts with absent leadership, weak or undeclared values, or expectations that do not match what is demonstrated will be reflected in the response of the



school community. Even if citizens or partner groups are not able to clearly articulate what is “wrong” or “not successful” in the district, it will impact the strength and vibrancy of the organization. It is not sufficient or professionally responsible to just leave governing the organization to the Board alone. While the Board has the primary and legally, the central role, the CEO and the Secretary- Treasurer are both a formal part of the governing board and must act in that leadership capacity. Schools and trustees need strong Superintendents and Secretary-Treasurers. They do not benefit from overbearing or domineering senior staff but a firm hand guiding the organization who is seen as a knowledgeable and skilled leader, able to hold their own in all the aspects of leadership and professional practice, is a critical necessity for the development of a healthy and strong Board. Strong governance is not something that can be delegated. Tasks and portfolios are delegated, not oversight or responsibility. The Board has the leading role for healthy governance, firmly and closely supported by the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer.

Legitimate Expectations

Public Trust and Accountability

The school community, staff, students, legislative authority, and the public have the right to legitimate expectations of public accountability of an institution that holds in trust the care, safety, and education of minor children. They have the legitimate right to expect responsible use of funds, stewardship based on trust and transparency, and an understanding on the part of school district and Board leadership of the critical nature of the trust placed in them in educating and developing youth. They have the right to hold leaders in education to the highest standards of fiduciary and pastoral care that extends beyond that which is narrowly defined or upheld in the strictest legal sense. They have the legitimate right to expect leadership by example with respectful and transparent conduct at the Board table and away from it.

Duty of Loyalty

The duty of loyalty requires that individuals put the needs of the organization ahead of their own. They must act without personal economic conflict. However, their duty extends beyond economic conflict in terms of moral stewardship. They have a responsibility to meet the goals of the organization that they agreed to represent, even if it conflicts with personal views or opinions. The duty of loyalty encompasses; being honest with the employees, using good judgement in your working role, putting the interests of the organization ahead of your own, and protecting confidential information. These responsibilities extend fully to both the Board and the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer.



Duty of Care

The duty of care is the responsibility of a person or an organization to always act in the best interests of individuals and others, not to act in a way or fail to act in a way that results in harm, to act within your competence and not take on activities or initiatives that you do not believe you can safely do. A standard of reasonable care applies (it is not an impossible or unachievable standard) however, the Board and the senior staff must have an eye to prudence, processes and procedures that provide for a high degree of care while safely undertaking necessary activities and initiatives. Decisions of staff members that, while desirable for the staff member or less work for the team but do not maximize care and effective learning for students, is not adhering in mind and heart to the duty of care. The duty of care in our world now extends to an understanding and respect for a diverse society, the views and beliefs of the range of citizens in our communities and the legal expectations for tolerance and generosity in our country, regardless of an individual's beliefs. It does not abrogate the responsibility to act with prudence and care for individuals in order to protect stewardship on behalf of children.

The Superintendent's Scope and Leadership Framework- the [Spirit of Leadership](#)

The role of the Superintendent can be characterized by several perspectives and components of leadership responsibility. The Spirit of Leadership Competencies is the BC School Superintendents Association's framework for the leadership responsibilities of Superintendents. It focuses on the strengths, skills and capacities to foster their own leadership, develop leadership in their team and their community, concentrating on the core work of student learning. The framework structure is designed with a thorough knowledge, respect and demonstration of Indigenous learning, knowing and culture. A Superintendent may not be an expert in every component of the leadership framework but must be knowledgeable enough in each aspect of their work to set the expectations for staff and the organization and to recognize when those expectations are not being fulfilled. The Superintendent is responsible to ensure that the right staff are employed to achieve the right ends, through understanding, articulating, and demonstrating clear expectations for staff that align principled behavior with professional goal achievement. The character attributes must be woven through each of the perspectives of leadership practice. Not only should the Board be able to hold the Superintendent accountable for character attributes and the range of leadership needed, but more importantly, the Superintendent should be able to articulate examples and evidence of their leadership. It is the Board's responsibility and that of individual trustees to develop



knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer and to see the effectiveness of their work through these responsibilities.

Accountability Mechanisms

The business of education is filled with accountability mechanisms. Some of them are formal and obvious, some are formal but not so obvious to the school community and some are informal. All of them, however, must be satisfied, or if not satisfied, it is the responsibility of leadership to know which has been compromised, for what reason and what the potential consequences of compromise may be for the organization. Formal accountability mechanisms are statutory requirements, the law of the land, Board policies and fiscal frameworks to name a few. These types of accountability mechanisms have been put in place by those with a responsibility to ensure that the care, safety, and education of children comes first as a legal obligation and priority for schools and school districts. However, there are many competing accountability mechanisms that may arise from other pressing priorities that also need to be satisfied, even when they conflict with the standing fiduciary responsibilities. Staffing contracts, Union labor agreements, “soft or “guiding” policies of agencies or governments, emerging social justice expectations, expressed hopes of the school community are examples that must be considered and met to the degree possible. The Board and the senior staff must be able to articulate and intuit the difference between these accountability mechanisms, the conflict between them, and find solutions to satisfying both (or all) or deciding to compromise one or the other. It is senior staff’s responsibility to continually help guide the Board’s understanding of compatible and competing accountability mechanisms and when decisions and directions must be modified to safeguard the organization and the welfare of students.

Relationships and Responsibilities that Strengthen the Work

Most of the significant leadership work that happens occurs because the Board, the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer foster and develop constructive relationships, proportionate to their responsibility and stewardship obligations. There are some critical relationships for the Board and the list of those primary relationships are noted below. They all need care and nurturing. The main considerations for all involve

- Trust and integrity, even when the work is hard, and the decision is potentially unpopular with some
- No surprises, give each other the head’s up
- Being prepared to be each other’s most honest critic and staunchest supporter
- An abundance of communication and information



- Connecting regularly and frequently at agreed-upon times when participants can count on a good discussion and be prepared to bring issues forward for clarity and sharing
- A practical understanding and acceptance of what can, should, or must be shared and what cannot.
- Speaking with one voice, supporting each other and not undermining or maligning the work of fellow trustees or staff.

Roles and Relationships Within the Board that are critical to the success of all are

- the relationship between the Board and Board Chair
- the relationship between the Superintendent and the Board
- the relationship between the Superintendent and the Board Chair
- the relationship between the Superintendent and the Secretary Treasurer
- the relationship with partner groups and all aspects of the local community, including the formal and informal Indigenous community structure

Dynamics of an Effective Board

Preparing for Effective Meetings

The public, the school district, staff, parents, the Ministry of Education and Child Care, the media and all partner groups form opinions of the Board of School Trustees largely on what they see arising from public Board meetings. They draw conclusions based on how the meetings are conducted, conduct at the table, openness and transparency, strength of stewardship and depth of governance based on the work they see the collective Board undertaking and the interaction between staff and the Board as well as between trustees. The following are recommendations to bear in mind when working with fellow trustees.

- Come prepared, read the Board package thoroughly ahead of the meeting
- Ask thoughtful questions, designed to move debate forward and help the public understand the issue at hand
- Inform the Board Chair, in advance of the meeting, if you have concerns
- Inform the Board Chair, in advance of the meeting, of any potential conflicts of interest
- Keep the “trustee hat” firmly on, the “community hat” is to the side
- Build on and support the work of Committees
- Debate with energy, integrity and grace but do not personalize the issues
- Support the Board Chair and the Superintendent in resolving issues
- Maintain strict confidentiality and do not discuss Board business with anyone other than trustees or senior staff outside of meetings



- Mentor new trustees
- Publicly support the Board's decisions even if you did not support the decision at the time the vote was taken
- Respect the voice and face of the Board- the Chair speaks for the Board and the Superintendent speaks for the work of the district

Modes of Governing

There are 3 modes of governing- the responsibilities and lens that inform decisions. All are critical and all should be a functioning consideration in the decisions that the Board makes. The strongest governance happens where the intersection of all three modes takes place in debate and decisions.

Fiduciary Mode

The fiduciary mode encompasses the legal and legislative responsibilities of the Board and is a critical cornerstone in meeting the obligations of the Board. Questions of finance, legal responsibility, risk management and sound stewardship decisions are all fiduciary responsibilities. The questions that might arise regarding the fiduciary mode are Is the budget balanced? Do we have appropriate and adequate insurance? Is this initiative legal? Is it ethical? Are programs producing the intended outcomes?

Strategic Mode

The strategic mode requires trustees to think into the future and be prepared for strategic decisions that position the organization for success and viability. The questions that might arise regarding the strategic mode are Is this decision viable? What are our core competencies and are we positioned to be successful with this decision? What trends and factors should we consider? What opportunities do we need to act on now for future return for our district?

Generative Mode

The generative mode is sometimes least undertaken by Boards but is critical. It is the "blue sky" discussion that probes assumptions. It is a lens through which decisions can be checked to ensure that core beliefs are being respected. The questions that might arise regarding the generative mode are How does this decision reflect our organizational values and beliefs? How might we reframe this issue? How does affect our vision for the future? Are we relevant?

Items worthy of vigorous debate and commitment on behalf of the Board should have all three modes of governance involved.



The Role of Policy

Board policy is the road map that guides and supports your organization. The Board and the school district are bound by legislation, the first of which is the School Act among the myriad of policy and legislation governing public bodies. Local Board policies should not duplicate legislation or ministerial regulations or direction (unless the Ministry has directed that local Board needs to enshrine a particular obligation in their own local policy) however, it should encompass areas where there is local discretion or schools need to have a consistent approach to process. Keeping policy format simple and having a clear process on how it is developed, approved and in serviced helps employees know how to implement policy, to carry out the direction of the Board and to do their jobs well.

Most public Boards have policy arise from the Secretary-Treasurer's office, with some policy coming directly from the Superintendent. Circulating drafts to partner groups helps garner feedback for refinement as well as help with awareness of the need for the new policy before it appears at a public Board meeting. Boards and schools are bound by policy, and it is meant to be respected and followed. Like every rule, sometimes there are rare exceptions where the Board must step outside of its policy for good reason. This should be the exception; however, Boards are perfectly capable of deciding as a collective that they need to "detour" occasionally. Such an occasion also may offer the opportunity to review the policy in question for updating or change.

Policy should be clear, concise and proportionate to your needs. Any citizen reading your policy should be able to tell easily; what business you are in, what is the central point or action expected of the policy, and who it impacts. Policy formats vary but a belief statement that sets the purpose of the policy followed by the basic principles and procedures of its implementation is the most helpful for the public to use and respond to. The detailed administrative steps that district or school staff may undertake (i.e., dealing with travel expenses or undertaking field study) do not belong in district Board policy. It needs to be sufficiently fulsome to have users understand the purpose and use it if necessary but not so detailed that internal administrative procedures are unnecessarily out in the public.