



The Essential Work of School Boards

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Winter 2016

The Grocery Store Case Study

You have been on the school board for the past 3 months. You are in the grocery store and a person in town with whom you are acquainted comes up to you and begins to complain about her child's teacher. She feels that the teacher is not responsive to her child's needs, but also that she is not attentive to a high-needs child in the classroom. She wants the school board to do something about it.

How do you react? What do you say?

How do you leave it with her?

What do you do next?

Characteristics of Successful Boards

- Respectful listening and dialogue
- Good communication with each other and the community
- Well-structured meetings where significant work occurs
- Clarity of role, purpose and responsibilities
- Board members come to meetings prepared

Characteristics of Challenging Boards

- Lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities
- Individuals with attachment to specific outcomes/conflicting interests
- Individuals with problematic motives or behavior
- Lack of trust

The Role of a School District Board

The school board acts as trustees on behalf of the community to provide oversight of public education, assuring:

- High quality education for every student
- The public gets good return on its investment
- The system operates efficiently, effectively and ethically

The Essential Work of School Boards



Engage the Community & Build a Vision

- Be active partners with your community. You need their assent to move forward with any endeavor
- Ask your community what is it they want students to know and be able to do when they leave our system
- Inform the community about what experts tell us regarding the changes we need to make to better serve students
- Articulate a vision for education that reflects the aspirations of your community and best practice as identified by your administrators

Hire a Superintendent to Lead and Manage the District

- The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the district, responsible for all aspects of operations, and for providing educational leadership
- The board:
 - Sets clear goals and expectations for the superintendent and expect that goals are set for principals
 - Conducts a regular performance review of the superintendent
 - Assures good communication between the board and the administration
 - Assures that there is a clear system for accountability
- Boards assure schools are well run – they do not run them

The Board, Superintendent & Principal

Board—vision, policy, resources, accountability



Superintendent—systems leader and CEO for the district, accountable to the board



Principal—educational leader for school, accountable to the superintendent

Establish Policy Parameters

- Be clear why you need a policy in a particular area
- Policies should be:
 - A fairly broad statement of intent
 - Informed by the values of the community
 - Reviewed by an attorney for legal compliance
 - Designed to assure sound risk management
- Policies should not:
 - Micromanage operations
 - Tie the hands of administrators to make reasonable decisions based on the facts (preserve flexibility)

Adopt a Budget to Support the Vision

- Build a culture of care and concern for the financial resources of the district
- Establish policy on budgeting and financial oversight
- Adopt a budget for approval by the electorate
- Assure adequate internal controls are in place
- Monitor compliance with the district's fiscal policies
- Be a good consumer of the annual audit

Monitor Progress Toward the Vision

- If our kids were receiving the educational experience we envision, how would we know?
- If our school system was operating efficiently, effectively and ethically, how would we know?
 - What would be happening?
 - What evidence (data) would we collect?
- Establish expectations for the superintendent to report data/produce evidence regarding progress toward the district's vision

Negotiate Contracts Aligned with District Needs

- When preparing for negotiations:
 - What is working in our master agreements? What's not?
 - What is the cost of total compensation for our employees? How does that compare to similar professions in our community? How does this cost affect our current budget and tax rates?
- During negotiations:
 - Understand fully the implications of any particular proposal
 - Use the vision to guide and ground your proposals and reactions
 - Develop clear and consistent communications to keep the community apprised of the process
 - Don't shy away from difficult positions, but be able to explain them and stand behind them

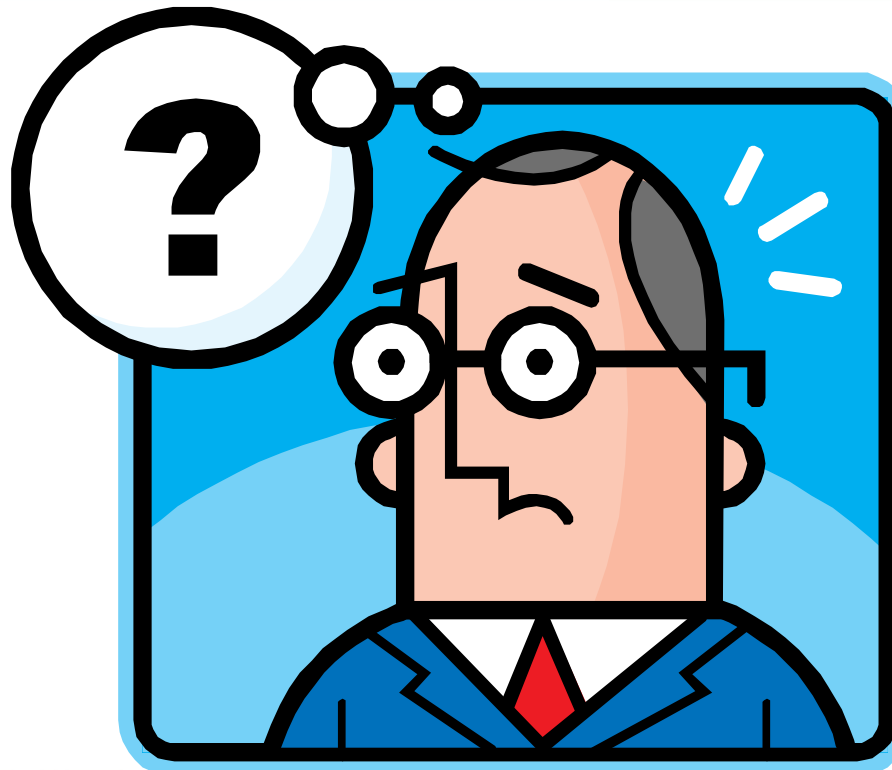
Guidelines for Lawful and Ethical Operations

- School board members:
 - Assure that schools are well run, but do not operate the schools
 - Have no legal powers outside of the board
 - Must maintain the confidentiality of executive session
 - Must avoid conflict of interest or perception
 - Should recognize the validity of board decisions, even if they don't agree with them

The Role of the Board Chair

- Promote the development of a strong board team that understands its role and performs its essential work
- Establish a strong connection with the administration to build common vision and a strong sense of teamwork
- Organize and conduct productive meetings
- Promote lawful/ethical operations

Questions?



The Vermont School Boards Association

The VSBA exists to achieve Vermont's vision for public education by supporting all school boards to serve as effective trustees for education on behalf of their communities and by providing a strong collective voice toward enhancing the cause of public education in Vermont.

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