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
- Effective leadership

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)

Quiz Question: Do I get to always insist on "collaboration"?

- A board member wants the superintendent to pull something off the agenda.
- What questions does that board member need to ask?
  - Do I individually have the authority to request such a change?
  - Where does policy place the authority for accomplishing this change?
  - What might be the best way to raise this issue?
    - Civility, professionalism
  - What will my actions mean for relationships?
  - Am I placing improper pressure on my superintendent?
  - Norm for handling?

Board Community Communication: General Norms

- Board:
  - Help the superintendent anticipate problems
    - Remember that the superintendent is your CEO
    - Do not directly communicate with employees or community members regarding problems
  - 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 that need to be in the chain of command

Interpersonal Norms for Meetings

- Listen more, talk less.
- No interrupting.
- Attempt to work with the ideas of others
- Seek amicable resolution
- No raised voices
- Do not personalize
- Embarrassing other board members
- Rules for disagreeing?
    - Professionalism, civility, merits
- PUT NORMS 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

- Letters to the editor

- Fielding criticism about the superintendent

Norms for Board Personal Conflicts

- 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: cheerleading, informational
  - 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?

- O Open Meeting

- O Facilitated discussion of growth areas for the board

- O Creation of a "Norms Statement"

- O Vote to adopt; should aspire to a full board adoption

- O 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, board members should be encouraged first, and then a board can consider what else it's willing to do, and whether it would be worth it. It's supposed to be a collaborative and voluntary agreement.

Questions?

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