

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Operating Principles, Port Townsend School Board and Superintendent

Introduction

The school board is most effective when it is able to constructively integrate the diversity of its members into a strong, dynamic voice for quality education for all students. The difference between diverse and divided boards is that a diverse board is able to express diversity without questioning one another's motives while a divided board can find no way to reconcile differences and is unable to govern effectively. Operating principles define beliefs, values and methods of working together. Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. To assure quality of operations, leaders must agree on basic ways of working together.

We must agree on both philosophical ideas and practical ways of working together to achieve the common goals that provide quality education for all students. Effective working relationships are most likely when all parties know and agree to accepted ways of working together.

This procedure sets the principles and practices of cooperative behavior for Port Townsend School District leadership. The board and superintendent may document their commitment to strive to uphold these principles by passing a resolution annually.

These operating principles are not intended to limit a board director's ability to uphold their oath of office to faithfully discharge the duties of their office in affirmation of support to the constitutions of the United States and the State of Washington. Additionally, these principles will not hinder individual board directors' freedom of individual opinion or expression, nor will it limit their freedom to individually communicate with any members of their constituency. If a board director believes any of the operating principles in this procedure are in conflict with their oath, constitutions of the United States and the State of Washington and their freedoms stated by those, they will strive to rectify the conflict by pursuing the revision of these operating principles in this procedure.

Leadership roles

Port Townsend School Board of Directors	Port Townsend Superintendent of Schools
Reviews and Suggests What	Decides How
Requests Information	Seeks and Provides Information
Considers Issues	Provides Recommendations
Creates, Reviews, and Adopts Policy	Recommends and Carries Out Policy
Approves and Reviews Plans	Implements Vision
Monitors Progress	Reports Progress
Contracts with Personnel	Supervises Hiring Process and Practices
Approves Evaluation Criteria and Procedures	Supervises and Evaluates Personnel
Approves and Reviews Budget	Formulates Budget
Represents Public Interest	Acts in Public Interest

Philosophy Statement

The most effective way to operate and supervise a dynamic school district is through close cooperation between the school board, the superintendent, administrative teams and the staff. The example by which the board and superintendent lead the district becomes the model for the administrative team, staff, parents and community on how issues and problems are resolved.

Our approach is to work in an open, positive problem-solving atmosphere to achieve the goals of the organization. Cooperation, support and loyalty do not mean we will agree on every issue; dialogue, divergent thinking and debate will encourage the best decisions. We have agreed to the following practices and principles:

Communication: The centerpiece of this agreement is focused on communications. The board and superintendent agree to conduct the business of the district in a courteous, positive manner with open communications and an attitude of sharing and respect. We will make deliberate attempts to share information and data.

Loyalty and Commitment to the District: Each individual has a responsibility to be loyal to the district and has a commitment to our common cause – a quality education for every child and a quality of life for the community. To maintain a close and positive working relationship between the board and the superintendent, each member of the board agrees to the following:

Problems: Problems or perceived problems are those areas of concern that involve a breach of any district policy. The board members agree to direct questions or concerns about perceived or actual problems to the superintendent or designee rather than solicit information from employees.

Information: Board members should feel free to seek information to increase their understanding of procedures and practices. Each board member may engage in open communication within the district in an effort to gather information. To ensure the effectiveness of board-superintendent relationships, information concerning policy or general information that requires research and/or data, will be directed to the Superintendent.

Employees: The board is encouraged to offer praise for employees, but criticism must be channeled through the superintendent's office.

Public and Employee Complaints and Concerns: When an individual board member is contacted by a staff or community member, either by phone or correspondence, each member agrees to the principles of the following model:

1. Listen to the concern or complaint and find out if the individual is “venting” or wishes to know the steps to resolve the issue.
2. Inform the individual of the appropriate policies and channels regarding the complaint or concern. Assist by informing the individual of the correct procedures to resolve the issue.

Example: Teacher complaint by parent

- a. Refer parent to teacher and principal
- b. Continue to channel the individual to the next immediate level, if the issue is unresolved.
- c. Insure contractual agreements are considered.
- d. The issue is only placed on the board agenda when all appropriate levels and channels of responsibility have been pursued, including the superintendent's office.

3. The superintendent will be informed by the board member of the complaint or concern and, except in unusual or extenuating circumstances; the information will be shared by the superintendent or the board member with the remaining members of the board.

Confidentiality: Without exception, all information received and/or discussed in executive sessions will remain completely confidential. Information given in confidence, particularly when planning and exploring alternatives within the confines and laws that determine executive privileged information, must also remain confidential.

Public debate and information, while being open and honest, must not disclose information held to be confidential in regards to negotiations, the purchase of real estate, personnel and other topics covered by the confidentiality of the executive session laws.

Agenda Preparation: Individual member's agenda must be open and on the table for meaningful dialogue to occur. Surprises at meetings are counterproductive. If a board member wishes to have an item or items placed on the board meeting agenda for discussion or action, the item(s) must be in writing explaining the content of the item and the reason for submitting the item(s) or, during a regular board meeting a board member may request an item(s) be placed on a future board meeting agenda. In either case, the superintendent and board chair should be advised in a timely fashion to allow the administration the appropriate time to gather data and prepare the board packet according to established deadlines.

District Negotiators, Attorneys, and Consultants: Only the superintendent or his (her) designee are to contact the district's attorneys, consultants, or negotiators. If a majority of the board feels a need to consult with the district counsel, consultant or negotiator, the board chair may request that the superintendent arrange such a meeting.

The board chair, on behalf of the board, may contact the district's legal counsel in reference to the superintendent's contract and share that information with the remainder of the board.

The Media: The superintendent is responsible for communicating official district positions to the media. There will also be occasions when the board chair communicates the boards' or district's position.

We understand that the best practice of the board, especially relative to controversial issues and negotiations is to speak as one voice as the board and administration. However, it is not the intent of the superintendent or board to negate a member's right to speak to the media or community. Board members may state personal positions as long as they make it known they are not speaking on behalf of the board or the district.

It must also be understood that divisiveness through the media is inappropriate. It must be clear that we agree not to use the media to strike out at the district, superintendent, board members or other administrators and staff members or to use it for one's personal political gain.

School Visitations: Board members are welcome in all schools and facilities at any time. However, out of courtesy a board member should advise the principal of his/her intent to visit a school.

Meetings: School board meetings are the community's window to district operations. As per Board Policy 1400/1400P, "...all meetings will be conducted in an orderly and businesslike manner, using Robert's Rules of Order as a guide."

Meetings will begin promptly at 5:30 p.m. or as otherwise announced, and end at a reasonable time.

Executive sessions will take place as needed, consistent with board policy. Board members will be advised of the intent of the executive session in advance of the meeting.

Except in cases of emergency, issues not set on the agenda or addendum will not be presented by either board or administration, with the exception of announcements that require no action by the board. Announcements are defined as pieces of information regarding various meetings and items of interest. (An emergency is defined as being a situation involving injury or damage to persons or property or the likelihood of such injury or damage when time requirements of notice would make notice impractical and increase the likelihood of injury or damage [see RCW42-40-080]).

Before each meeting the board members agree to read all available agenda materials and contact the superintendent prior to the meeting if he/she feels clarification is necessary. Each agenda item requiring action by the board and all reports to the board will be accompanied by appropriate information provided by the superintendent in the board's meeting packet. The board packet will be sent in a timely manner to allow the board to study the agenda items.

It is understood that on occasion it may be necessary for the administration to provide additional information at the board meeting.

Audience Participation: Members of the audience may address the board at the scheduled time for community input at each meeting. Audience members may address agenda items or other topics during this scheduled time. The board will listen to the information and opinions presented, and through the superintendent provide answers to questions, but are under no obligation to take action by audience request. An issue may be put on a future agenda if it is deemed appropriate for board action or reports. If a member of the audience requests information that is not immediately available at the time of the meeting, the board understands it may direct the superintendent or his/her designee to provide information to that person in the future. No board member or administrator should be expected to provide information if it is not readily available

Decision Making: Each board member recognizes that he/she has no power or right to make individual promises that would be binding upon the board and district. Each member has the obligation to state his/her point of view prior to a board action, including the chair of the board.

Because the board functions as a team, each member has the responsibility to support final decisions and aid in their implementation even though the member may not agree with or favor the decision.

Concurrently, board members respect the right of individual members to oppose a proposal and vote against the majority of the board.

The board and superintendent will prepare a tentative calendar of regular events requiring board attention during the year including reporting systems of annual goals.

An individual board member may request that the superintendent prepare information and reports to assist in making informed decisions. If the request requires an excessive and unusual amount of staff time in the opinion of the superintendent, he/she may direct the member to the board chair. It is the chair's responsibility to discuss the request with the rest of the board to insure the request is a need and is of interest to at least the majority of the board.

Board members may make suggestions to the superintendent at any time, but he/she is not bound to follow such suggestions. If a member wishes to pursue his/her idea, he/she will request that it be considered as a regular item of business through the board chair and superintendent.

Criteria for Decision Making:

1. Whose decision is it?
2. Is it consistent with the vision and mission:
3. Is it legal and in accordance with directives:
4. Is it supportive of the strategic plan's goals?
5. Is it in the best interests of students?
6. Can the decision be supported by staff, students, parents, and the community?
7. Are the implementation risks manageable?
8. Are the implementation funds budgeted and available?
9. Are staffing and other resources available?
10. Will failure to make the decision have an adverse impact?
11. What result(s) is expected from the decision?
12. What result(s) is expected of making a negative decision?

The Art of Politics: Board members each have different experiences, beliefs, needs, and community support. It is the art of persuasion and politics to provide convincing testimony to persuade at least a majority of the board, in open meeting, to agree to an issue. If that is not possible, the individual agrees that the majority rules. After stating his/her arguments through orderly debate and consideration, he/she recognizes the need to move on to other issues. It is not in the best interest of the district to hold tightly to past disappointments, disagreements, and debates.

The WSSDA Code of Governance

The Washington State School Directors' Association holds that the values, knowledge and skills of effective school board members are based on adherence to basic principles such as honesty, integrity and respect for human dignity.

We, as independently elected officials, recognize and accept the responsibility of our role and our personal authority to act only within the structure of a school district's board of directors.

We commit to taking the time necessary to understand the beliefs, acquire the knowledge, and develop the skills necessary to be effective school board members.

Beliefs

- We believe each individual board member is responsible to:
- Be fully prepared and work within the board's structure;
- Make decisions to ensure equal access to public education;
- Acknowledge that an effective board must be composed of members who respect the processes and recognize dissenting viewpoints;
- Respect the professional expertise of district staff as necessary for the operation of effective schools;
- Recognize that schools thrive in a community where there is an atmosphere of mutual respect;
- Support actions taken by the board, and clearly differentiate personal opinion from board decisions when speaking in the minority;
- Make decisions to ensure the rights and welfare of all students;
- Make decisions that respect and accommodate diversity;
- Maintain independent judgment free of special interest and partisan political groups, and avoid the use of schools for personal gain;
- Promote environments that meet the educational needs of all students;
- Recognize that effective internal and external communications are an essential part of our public schools and the role of a school board member;
- Consider educational research, proven practices and community input in making decisions;
- Be accountable for personal actions;
- Work cooperatively with other board members, the staff and the community;
- Understand his/her role in making, monitoring and evaluating school district policies; and
- Be sensitive to how independent statements or actions of a board member may be perceived.

Knowledge and Skills

We believe that successful school board members will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to:

- Understand the state's laws and regulations and their district's policies and procedures and contractual obligations which govern the operation of schools;
- Recognize that their school board authority to act can be exercised only when participating in an official meeting of the board;
- Hold confidential from the public, including families and friends, all matters discussed in executive session;
- Accept the appropriate roles of the board and superintendent in the operation of the school district;
- Strategically plan for the schools' short-, intermediate- and long-range futures; enact policies to ensure fair, efficient and effective operations; monitor – not manage – the implementation of plans and policies and evaluate the district's educational effectiveness;
- Develop interdependent relationships based on collaboration with other school board members, boards, other educational policymakers and appropriate agencies which will improve public education; and,
- Keep abreast of important developments in educational trends, research and practices.

(From: WSSDA's publication: "Serving on Your Local School Board: A Guide to Effective Leadership. Revised July, 2007)

Date: 8/19/93; 7/22/96; 2/8/99; 12/20/99; 2/23/04; 2/4/08; 2/22/10; 3/8/10; 10/24/16