



HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT-

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Administrative Building

Thursday, May 19, 2016

7:15 PM

1. Call to Order 7:15
2. New Business
 - a. Workshop for School Committee Members: School Committee Governance with Dorothy Presser of MASC as the presenter
 - b. Review SC Protocols
3. Vote to Adjourn 9:30

Secretary: Michelle Bailey, HWRSC

Knowledge • Responsibility • Respect • Excellence

The District does not discriminate in its programs, activities or employment practices based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or disability.

School Committee/Superintendent Operating Protocols
Hamilton Wenham Regional School District

The primary objective of the School Committee is to improve student achievement. Members of the School will abide by the following protocols as individuals and as a committee.

1. Members of the Committee will make no independent commitments or take any independent actions that relate to the School District. When School Committee members attend meetings of other committees or boards, they will speak as individuals. They may only speak for the Committee when designated to represent the Committee.
2. The Superintendent and the School Committee represent the needs and interests of all students in the district and place the students' interests above all others in their decisions, while remaining within the limitations of a voter-approved budget.
3. School Committee members will establish a vision, create policy, approved a budget and assure accountability to sustain continuous improvement in teaching, learning and facilities. Members agree to leave the day-to-day operations, including business transactions, to the superintendent and staff. Members of the School Committee recognize that authority rests only with the majority in its decisions.
4. School Committee members will channel requests for information, reports and data through the Superintendent and the School Committee Chair rather than to staff. The Superintendent will ensure that each member of the committee has equal access to this information in a timely manner. Recognizing the importance of proactive communication and avoiding surprises, School Committee members will, whenever possible, contact the School Committee Chair and/or the Superintendent in advance of a meeting if they have questions or concerns about an agenda item, or will ask the chair at least 48 hours prior to a meeting that an item be placed on an agenda.
5. School Committee members will attend meetings on time and be well- prepared to discuss agenda items. While at meetings, members will stay focused on the agenda items and will not engage in communication outside of the agenda item being discussed. When making decisions, School Committee members will keep an open mind, utilizing the best information available including: research, best practices, public input and financial considerations. Members will debate issues and not each other. Members will analyze carefully and debate fully, whenever necessary, prior to making decisions.
6. School Committee members will vote according to their convictions will avoid bias and will uphold and support the decisions of the majority of the Committee once a decision has been made. Positions will not be used for personal or partisan gain.
7. All members will maintain the confidentiality of privileged information and will respect the Open Meeting Law.
8. Members will refer constituent concerns and complaints, including issues relating to District personnel, to the Superintendent or the School Committee Chair.

9. A School Committee meeting is a business meeting that is held in public – not a public meeting. The committee values communication between all stakeholders of the community and will make every effort to ensure meetings are effective and efficient. Comments made at a meeting that are not part of the agenda will be tabled to a future meeting.
10. The School Committee recognizes the importance of working collaboratively with town officials and actively seeking their support to improve the District.
11. Recognizing the importance of honoring these protocols, members will respectfully remind each other when they get off track.

Signatures

Stacey Metternick

Lawrence Swartz

Jeanise Bertrand

Deb Evans

Dennis Hurley

Hannah Fraley

Doing the Right Thing: The Panasonic Foundation's Guide for Effective School Boards

By Patricia Mitchell, Andrew Gelber, Sophie Sa, and Scott Thompson

Background

Over the past 25 years, the Panasonic Foundation has focused on improving student achievement through partnerships with dozens of urban school systems. We work directly with our partnership districts, providing leadership and organizational development so that system leaders are better able to educate all students to high levels. The partnership includes all four key supports of district leadership: the school board, the superintendent/central administration, the teachers' union/association and the principals' association.

This paper captures our experiences and offers guidance to school boards on what they should do and avoid doing to effectively lead their district's improvement. Some suggestions have been influenced by others' thinking and writing about effective school boards such as: the National School Boards Association, the Institute for Educational Leadership and John Carver. We appreciate what these sources have contributed to our broader thinking but wish to make it clear that "the school of hard knocks" has been our primary educator on effective boardsmanship.

We have worked in districts where schools' improvements were slowed, even stopped, by the spin-off effects of board conflict and misbehavior. We have also seen school boards commit to improving student achievement, use all of their "tools" effectively and turn around years of low-performance among schools. What follows should help school boards think about what they do and how they do it, since both dimensions of their work have a profound impact on everyone else in the system.

The Mission and Duties of School Boards

School systems exist to educate all students to high levels through high-quality instruction. The essential mission of a school board is to govern the school system on behalf of its community as a whole. As the guardian of its community's schools, the board serves as a trustee acting on behalf of current citizens and future citizens. Christa McAuliffe, the Teacher-in-Space who died in the Challenger Space Shuttle explosion, once said, "I touch the future, I teach." School boards shape the future. Their actions affect the quality of education for all of their community's children, and hence those children's capacities for productive citizenship in the decades to come.

There are four "sacred" duties that a school board must fulfill. If a board does not perform these duties, no one else can. No other entity and no single person, not even a talented superintendent, can discharge the board's duties as effectively as a school board. The board's duties are:

1. Establish and promulgate ownership of the district's vision and values.
2. Articulate expected district results and monitor progress.
3. Create the conditions for achievement of the district's vision, values and expected results through effective use of the five areas of board authority - "board tools:"
 - Promulgation of policies;
 - Governing the use of their community's fiscal resources for education;
 - Engaging the community in its schools;
 - Sustaining an effective board-executive relationship;
 - Negotiating and approving union contracts.
4. Ensure a community-wide climate of commitment, respect and trust.

The Panasonic Foundation has found that effective boards operate at a "higher level" -- the board level. They govern a school district. Their time is limited and valuable, so they don't waste it doing what staff members do. The other characteristic of effective boards is their willingness to take on tough challenges. They will "chew on the big bones"- issues that

feel overwhelming but are critical to students' success. Other boards avoid the big bones and go for the little ones, chomping through details and staff-level decisions with relish. Such boards may feel productive. They are making decisions at every meeting and telling staff what they must do. Such boards are not governing, they are supervising, which means that they are not fulfilling their board duties. feel overwhelming but are critical to students' success. Other boards avoid the big bones and go for the little ones, chomping through details and staff-level decisions with relish. Such boards may feel productive. They are making decisions at every meeting and telling staff what they must do. Such boards are not governing, they are supervising, which means that they are not fulfilling their board duties.

The Board's First Duty: Establish and promulgate ownership of the district's vision and values.

Many school boards believe that their number one responsibility is to hire a good superintendent and let him/her do whatever needs to be done. They think that the superintendent should set the vision and board should adopt it. Morally, the board must determine the vision and values of the district because they, not the "hired help" are ultimately responsible to the community.

The Panasonic Foundation has found that the best context for real school improvement occurs when the school board and superintendent are attracted to each other because both are unwavering in their vision of a better district and are conscious that they are mutually dependent for making that vision a reality.

The board must develop a clear, compelling, and energizing vision, not hollow platitudes that often get passed off as "vision statements." If the vision is mundane or muddled, then all of the aligning and guiding that follow based on those vision/values will be tied to a flawed point of reference. A board must also articulate what it believes in and stands for - its fundamental values. The board cannot be silent on values or "values neutral." Values exist, whether articulated or not, and will drive board actions. Board members represent their community, which is likely to have competing, even

conflicting values. In the boardroom, the community's different perspectives and values should be discussed and consensus reached on what this board believes in and stands for. Then, the board must make explicit pronouncements on what it values - what it sees as right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, worthwhile and worthless. These values will form the framework for actions by the board and the staff. Articulating the board's values makes it possible for everyone in the district to use the same "compass" for the countless, daily decisions that push (or pull) a district toward its vision.

The Board's Second Duty: Articulate expected district results and monitor progress.

Expected Results: The board's visions and values create vertical and horizontal parameters for an action framework. The vision focuses the district on what it should see as it looks "up", the values tell the district staff about the "outer walls," what must be within them - the right, acceptable and worthwhile things to do- and what must be outside of them because such actions would be wrong, unacceptable, and/or worthless.

With the parameters in place, the board and superintendent can then decide what are the most important objectives to reach over the next few years and how they will determine if the objectives have been met. Many boards set objectives; few boards are clear about what will constitute satisfaction of their objectives. Boards need to decide, at the outset, how they will assess progress and what criteria will be used to decide if objectives were fully met, partially met, or not met. These objectives and criteria become the "expected district results," for which the superintendent will be held accountable.

Staff Work Plans: Using the set objectives and criteria for assessing progress, the superintendent and his/her staff should create long- and short-term plans for achieving the expected district results. The board may wish to clarify criteria - what will make the chief executive's plan acceptable or unacceptable to the board. They can also, if desired, provide guidance on the process (who to involve, review processes before bringing it to the board for approval). But, the board needs to

recognize that their chief executive is developing a staff work plan. and should be given the authority to create a plan that he/she thinks can move the district from "current reality" to the expected district results.

Staying out of the development of a staff work plan will be a challenge for most boards and their members. Most love debating the details of a work plan. But, an effective board guides the staff work plan by doing what the board must do first -- setting the vision, values and objectives - the "what" that needs to be done. The board can also provide guidance in the form of criteria they will use to determine if the plan is or is not acceptable. These pre-set criteria will be invaluable in keeping the board "in role" as it reviews, discusses and approves the plan.

Board Work Plans: The staff work plan is essential, but not sufficient to have a system plan for a district. The board has work to do as well; work that the staff cannot do. The board, with advice from its chief executive, must determine what it has to do to make the district plan succeed and develop a board work plan. This plan should focus on how the board will use its areas of authority (see 3rd Duty below for details). As with the staff work plan, the board should establish pre-set criteria for assessing its own progress and deciding if its objectives were fully met, partially met, or not met. The board holds itself accountable for completing its "part of the bargain" - the board work plan - in achieving overall district objectives.

Monitoring Progress: AH boards know that It is their duty to watch what is happening in their school districts and be able to answer the question, "How are we doing?" Student achievement test scores, particularly gains in achievement, is a much-valued source of data about how a district is doing. But, effective boards know that more information is needed to assess the success of a district than viewing the end-of-the-year "scoreboard" of standardized test results.

In the typical district, staff members oblige the board's need to monitor progress by supplying a constant stream of information on what the district is doing - from kindergarten skills assessments to school bus maintenance schedules. In the typi-

cal district, boards dutifully skim/read through the mounds of staff reports and find evidence that enables each member to answer the question, "How are we doing?" for him/herself. When individual members have different perceptions about results, the board engages in discussion, or debate, and reaches some sort of conclusion. If the board is satisfied (at least a majority), the staff is satisfied. The "results" are acceptable.

The board in the "typical district" (described above) is fulfilling two aspects of its duty to articulate expected results and monitor progress. It has made it clear that the board will be watching performance and will make judgments about what is/is not satisfactory. But, the board has not made it clear what it will watch (expected results) and how good the results must be if they are to be judged satisfactory (preset criteria). Being "upfront" with expected results and criteria for evaluation is hard work and time-consuming. But, this upfront investment of board time and energy pays off over the long run. These pay-offs include:

- Increasing the board's ability to control its agenda. Every meeting agenda doesn't have to start "from scratch" with the chairperson and superintendent trying to figure out what the board needs to hear about this time. The board has made it clear what it must know about and how it will judge results.
- a. Focusing the information that comes to the board on board-level interests, not staff-level interests.
- improving board judgment by providing more concise and focused reports telling the board about what it cares most about in a way that facilitates informed decisions around the results and actions needed to make improvements.
- Saving board time for areas needing special attention. Since the superintendent knows, in advance, what the board expects, he/she can prepare reports targeting areas where results are not "satisfactory" and offer an analysis as to why results felt short, what the staff is going to do and what the board may need to do (revise a policy, build stronger community understanding and support, rethink funding allocations in next year's budget).

- Saving the amount of time staff members have to spend preparing for board meetings. Staff no longer have to guess what the board might want to know and, just to cover all contingencies, put everything of possible interest into board reports.
- Eliminating “window dressing” staff reports that focus only on what is going well and while glossing over poor results.
- Saving the amount of time board members spend preparing for meetings. They get the information they need to monitor and evaluate results, not mounds of reports.

The Board’s Third Duty: Create the conditions for achievement of the district’s vision, values and expected results through effective use of the five main areas of board authority - “board tools:”

- Promulgating policies.
- Governing the use of their community’s fiscal resources for education.
- Engaging the community in its schools.
- Having an effective board-executive relationship.
- Negotiating and approving union contracts.

A. Promulgating policies

District school boards have many policies “handed” to them by federal or state authorities. These policies are determined by others’ vision, values and objectives and the local board has no choice but to comply. But, a district board has authority in many areas to adapt federal/state policies to meet local needs and/or to promulgate local policies based on its own vision, values and objectives.

In the areas in which the district board has partial to complete rule-making authority, it should ask itself the following questions about those policies:

- How well do the board’s policies align with its vision, values and objectives?
- Are all board policies written, codified and easily accessible to board and staff?

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- How clearly and consistently do the policies communicate the board's vision, values and objectives?
- How well do the policies provide guidance to the superintendent and staff about what they can and cannot do in achieving the board's vision, values and objectives? Do the policies make it clear to staff what are acceptable and unacceptable actions?
- How well do the policies provide guidance to the board itself, and its members? Does the board, and its members, understand what are acceptable and unacceptable actions based on the board's values?
- In which areas does the board feel that the policies are sufficiently clear that the superintendent can operate within those policies and have, in effect, "prior board approval?"
- In which areas does the board feel that policies are not sufficiently clear that the superintendent must come to the board prior to taking action and get approval?
- Can those "unclear" policies be made clearer to guide executive action without prior board approval? If the board decides the superintendent must have prior board approval before taking any actions on a given issue, can the board provide any guidance for the superintendent and for itself on criteria to use in approving/not approving the recommended actions?
- Do any of the board's policies impede staff in taking actions that are consistent with the board's vision, values and objectives? If so, what policy changes must be made to remove those impediments?
- Does the board have an effective process for regularly reviewing and revising its policies as needed to achieve the expected results?

Boards often feel that they have to cover every contingency and make it explicit what staff should do. Their policies read like procedure manuals and become even more prescriptive every time there is an "incident" in which staff action is unac-

ceptable to the board. If this sounds like what has happened in your district, we recommend using the approach advocated by John Carver¹ -- set limits. Make it clear, through policies, what staff may not do. what is imprudent, unethical or simply unacceptable to the Board given its beliefs and values. Be as specific as necessary for the board to feel comfortable that staff actions, within those limits, are automatically approvable.

Articulating limits through policies requires more up-front board work but saves board time later by not requiring staff to review an unending list of proposed staff actions. By using a "limits" approach to policy, the board is telling staff, "Do what works best within the boundaries we have set." Staff members are more accountable under this approach because there is no impediment to their being responsive and adaptive in finding the best way to achieve the expected results.

The worst situation is for a school board to have unclear or inconsistent policies and to constantly review staff actions. Some boards prefer this. They avoid the tough, board-level, work of creating clear, consistent board policies and instead focus on staff actions. In the absence of clear policies, the board is forced to review staff work in the context of the moment, letting individual members offer their opinions on whether the staff's actions were right or wrong; acceptable or unacceptable; worthwhile or not. As a result, staff members have to try to guess what the board would have them do rather doing what they think is best. And, if in doubt, do nothing until board approval is given. In our experience, "stop until we say go" school boards grind staff initiative and school improvement to a halt.

B. Governing the use of their community's fiscal resources for education.

As most folks see it, making policies and allocating funding are the real "power tools" of a school board. They are right. Policies and funding are powerful tools to achieving the board's vision, values and expected results. In the absence a guiding framework, however, decisions about policies and fiscal allocations will be driven by the pressures of the "here and now" and not what best serves the long-term interests of the entire community.

Boards must think about the future, not just the present, and about all community members. If all children are to be educated to high levels, then this vision must be kept in the foreground during the intense wrangling over district budgets. A board that is driven by its vision of all children succeeding in schools must adopt a budget that allocates resources to schools based on the schools' and students' needs, not formulas or previous history of allocations. And, the board must not be afraid to provide significantly greater resources to low-performing schools, even when the constituents of those schools are not politically powerful.

A board's fiscal responsibilities do not end when a budget has been approved. It must have policies and processes to monitor and maintain the fiscal health of the district. The board should be able to regularly and effectively tell the public that its money is being "well spent" in the schools. Finally, a good school board is able to build public support for revenue increases when such funding is essential to having schools in which all students learn.

C. Engaging the community in its schools.

A school board must genuinely listen broadly to all parts of its community and understand their beliefs and values. It uses the understanding gained from listening to its citizens to forge the board's beliefs and values, which probably reflect, but may not mirror the community's views.

In many communities, the beliefs and values of the most politically influential citizens may not yet be consistent with the purpose of a school system - to educate all children to high learning levels. We find that many citizens do not fully understand the social, economic and political changes that affect young people's prospects for adult success. Getting a basic education is no longer sufficient for getting a "living wage" job. Mastering high school academics and being prepared for post-secondary education is no longer a goal for the top percentiles of students. It's a goal that virtually all students must attain.

¹ John Carver, *Boards That Make A Difference: A New Design For Leadership in Nonprofit And Public Organizations*. Chapter 5: Setting Limits.

It has taken many years for education leaders to understand the changes being demanded of schools and to undertake those changes. The citizenry may lag behind. Many may still believe "high-levels" of learning are needed by many, but not all students, and beyond the reach of certain groups of students. So if a school board believes that all students will learn to high levels, the board is probably going to have ^^systematically build the community's willingness to share this belief.

Some school boards are lucky. Their citizens join in the board in supporting high academic achievement among all students. The "rub" comes with differing beliefs and values about how to raise revenues and allocate funds for schools, while maintaining other vital community services. This "rub" becomes a major challenge for school boards, particularly those who see their constituents as being students, their families and the voters who elected them. Children do not vote and the percentage of families with school-aged children is usually a minority, a small minority in some communities. School board elections also do not tend to draw a large percentage of voters. It would be a grievous error for a school board to believe that it must fulfill the wishes of the majority voters in the most recent election. Voters are only part of the "owners" of a school district, and a school board should act on behalf of all owners.

Boards should think of their owners as all the people that make up the community, now and in the future. The "time horizon" of an effective board is not drawn by the most recent or the next election. Board policies and allocations shape who teaches and manages their schools and what goes on in classrooms. The quality of teaching and learning will affect the level of preparation for employment and productive citizenship of every child that goes through the system for the next several years and, thus, a significant number of the community's citizens ten, twenty, thirty, forty and more years into the future. An effective board listens and responds to the adults who are actively engaged in the present community (i.e., voters, elected and civic leaders, parents). If it does not, most members may not survive the next election. But, a board

Is also morally accountable to all current citizens who are adults, as well as those who will become citizens later - the students.

D. Having an effective board-executive relationship

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School boards are usually very conscious of their supervisory role in terms of their chief executive - the superintendent. The CEO's effectiveness is a top priority for boards, as reflected in the time and energy devoted to finding and hiring a good CEO and, similarly, the time and energy consumed when a board feels that its CEO is no longer effective.

Most school boards strongly value having a good relationship with the superintendent. The difficulty comes when boards: (1) do not define what they will hold the superintendent accountable for; (2) is ineffective in monitoring superintendent performance; and (3) intrudes in ways that make it difficult for the superintendent to be held accountable. We have seen all of these problems in most of the Panasonic Foundation partnership districts. The third problem, board intrusions that undermine executive accountability, is a pervasive problem among school districts, even those in which the board is strongly committed to ensuring executive accountability.

Define what the chief executive is responsible for doing and what the board is responsible for doing.

In the vast majority of school districts, the chief executive goes by the title of superintendent. But it's helpful to consider the two words, Chief executive, because help to differentiate board and staff roles and responsibilities. The chief executive is the top person, the one who holds staff accountable, and the "boss" of all staff. The chief executive executes, doing whatever it takes (within the limits of board policies) to ensure that expected results are achieved.

The separation between board and staff functions is a fuzzy line in many districts. But, that line becomes distinct if the board focuses on fulfilling its duties and has explicit expectations and performance standards for itself and for its chief executive (see Duty #2). Board/staff separation is a problem when the board shirks its duties and instead tries to simply "run the district." Constituents often encourage "the board's the boss" thinking. But, an effective board focuses on being the boss of one person - its chief executive - and holding this

person accountable. The chief executive has all the rest of staff to hold accountable. Further, an effective board knows that it operates as a board so the chief executive is only accountable to the full board, not to individual members.

Monitor the chief executive's performance based on a pre-established set of criteria.

As just stated above, an effective board articulates explicit expectations and performance standards for itself, its chief executive and for its work with this individual. The board establishes performance expectations for the superintendent (and any other "direct reports") using a clear set of criteria for evaluating performance. And, the board regularly reviews performance and determines if the superintendent -- and any other "direct reports" - is meeting performance targets.

The board should expect the superintendent to establish performance expectations for all other staff and have processes for determining how well staff members have met expectations. An effective board never tries to determine if other staff below the level of the chief executive are or are not meeting their performance expectations. This is the chief executive's responsibility.

Don't make staff-level decisions.

When the board crosses over into the executive's responsibilities, even if it is for on just a few decisions, or if individual board members attempt to sway an executive's decision to "their way," the board sends a clear signal that it is really the executive but will let the superintendent handle things when the board is not interested in them (subject to change, of course, as members change).

When board members go to individual staff members to "advise" them or vice versa, the line between the board role and the superintendent's role has been violated. This occurs on an almost daily basis in some school districts, even when the board tries to stay out of staff work. In the worst districts we have seen, board members use staff members to push their particular interests or to influence or even coerce staff-level decisions. The reverse is also true in these dysfunctional districts. Staff members come to board members to advocate

for their particular interests and to get the board member to serve as an advocate for those interests in board-level decisions. The school board and superintendent are supposed to be the top leaders in a district, but it is the behind-the-scenes maneuvering among individual board and staff members that rule.

Boards must be clear about board-level decisions and staff-level decisions and insist that the board and its members stay out of the latter. It is easy for boards to condone involvement with staff decision when their intentions are "good" (e.g., a member has expertise that might be helpful to staff). Often times, a board only censures "staff-decision-dabbling" when a board member crosses the line on ethics and his/her behavior becomes public (e.g., a key contract was steered to a board member's close friend or relative). Even well-intentioned intrusions by board into staff decisions sends the signal to staff that the board is also the chief executive, particularly when someone has a personal interest in a staff decision.

E. Negotiating and approving union contracts

What gets decided at contract time can really help or really hinder a district's capacity to achieve the expected results. Boards can get so caught up in the negotiation process or can be so focused on the financial issues that they forget that a contract is another way of setting policy and the policy set by a contract can preempt other policy. Boards must keep their vision, values and expected results in the foreground of their thinking as they make the compromises needed for an approvable contract.

The Board's Fourth Duty: Ensure a community-wide climate of commitment, respect and trust.

The school board has the greatest influence on its district's culture and climate. The actions it takes - or fails to take - can make or break an effective organizational culture.

Climate of Commitment: An effective board demonstrates its commitment to all students learning to high levels, not only through its vision, values and expected results, but also in

how it performs its duties. When monitoring results, an effective board seeks a variety of evidence on how well each group of students are succeeding at each phase of education in the school district. It not only examines disaggregated test scores, but also looks at other statistics on: drop-outs, unsatisfactory attendance, disciplinary actions, enrollments in advanced classes as well as remedial classes, rates of failure in grades or subjects, and rates of continuous academic progress for students as they move through the system. The board also demonstrates its commitment by persistently pushing for better results among students who are falling behind.

Effective boards also build a community-wide climate of commitment when they actively seek and listen to students', families', teachers', principals' and other school staff members' views in order to better understand issues facing the district and to determine the best course of action. It does this systematically as a board, not just relying on what individual board members "hear out" in the community.

In some districts, it requires a great deal of courage for the board to publicly discuss low-achievement results and insist on taking actions that get at underlying problems. There can be a long history of inaction and considerable forces maintaining that inertia. The pervasive belief that "certain kids" cannot succeed in school goes unchallenged. The public and professionals tolerate significant differences in the quality among schools, with some schools serving as "dumping grounds" for low-achieving students. There are intense political pressures to "band-aid" over the trouble spots. But, we have seen boards that did not accept excuses or permit exceptions to its expectation that all children will learn to high levels.

Climate of Trust and Respect: Showing commitment to student success must be coupled with building a climate of trust and respect. Why? Because real, sustainable improvement in student learning will only come if there is a climate of trust and respect among the school board and its staff.

Even among boards with good intentions, we have seen board actions that significantly damage trust and respect. Most notable, some boards allow members to publicly criticize, even

belittle, staff. Some members do this out of a misguided belief that "raking the staff over the coals" will demonstrate commitment to children. Bui, the board actions that really help students are setting clear performance expectations, insisting that the superintendent work to meet those expectations and not interfering when the superintendent disciplines or dismisses employees who aren't meeting the expectations. Effective school boards are respectful in interactions with staff. They demonstrate this in how they listen to and ask questions of staff. Because an effective board needs to be able to trust the information used to make decisions, they encourage staff to be open and honest in their reports, in answering board questions, and in engaging in board-staff discussions. Such boards also watch out for actions, inadvertent or deliberate, that make staff regret having been open and honest with the board.

Effective boards also insist that others treat staff with respect. They should not allow negative comments to be made about any district employee during a public session. If parents or other citizens (including board members!) voice concerns or are critical of any staff member, the complaints should be referred to the superintendent. If the complaints are about the superintendent and the board wishes to explore the concerns in greater depth, the board members should discuss the matter in a closed session with the superintendent. A board should not let any member of the district staff to be, in effect, "publicly flogged or lynched."

Code of Conduct

Effective boards insist on the proper use of authority and behavior befitting their position as the community's trustees for children and their education. They establish a code of conduct for the board and its members, and have clearly understood processes and consequences to hold it and members accountable. They take a clear stance on what is acceptable and unacceptable board member behavior.

One of the key principles in this code is that there is a clear distinction between the board and individual members. Individual members are just that - individuals, members. Only the board, acting as a body, has board authority. Thus, individual members may not attempt to exercise authority over

the superintendent or staff or to speak for the board, unless specifically granted this power by the board as a whole. Conflict happens; it is unavoidable. The problem for boards isn't having conflict among members' views and opinions, it is how to manage the conflict so that the "exchange" of ideas is productive and leads to good board policies and actions. A code of conduct should set down the board's rules for dialogue, debate and making decisions. Board members should be encouraged to express their views on board issues at the board level. They can be passionate in sharing their opinions, but should not do so in a way that divides, polarizes or hurts people. Also, when the board decides, even if it is divided in that decision, the board has acted. In all subsequent interactions with the public, staff, media, individual members must bear in mind that they have no authority to speak for or to "interpret" what the board decided.

Summary

A Board of Education is an elected or appointed body entrusted with the governance of a system of public schools on behalf of the community those schools exist to serve. Panasonic Foundation's experience over a couple of decades working with school districts and their school boards has revealed both effective and ineffective approaches to this crucial work. These behaviors and practices are summarized in the following chart.

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What we believe is "right" for school boards to do:	What we believe is "wrong" for school boards To do:
Act on behalf of all citizens, keeping in mind that the board's actions will affect not only the current generation of the community's children, but the next as well.	Act on behalf of only those citizens who supported individual members in their election campaign or who talk regularly with individual members.
Act as a board in setting vision, values and objectives. Hammer out the differences among members' viewpoints, beliefs and priorities. Find the common ground, the vision, values and objectives that drive both board and staff actions in educating the community's children.	Avoid the difficult conversations the board must have to determine its "collective" vision and values. Let difference in personal viewpoints keep the board perpetually divided and unable to act in unison.
Attend to its job. Fulfill its four duties. Guide and support the staff's work through its five areas of authority - not by directives.	Attend to the staff's job. Try to become experts in the various staff functions. "Second guess" what staff should or should not do.
Establish a board work plan around how it will use its areas of authority - "board tools" - to achieve the district's vision, values and expected results. Hold itself accountable for accomplishing those plans.	Avoid making a commitment to a planned course of action that reflects the board's vision, values and expected results. Let the board's actions be "happenstance" - driven by decisions made at monthly meetings based on issues brought to the board by staff. Blame the chief executive/staff if expected results are not met, even if the board failed to create the conditions necessary to achieve those results.
Set parameters for staff actions through the board's statements on vision, values and expected results, as well as board policies. Allow the chief executive to "execute" needed actions, within the board's parameters, without having to come to the board for prior approval. State those areas in which the superintendent must get board approval before acting, and keep the "see us first" areas to a minimum.	Attempt to direct staff actions by having the superintendent run everything by the board first so that they can debate the pros and cons of taking that action and provide advice for staff on how to do their job.

NOTES

What we believe is "right" for school boards to do:	What we believe is "wrong" for school boards To do:
<p>Establish a code of conduct and have clearly understood processes and consequences to hold itself and its members accountable for acting in a way befitting the chief trustees of their community's education system.</p>	<p>Avoid taking a stance on acceptable and unacceptable board member behavior and articulating this in writing. Waiting until one or more members' behavior becomes intolerable to the other members of the board or to staff or is affecting the public's perception of the board's effectiveness. Trying to solve the problem by leaving it up to the chairperson to "say something." Or worse, not trying to solve the problem and letting board members express their dissatisfaction with each other in public.</p>