

# Serving on Your Local School Board

**A Guide to  
Effective Leadership**



WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

# About Us

- Washington State School Directors' Association – “WSSDA”
  - *All school board members from the state's 295 districts*
  - *Authorized by the Legislature to be self-governing*
- Your Presenters
  - *WSSDA Board Member*
  - *WSSDA Staff Member*

# About the Workshop

- An introduction to school director duties and responsibilities
- Intended to help you be successful, effective board members
- Not about how to campaign
- Not a forum for debating education issues

# The Challenges and Rewards of School Board Service

- Difficult times = Difficult Decisions
- Inherent rewards
  - *Working to improve schools and student learning*
  - *Building a better future for our kids, our communities and our state*
  - *Strengthening our democracy through an educated citizenry*

# Education Reform: A Work in Progress

- Education Reform Act/1993 (HB 1209)
  - *Goal: All students graduate with knowledge and skills to “enjoy productive and satisfying lives.”*
  - *Emphasizes core academic areas plus critical thinking, problem-solving, and work ethic.*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- Three-part strategy
  - *Set high academic standards*
  - *Measure progress through assessments*
  - *Hold students and schools accountable for results*

- Part 1: Standards
  - *What are students expected to know?*
  - *Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRS)*
  - *Clear, challenging standards in nine academic areas*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- Part 2: Assessment
  - *Are schools and students making progress toward meeting standards?*
  - *Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)*
  - *Other measures (District, Classroom)*

- **Part 3: Accountability**
  - *What happens when students/schools are not meeting standards?*
  - *State Board of Education is developing an “accountability system”*
  - *Set improvement goals, identify those in need of assistance*
  - *Identify strategies to assist or intervene*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002
  - *Goal: "100% of students in each state proficient in reading, math and science by 2013-14 school year"*
  - *Similar to Washington State's education reform efforts*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- Under NCLB:
  - *Annual testing in reading and math for all students in grades 3-8; at least once in grades 10-12*
  - *Schools/districts must meet "AYP" or face increasing levels of consequences*
  - *Fully qualified teachers in every classroom*
  - *Students can choose to attend schools in another district*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- Basic Education Finance Reform
  - *A "Road Map" to 2018*
  - *Redefine Basic Education*
  - *Develop new funding formulas*
  - *Increase graduation credits (CORE 24)*
  - *Create teacher performance standards*
  - *Establish accountability system*

*Education Reform: A Work in Progress (continued)*

- Progress made, challenges ahead
  - *Most schools and districts focused on raising student academic achievement*
  - *Overall WASL scores are rising, but challenges remain*
  - *Schools must close the achievement gap, reduce the dropout rate*
  - *All Children Can Learn! (WSSDA Achievement Gap Task Force Report, Data Dashboards for School Directors)*

# Statewide System, Local Governance

- “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”

- *Article IX, Section 1*

*Washington State Constitution*

*Statewide System, Local Governance (continued)*

- School boards established by state law to govern their local districts
  - *Most funding provided by the Legislature and allocated by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).*
  - *OSPI and State Board of Education adopt rules to implement laws*
  - *School boards govern locally through district policies and budgets*

*Statewide System, Local Governance (continued)*

- Washington has 295 school districts, 1,477 school directors
  - *1,038,620 students statewide*
  - *104,000 employees*
  - *\$6.6 billion per year allocated by the state, plus \$1.6 billion from levies*
- School districts are often the largest “business” in the community

# The Governance Role of School Boards

- School boards are “governors” of the district, acting on behalf of the people in their community
- School directors are elected to exercise good judgment in guiding the district
- For all school boards, the bottom line is student learning

*The Governance Role of School Boards (continued)*

- **Role 1: Vision**

- *School boards are responsible for determining where the district will be in the future*
- *It is essential that school boards work with their administrators and the community to identify the district's mission and set long-range goals, strategies and expected outcomes*

- Role 2: Structure
  - *The School Board develops the structure to fulfill the vision, including:*
    - Employing the superintendent
    - Developing a long-range plan
    - Adopting policies
    - Approving budgets
    - Setting standards for students and staff

- **Role 3: Accountability**
  - *Boards must continually assess performance in their districts*
    - Monitor student learning
    - Evaluate board, superintendent and staff performance
    - Provide corrections and support
    - Keep the public informed

- **Role 4: Advocacy**
  - *School directors are champions for public education and student learning*
  - *School directors are relied upon for their opinions and experience with local education issues*
  - *As elected officials, advocate for your schools in the community and with your state and federal representatives*

# The Responsibilities of School Boards

- School directors have no legal authority as individuals
- Powers are exercised by a majority of the board (when in lawful session)
- Specific responsibilities include:
  - *Planning and goal setting*
  - *Employing and evaluating the superintendent*
  - *Setting district policy*

*The Responsibilities of School Boards (continued)*

- *Adopting an annual operating budget*
- *Making decisions about placing levies and bonds before voters*
- *Approving the instructional program*
- *Ratifying contracts negotiated with local bargaining units*

# The Leadership Team

- School directors and the superintendent make up the district's Leadership Team
- Board-Superintendent relations are the key to a successful district
- Understand and respect each others' roles

*The Leadership Team (continued)*

- A successful board-superintendent partnership is built on trust and mutual respect
  - *Frequent two-way communication*
  - *No surprises!*
  - *Well-defined roles*
  - *Professional growth*
  - *Regular evaluations*

*The Leadership Team (continued)*

- Once a decision is made, it is important for all parties to respect the board's decision
- Whenever possible, speak with "one voice" on decisions

# The Leadership Team Roles

## School Board

### GOVERNS

Decides What  
Requests Information  
Considers Issues  
Creates, Reviews and Adopts Policy  
Approves and Reviews Plans  
Monitors Progress  
Contracts with Personnel  
Approves Evaluation Criteria  
and Procedures  
Reviews and Approves Budget  
Represents Public Interests

## Superintendent

### MANAGES

Decides How  
Seeks and Provides Information  
Provides Recommendations  
Recommends and Carries Out Policy  
Implements Plans  
Reports Progress  
Supervises Hiring Process & Practices  
Supervises and Evaluates  
Personnel  
Formulates Budget  
Acts in Public Interest

# Frequently Asked Questions

- The “most frequent” FAQ’s...
  - *Will I be paid?*
  - *Do I have to report my personal finances to the PDC?*
  - *Am I personally liable for decisions I make on the school board?*

# Ethics for Effective Board Members

- Make sure your actions as a school director are guided by a sound, ethical code of conduct
  - *Make decisions based on facts and independent judgment*
  - *Take no private action that will compromise the district; avoid conflicts of interest*
  - *Be objective; keep an open mind*

*Ethics for Effective Board Members (continued)*

- *Keep your promises; don't make promises you can't keep*
- *Strive for cooperation and teamwork*
- *Keep your sense of humor*
- *Understand that change comes slowly*
- *Act in the interests of all students*

*Ethics for Effective Board Members (continued)*

- Don't forget your work ethic!
  - *Do your homework before board meetings*
  - *Do your best to attend every meeting*
  - *Stay current on local, state and federal education issues*
  - *Take part in board training programs*
  - *Attend other government/community meetings when possible*

# The School Board and the Law

- Laws and regulations governing school districts are numerous, complex and ever-changing
- Statutes (RCWs) and regulations (WACs) are compiled in the Common School Manual, published by OSPI
- Federal and state court decisions also affect school law

*The School Board and the Law (continued)*

- When legal issues arise, districts consult an attorney
  - *District staff counsel*
  - *Contracted private attorney*
- WSSDA can provide some assistance, but does not offer legal advice or act as legal counsel for schools

# Legal Requirements for School Board Meetings

- “Regular” meetings must be at least once a month
  - *Time, day and place must be spelled out in district policy*
  - *Must be held in the district*
- If “special” meetings are held, adequate notice must be given to board members and local news media

*Legal Requirements for School Board Meetings (continued)*

- A quorum (a majority) is needed to hold a meeting
  - *It is best – and sometimes required – that a majority of the board vote on action items*
- Accurate minutes must be kept of regular and special meetings
- Executive (“closed”) sessions may be held to discuss certain subjects

*Legal Requirements for School Board Meetings (continued)*

- Executive sessions are allowed to:
  - *Review performance on publicly-bid contracts*
  - *Evaluate complaints or charges brought against an employee*
  - *Evaluate a job applicant's qualifications or conduct an employee performance review*
  - *Confer with legal counsel regarding actual or potential litigation involving the district*

*Legal Requirements for School Board Meetings (continued)*

- Sensitive, controversial or uncomfortable subjects are not a justification for executive session
- “Private” meetings are allowed for:
  - *Quasi-judicial matters, e.g. student disciplinary hearings*
  - *Planning for collective bargaining or reviewing contract proposals during negotiations*

# Employee Relations and Collective Bargaining

- Since 1975, school districts have been required to bargain collectively with their employees
- Districts take different approaches
  - *Some hire bargainers*
  - *Some designate the superintendent or a staff member*
  - *Some include board members in bargaining*

*Employee Relations and Collective Bargaining (continued)*

- The Leadership Team must agree on the parameters of bargaining
- The board must be kept informed on the status of negotiations
- The board must act collectively; actions by individual board members may constitute an Unfair Labor Practice

*Employee Relations and Collective Bargaining (continued)*

- Sometimes strikes are inevitable, but they should be avoided if possible
- Remember that effective employee relations are continuous
- Ultimately, the board must make decisions about budget priorities and the district's long-range objectives
- If a strike does occur, resources include ERNN, WSSDA and WASA

# Education Acronyms

- Seemingly endless education-related abbreviations and acronyms
- “Educationese” is a barrier to communication — limit use of buzz words and acronyms in board meetings and other public forums
- If you do use acronyms, explain what they mean

# WSSDA: Your Organization

“The Washington State School Directors’ Association provides leadership, advocacy and services to support public school directors’ efforts to improve student learning.”

*WSSDA: Your Organization (continued)*

- WSSDA was established in 1914 and is a state agency
- Authorized by the Legislature to be self-governed
- All school directors are automatically members
- Positions and policies developed by members through a grass-roots process

*WSSDA: Your Organization (continued)*

- WSSDA Services:
  - *Board training and professional development*
  - *Strategic planning and policy assistance*
  - *Information/communication services*
  - *Governmental relations and advocacy*
  - *Networking opportunities*
- Be sure to attend the WSSDA Annual Conference!

# Other Sources

- Help is just around the corner...
  - *WSSDA*
  - *Your superintendent*
  - *Educational Service Districts*
  - *Other board members*
  - *OSPI, State Board of Education*
  - *WASA, AWSP, PTA*
  - *Local teacher associations*