



**DOVER SCHOOL  
DISTRICT**

## DOVER SCHOOL BOARD – AGENDA

Meeting Type: **Workshop #1**  
Meeting Location: **Room 305, McConnell Center**  
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, January 13, 2015**  
Meeting Time: **6:30 pm**

- A. ROLL CALL**
- B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- C. CITIZEN'S FORUM (Limited to Agenda Items Only)**
- D. SCHOOL BOARD TRAINING AND Q & A WITH BARRETT CHRISTINA (NHSBA)**
- E. ADJOURNMENT**

## **NHSBA Sample Policy**

### **BCA - SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER ETHICS**

(Download policy)

*Category R*

Each board member shall comply with the following ethical provisions:

1. Attend all regularly scheduled Board meetings, insofar as possible, and become informed concerning issues to be considered at those meetings.
2. Make decisions only after full discussion at public Board meetings; render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.
3. Seek systematic communications with students, staff, and members of the community.
4. Work respectfully with other Board members to achieve the educational goals of the school district by encouraging the free expression of opinions by all Board members.
5. Communicate to other Board members and the Superintendent expressions of public reaction to Board policies and school programs.
6. Be informed about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school board associations.
7. Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff, and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.
8. Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law or is received in confidence or executive session.
9. Recognize that no individual member has authority to speak or act for the entire Board, except as specifically designated to do so by Board action.
10. Recognize that final Board actions will be supported by all members of the Board; take no private action that will compromise the Board or administration; and refrain from private actions which undermine or compromise official Board action.
11. Display and demonstrate courtesy and decorum toward fellow Board members at all public meetings and in all public statements.

#### *Appendix BCA-R*

Revised: May 2006

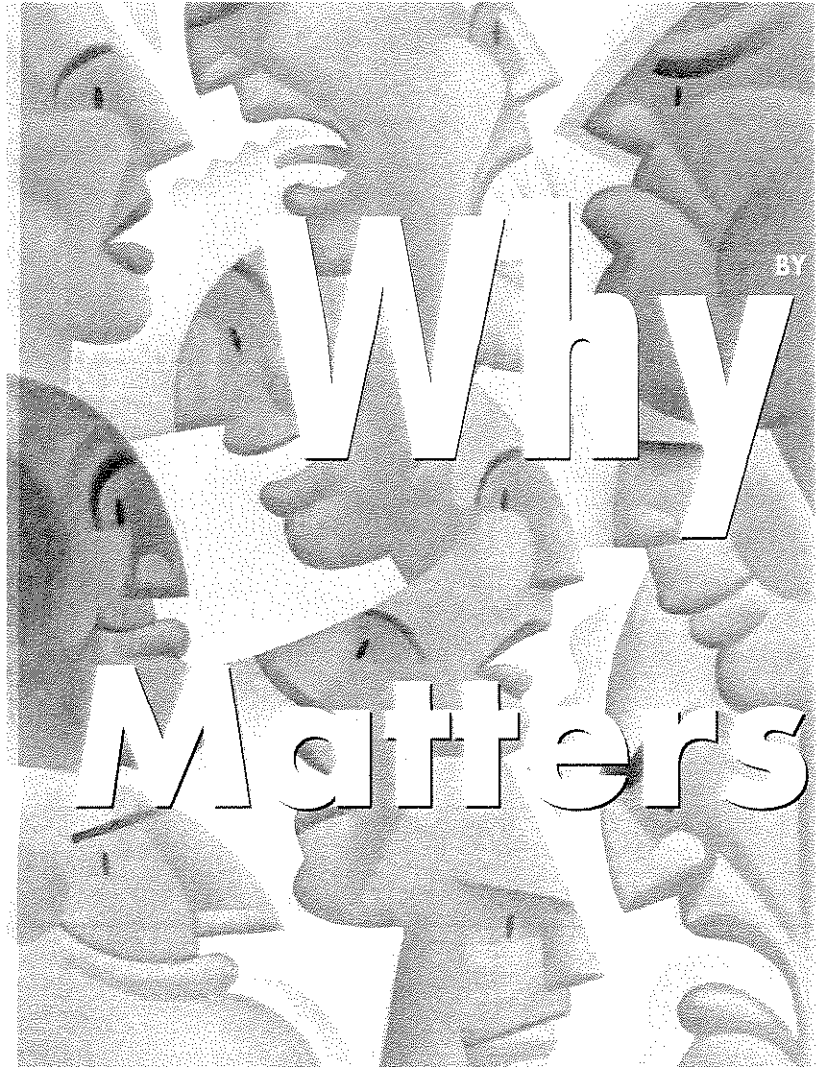
Reviewed: February 2004

Revised: November 1999

Revised: July 1998

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BY LINDA J. DAWSON AND RANDY QUINN

# Board Culture

*Allowed to go unchecked,  
boardroom dysfunction  
will erode the public's trust*

**A** school board's most critical responsibility is to safeguard the public's trust in public education. That trust hinges on a clear, unerring organizational mission to educate *all* students and challenge their level of achievement. Once that trust is lost, it is difficult to regain it.

As community members, we trust that our school board can define what it wants the schools to achieve for students and delegate the attainment of that vision to trained professionals who know how to achieve it. We trust that the board monitors and evaluates the performance of the organization and of the CEO/superintendent. We trust that the board and its members will hold themselves accountable to one another and to the community of people they were elected or appointed to serve and represent.

Mainly, we trust that members of the board can find ways to work together. We trust that despite personal or pedagogical or philosophical differences, they will work maturely and civilly to meet the needs and hopes of all students in the district. And, we trust that they will have the skills to discuss, argue, and represent their individual points of view but ultimately vote and move forward as a democratic body to serve a diverse citizenry that expects a reasonable return on its investment.

Can school boards live up to these expectations? Is it reasonable to expect that public school boards should be made

up of board members who are committed to creating an ethical culture and building the public's trust and support?

The expectations may be reasonable, but experience suggests we are far from achieving it. In our work with school boards nationwide, we are encountering with increasing and alarming frequency the rebel board member who chooses not to act for the public good, opting instead to promote a private agenda or advance the demands of a special interest.

Even more alarming is the trend for fellow board members to tolerate one member's unethical and self-righteous behavior. It is amazing how much power a single member can wield over an entire board—even when the others do not share the same views and tactics. These board members usually march to a different drummer—and they have found that they can make the entire board march to their drummer, too.

These mavericks may be a small percentage of any board, but they become a tyranny of the minority, forcing their will on the majority. They constitute a powerfully destructive force that is handicapping, if not destroying, effective board work. The result is a climate of public mistrust—not only of school boards but of public education at large.

### **Behaviors that erode the public's trust**

Most school boards are made up of good people who want to make a positive difference in the districts they serve. But we

have seen good board members who allow themselves to be completely taken over by one individual who refuses to be a functioning member of the board. In their effort to be “nice” to each other, they allow behaviors they know to be destructive to the board and the district to continue unchecked.

They permit a single member to dictate what they will and will not spend their time doing, to limit or delay significant actions that need to be taken, to direct major staff activities without board authorization, and to take over agendas with unrelated and irrelevant motions and comments. They leave unchallenged public comments that are demeaning to the staff and other members of the board.

Consider the following real-life scenarios that we have observed over the past few years:

#### Case Study A: The Queen Syndrome

Sandra has come on the board to take charge of operations. The professionals can educate, but they can't possibly operate a multimillion-dollar enterprise without her tenacious vigilance. In her opinion, this lackadaisical board needs a watchdog to make sure buildings are built on time and without change orders. Finances must be scrutinized and every line item explained. Vendor complaints of injustice in the contracting process must be examined and reexamined.

At board meetings, Sandra takes advantage of every opportunity to put staff members in the hot seat with remarks that start, “Can you explain? ...” “How could you let? ...” or “Do you mean to tell me? ...”

She garners increasing public attention with her veiled and unveiled innuendos and accusations. She likes the notoriety. She dismisses the idea of the superintendent ever appearing on television or at political or social events. “That’s the board’s role,” Sandra declares.

Through careful politicking, Sandra has recently been named board vice chair. She is working to defeat her board colleagues who are running for reelection and is increasingly revved up, trying to flex her muscles over all board decisions.

The superintendent and staff are stressed, trying to focus time and energy on their main job of educating the students and operating the district effectively. The board is worn down and worn out.

#### Case Study B: The Champion Syndrome

Milt delivers. He sees himself as the lone voice for the special-interest groups and individuals in the community. Since that is Milt’s primary reason for serving on the board, all other concerns come second. His job is to fight at the table for special consideration and then to deliver on promises.

He questions the integrity of the other board members. He accuses them of not understanding or caring about “his” constituents. He enjoys offering evidence to refute every recommendation the superintendent makes and even writes lengthy counter-comments on the superintendent’s weekly newsletter to the board. The confidentiality of executive sessions has lit-

tle or no application to him—his responsibility is to his constituents.

Milt views facts as mere points to be manipulated and staff members as people who are meant to be distrusted. He accepts efforts to bridge misunderstandings and find common ground only for the night of the retreat—with the daylight comes renewed vigor and commitment to the fight.

The superintendent has had a long and honored career, but the idea of leaving before his contract is up is beginning to look attractive. Senior staff members are frustrated and question why the other board members fail to confront this destructiveness. The local paper has an unending source for new stories that question the competence of board and staff members alike. And, discontent is growing among diverse factions of the community.

#### Case Study C: The Keeper-of-All-Knowledge Syndrome

Thomas is a native of the community who takes great pride in serving his hometown. He considers it his rightful role to be the repository of all information about district dealings. Every hiring, extension of tenure, curriculum decision, and building project must be scrutinized through laborious committee and board processes to satisfy his hunger for facts and figures.

Thomas needs to know everything, every detail—right now. Otherwise, he complains, “How am I supposed to answer questions when I get phone calls?” Or he says, “I can’t look stupid and say I don’t know. It’s my job to know—my constituents believe we have the answers to any concern they have.”

The highest sin, in his view, is not being informed before everyone else is. “I heard about this incident on the television, not from you,” he fumes at the superintendent. “Your job is to keep us informed!”

The superintendent and senior staff members labor to get information to the board members in a timely fashion. But, some decisions seem to be clearly within the purview of the staff, with the board informed after the fact. For some operational decisions, it doesn’t occur to staff members that the board would even care.

But Thomas cares. He punctuates board meetings with comments like, “I wish we had known,” or “Once again, we have failed to be informed.” Staff members look forward to board meetings with all the enthusiasm of awaiting a root canal—they never know when Thomas will inflict a public tongue-lashing, chastising them for their “purposeful intent to keep the board in the dark.”

#### Improving board culture

We could continue with other examples, and you can no doubt add your own. In the face of these kinds of behaviors, how can a high-profile board address its own culture, its own commitment to ethical behavior, its vested trusteeship to build broad community trust and support for its school system? We have several suggestions:

1. *Resolve to govern as a body, not as individuals.* Board members should represent their individual perspectives

## Boards behaving badly

Consider the following checklist of destructive board member behaviors. Be honest: Have you ever fallen into any of them yourself?

- Passive-aggressive behavior, including refusal to participate during meetings but openly criticizing the board's decision afterwards.
- Dominating meetings by talking too much, intimidating other members, and shutting them up through bullying and ridicule.
- Publicly criticizing the board or the superintendent with the intent of promoting yourself and undermining public confidence in colleagues.
- Refusing to participate in board development, choosing instead to revel in "lone wolf" notoriety.
- Circumventing the superintendent to give directives to the staff.
- Trying to "fix things" for your constituents rather than referring problems to the district for a systemic fix.
- Declaring your First Amendment right to say and do as you please, without regard for the responsibility you have assumed as a member of the board to work for the whole.

Often, the individuals who manifest these behaviors are bright people who are accomplished in some field and gifted with a measure of ability that, if used properly, could reap enormous benefit for the board and district. Instead, they choose to strike out on their own and refuse to engage as constructive members of the board.—L.J.D. and R.Q.

and rigorously deliberate issues at the board table, but they must resolve to act as a single entity through the most powerful tool in a democracy: the vote.

This commitment should be written in policy, and it should be self-monitored routinely by the board to ensure full compliance. Then the board majority must faithfully practice the commitment. A single board member should never be allowed to override the whole to dictate the actions, the timing, the agenda, or any other aspect of the board's or the staff's operations.

2. *Develop a board member code of conduct.* The code, which should be adopted as board policy, should articulate written values by which the board will responsibly self-govern. Once adopted, the policy should be routinely monitored for compliance by all members.

Whenever new members come on board, the code of conduct should be reviewed for understanding and reaffirmation. Members should be expected to comply with the agreed upon code, without exception. If a member fails to comply, the board has reason *and responsibility* to privately and even publicly question the behavior as a violation of board policy. Individual situations must be dealt with, no matter how difficult that is. The board expects the superintendent to deal with policy vio-

lations by members of the school staff; the board must be equally diligent in confronting violations that fall in its area of responsibility.

3. *Ensure that individual points of view are heard.* Encourage rigorous floor debate and deliberation to explore conflicts and perspectives. This is demanded by our democratic society. But once a vote is taken, every member should accept the majority vote to provide clarity of direction to staff and the community.

4. *Encourage rigorous and frank dialogue with the public.* As a board, explore significant issues in public forums and other representative groups. Such dialogue gives board members the perspective they need to govern clearly on behalf of the diverse community they serve. It also exposes the narrow agendas promoted by board members who seek to represent only a small fraction of the broader public.

5. *Don't ignore bad behavior.* If your board has a rogue member, the first step is to make every reasonable effort to encourage that member to work with the group in a contributing manner. This could mean conversations initiated by the president or other members, discussions with the full board, facilitated retreats to get to the root of the behavior, and any other reasonable attempt to establish full understanding of board behavioral expectations.

6. *Consider public censure.* Continuing and willful violation of the board's code of conduct challenges the board to take further steps. This requires soul-searching, courage, and determination to be an ethical board working for the benefit of the entire community. After pursuing logical and reasonable attempts to address and mitigate destructive behaviors, the only avenue left might be public censure—that is, a public statement that the board has chosen to publicly separate itself from the destructive member.

This is not an easy choice to make. Certainly, the board will want to exhaust every other option first. But, failure to act allows the misery to go without challenge and the damage to remain unchecked and unchallenged, thereby signaling to staff and community that this board cannot responsibly govern itself—let alone govern the organization.

7. *Reaffirm the board's role in relation to the staff.* The staff cannot work to achieve defined goals for students if individual board members direct the staff's work. The board must reaffirm to the superintendent and staff that they are not to perform any work directed by a single board member. If such demands or requests are made, they should be referred by staff to the superintendent and by the superintendent to the full board for disposition by the majority.

8. *Be strategic and speak the truth.* Because some boards value unity and civility at any cost, they too often succumb to the temptation to allow renegade, political, undermining behaviors to go unchecked. Some board members even refuse to speak out truthfully when they are being attacked or challenged or when campaigns are run against them.

Who benefits from not confronting maverick board members? Certainly not the board. At the board table or when re-

sponding to news queries or meeting with small groups of citizens or staff, speak the truth without rancor. "My colleague knows exactly what happened," you might say, "and I challenge him to speak the truth about this issue in the context of our mission and purpose here of governing a system to educate children."

9. **Recruit citizens of high ethics and integrity to serve on the board.** Target people who want to work with a board made up of members who value good governance, people who care about the district as a whole and not their own self-promotion. Make sure your school system has a legacy of good governance by people who have a demonstrated ability to express ethics and integrity not only in theory or talk, but also in how they live their lives.

### **The will to act**

Our democracy and the school boards that are a manifestation of it need clear, consistent, value-centered leaders who are unafraid to confront rogue board members. When these mavericks' destructive behavior is allowed to continue, the result is erosion of public trust in public education. Progress is slowed by poor morale and fear. Good staff members and leaders leave, and it becomes difficult to attract good people to replace

them. The community suffers the image of a toxic system that is unable to govern, lead, or educate.

This is happening in districts across the country.

No one can tell a school board when enough is enough; the board must decide that for itself. When board members realize they are being dominated and hindered by a single member, when it becomes apparent that one member is compromising the effectiveness of the board and the district, it is time to act.

We hope your board has not fallen victim to this situation. It is not a pleasant, constructive, or wholesome environment in which to govern a district. But if you find yourself there, our best advice is this: Don't allow bad behavior to go unchallenged for the sake of temporary peace and harmony. In the long term, the cost of doing nothing is far too great.

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Dawson and Quinn have consulted with boards across the United States and on five continents. Their primary focus is on working with school boards, using board policy and data to focus on increasing student achievement.

## Eight characteristics of effective school boards: At a glance

What makes an effective school board – one that positively impacts student achievement? From a research perspective, it's a complex question. It involves evaluating virtually all functions of a board, from internal governance and policy formulation to communication with teachers, building administrators, and the public.

But the research that exists is clear: boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. So what do these boards do? Here are eight characteristics:

- 1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.** Effective boards make sure these goals remain the district's top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them. In contrast, low-achieving boards “were only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives” (Lighthouse I). “There was little evidence of a pervasive focus on school renewal at any level when it was not present at the board level,” researchers said. (Lighthouse I)
- 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.** In high-achieving districts, poverty, lack of parental involvement and other factors were described as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses. Board members expected to see improvements in student achievement quickly as a result of initiatives. In low-achieving districts, board members frequently referred to external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success. (Lighthouse I)
- 3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.** In interviews with hundreds of board members and staff across districts, researchers Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman found that high-performing boards focused on establishing a vision supported by policies that targeted student achievement. Poor governance was characterized by factors such as micro-management by the board.
- 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.** In high-achieving districts, school board members could provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and school board members received information from many different sources, including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals and teachers. Findings and research were shared among all board members. (Lighthouse I; Waters and Marzano) By comparison, school boards in low-achieving districts were likely to cite communication and outreach barriers. Staff members from low-achieving districts often said they didn't know the board members at all.
- 5. Effective school boards are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.** The Lighthouse I study showed that board members in high-achieving districts identified specific student needs through data, and justified decisions based on that data. Board members regularly sought such data and were not shy about discussing it, even if it was negative. By comparison, board members in low-achieving districts tended to greet data with a “blaming” perspective, describing teachers, students and families as major causes for low performance. In these districts, board members frequently discussed their decisions through anecdotes and personal experiences rather than by citing data. They left it to the superintendent to interpret the data and recommend solutions.
- 6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals. According to researchers LaRocque and Coleman, effective boards saw a responsibility to maintain high standards even in the midst of budget challenges.** “To this end, the successful boards supported extensive professional development programs for administrators and teachers, even during times of [fiscal] restraint.” In low-achieving districts, however, board members said teachers made their own decisions on staff development based on perceived needs in the classroom or for certification.
- 7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.** In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent who matched this vision. In contrast, in stagnant districts, boards were slow to define a vision and often recruited a superintendent with his or her own ideas and platform, leading the board and superintendent to not be in alignment. (MDRC/Council of Great City Schools)

**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.** High-achieving districts had formal, deliberate training for new board members. They also often gathered to discuss specific topics. Low-achieving districts had board members who said they did not learn together except when the superintendent or other staff members made presentations of data. (Lighthouse I; LFA; LaRocque and Coleman)

Though the research on school board effectiveness is in the beginning stages, the studies included in this report make it clear that school boards in high-achieving districts have attitudes, knowledge and approaches that separate them from their counterparts in lower-achieving districts. In this era of fiscal constraints and a national environment focused on accountability, boards in high-performing districts can provide an important blueprint for success. In the process, they can offer a road map for school districts nationwide.

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This summary is based on a report written for the Center for Public Education by Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien. O'Brien is an independent education researcher and consultant in Alexandria, Virginia. Much of her work has focused on access to quality education for disadvantaged and minority populations. O'Brien has a Master of Public Administration from George Washington University and a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Loyola University, Chicago. Chuck Dervarics is an education writer and former editor of Report on Preschool Programs, a national independent newsletter on pre-k, Head Start, and child care policy. As a writer and researcher, he has contributed to case studies and research projects of the Southern Education Foundation, the American Council on Education, and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, often focusing on issues facing disadvantaged populations. Dervarics has a Bachelors degree from George Washington University.

## The Cultured Club

*How can you make sure that your board members work through complex issues in a harmonious fashion and treat one other with respect? Define and work on the board's 'culture'*

**“Y**ou can't believe how negative our board's culture is,” a participant in my governance workshop for superintendents and school board members observed several months ago. “I'd really like to know how we can turn things around, because the constant bickering and rude comments are wearing us all out emotionally, and we're building up quite a backlog of unaddressed issues, to boot.”

The board member went on to say: “Frankly, it's not much fun being on the board. Actually, it's becoming pretty depressing, and I'm wondering if I'll

run again when my term is up.”

Sound familiar? This isn't an unusual lament in my workshops. I frequently hear about dysfunctional board “cultures,” and I'm often asked for practical guidance on building a positive one. My initial response is always, as it was on this most recent occasion, to ask for a definition of “culture.”

It never takes long to establish that “culture” is an amorphous concept that's hard to get your arms around, and that it means lots of things to different people. For example, to the participants in this particular workshop it

meant “what it feels like on this board,” “our shared values,” “how we treat each other in our deliberations,” “our guidelines for interacting with each other,” and “how we go about doing our governing work,” to mention just a few of the responses.

Without trying to pin the concept down precisely, let's just say that a board's culture reflects the beliefs, principles, and attitudes about working together in the governing enterprise. We know a positive board culture when we see it: Members work through complex issues in a harmonious fashion and treat one other with respect.

When a board culture is described as “dysfunctional,” in my experience, it usually means that the governing process is either highly adversarial and/or characterized by uncivil interactions, and it almost always takes a tremendous toll over time, not just in terms of emotional stress, but also in poor decision-making.

So what can we do to build a positive board culture that is conducive to high-impact governing?

### **Changed attitudes not enough**

Experience has taught me that there's no point in trying to preach to board members or teach them how to become a more positive, cohesive governing team. More effective, but not by much, is the formal team-building or human relations approach. I often tell workshop participants a true story to illustrate the point.

A few years ago I was retained to work with a school board that, six months earlier, had spent a whole weekend engaging in team-building exercises in a sylvan setting 25 miles



away from the district office. They worked with a very capable facilitator, as far as I could tell.

The event clearly met the “touchy-feely” gold standard. My early interviews with board members indicated that they really had gotten to know one another more deeply over the course of this very intensive weekend. They’d told one another the stories of their lives—where they’d grown up, about their mates and kids, the progression of their careers and interests—and had gotten down to brass tacks in terms of identifying barriers to communicating effectively.

They even managed to fashion a detailed set of guidelines for working together. One example was, “We will without fail treat each other with respect, never impugning each other’s motives or personally attacking each other; we will listen respectfully to each other’s points when considering an issue, without interruption; we will never cut each other down publicly, even though we might disagree vehemently on a particular issue under consideration.”

As I listened to the accounts of this weekend in my interviews, I couldn’t help but be impressed by the nostalgia board members felt about the experience. It was clearly a shining milestone in their history, and I even felt tears—well, maybe a tear or two—as board members described the weekend.

### **A fading glow**

So, you might rightly ask at this point, why was I retained to work with this board when it already had gone through an intensive team-building experience? The fact is, it was anything but a cohesive governing team when I entered the picture, and the warm glow of that intensive weekend together hadn’t lasted long.

When I arrived, bickering was rife, tensions were high, nerves were badly frayed, and issues were piling up undressed. It hadn’t taken long to erase

the glow as they worked to deal with challenging governing questions.

The district was dealing with, among other things, a serious budget shortfall projected for the year after next, demographic shifts that raised the issue of redrawing building boundaries, a seriously underperforming elementary school, and growing community opposition to a critical capital construction tax levy under consideration.

So why, when the board had been well trained to work together as a governing team and everyone agreed to guidelines for civil discourse, did the problems persist?

In a nutshell, the board members returned to basically the same governing organization they had left when they set out for the retreat. It was the same governing structure with the same governing processes. Attitudes changed, commitments changed, the people changed, but the governing organization they returned to was the one they’d left. So it didn’t take long to erase the glow.

### **A balanced approach**

What was the solution? Put simply, structure and process had to be updated so that new attitudes and commitments could be translated into concrete governing results. In other words, the governing architecture needed to be modernized.

Over the years, I’ve learned again and again that high-impact boards that make a significant difference in their districts’ affairs—the ones that handle the truly high-stakes, really complex issues effectively—marry the board members’ commitment to a well-designed structure and process. The result is a positive board culture.

This particular story had a happy ending. We employed a task force of board members and the superintendent to come up with very detailed, practical enhancements in board structure and governing processes, including standing committees that correspond to the

board’s basic governing functions (board operations, planning and development, performance monitoring, and community relations).

The task force also developed a well-designed process for board involvement in strategic and operational planning/budget development.

By marrying structure and process to attitude—pairing people with the “machine,” if you will—we made it possible to build and maintain a positive, productive board culture with real staying power.

Isn’t that what we’re all seeking? ■

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Doug Eadie (doug@dougeadie.com), an *ASBJ* contributing editor, is founder and CEO of Doug Eadie & Company. He is the author of 17 books on board and CEO leadership, including *Five Habits of High-Impact School Boards* (Scarecrow Education and National School Boards Association, 2005).



# Climate and Culture

**Why your board should pay attention to the attitudes of students and staff**

**BY DEL STOVER**

**U**rban school leaders who want to reform low-performing schools usually embark on a series of obvious strategies: strengthening the curriculum, promoting sound instructional practices, providing more staff training, and tutoring students who need help. But in this swirl of activity, an important piece of the puzzle is often overlooked: the attitudes and beliefs of students, teachers, and administrators.

Good climate and culture are key to the success of urban schools, according to researchers who've spent years studying the subtle interpersonal dynamics that take place among students and educators. Many are convinced that a closer look at climate and culture can help urban boards determine why one school is academically successful and—more important—why another

is poor performing and consistently failing to improve.

A school's climate "is probably the best predictor of whether a school will have high achievement"—more so than the socioeconomic status of students or the school's past levels of achievement, says Clete Bulach, associate professor emeritus of educational leadership at the University of West Georgia

and a long-time researcher in the field.

To some degree, school board members accept this claim. After all, a school where students are enthusiastic about learning should do better than one where students are bored or have low expectations. And a school where teachers feel empowered to tackle instructional challenges should fare better than a school where the staff is demoralized and lacks enthusiasm.

But researchers such as Bulach contend that school boards consistently overlook this simple truth when seeking to improve poor-performing schools. They invest heavily in staff development, tutoring programs, or a new instructional initiative—yet make little or no effort to ensure that conditions within a school are receptive to these reform efforts.

"You can implement a good-quality improvement plan and knowledgeable, data-driven decision making, but if the [staff] doesn't believe that things can be improved, it's not going to implement [changes] with the same depth or energy or commitment," says Kent D. Peterson, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and coauthor of *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership*.

#### ACADEMIC IMPACT

What's true for staff is no less true for students, says Brian Perkins, a member of the New Haven, Conn., school board and a researcher who studies school climate. Perkins says urban leaders must be cognizant of the distractions from learning that stem from negative student perceptions about school safety, teachers, and the learning process.

Perkins, chairman of the Council of Urban Boards of Education's Steering Committee, is author of a national survey of 33,000 urban students. The survey, funded by CUBE and the National School Boards Association, will be released nationally in December.

According to Perkins, the findings should provide policymakers with their clearest picture yet about the experiences, attitudes, and nonacademic development of children in urban schools.

"We don't have a full picture of what's going on in the nation's urban schools," Perkins says. "We have a range of tests we use to assess students to determine where the schools are in an academic space, but we don't assess their psychological well-being—their social health—in a comprehensive way."

How important is it to assess these less-tangible aspects of the school experience? How much do school climate and culture affect academic performance?

Given the many factors that affect academic achievement, it's difficult to quantify, but decades of studies make clear that a cor-

relation exists. Take, for example, a case study cited in Peterson's book, coauthored with University of Southern California professor Terrence E. Deal.

The study, based on research in 1995, compared two schools serving minority student populations of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. One school had a 60-percent dropout rate and student grades that were

*Academic performance is not the only measure of a school's success.*

largely in the D and F range. At the other school, students scored in the top quartile in math and first in the district in language arts.

Why the contrast? According to the study, Peterson and Deal note, the only discernable difference was that the poor-performing school had terrible teacher morale. The higher-performing school had a learning environment of passion and commitment and a "positive, focused culture."

In the most basic sense, researchers say, the act of learning is a very human endeavor—one that is undermined if students are distracted by bullies, teachers fail to challenge students, or struggling students are ignored and forgotten.

Research conducted by Perkins offers an example of this subtle interplay and its effects. In one district, he discovered that some students had given up on school. After watching drive-by shootings, drug overdoses, domestic violence, and deaths due to AIDS and cancer, these students didn't expect to live past age 25.

"That has great implications for achievement motivation," he says. "You have 14- or 17-year-olds who would say, 'Why bother? Why do I need to learn algebra?'"

Still, Perkins notes that academic performance is not the only measure of a school's success. It also is important whether students feel safe, believe adults care about them, and develop values of respect and cit-

izenship. The data in the CUBE survey, he says, will help school districts "identify and address those issues" that affect student learning.

Of course, data is useful only if school boards are serious about responding to the problems identified. Based on his observations over the years, Bulach is somewhat skeptical about the long-term commitment

of school officials to stay on top of the measures they might implement.

"What I see is spitting in the wind," he says. "Everyone goes through the motions. 'Yeah,' they say, 'we evaluate our school climate. We do a school improvement plan.' But does it ever improve? Many times it does not."

#### CLIMATE VS. CULTURE

Some educators use the terms "climate" and "culture" interchangeably, but researchers in the field say there is an important difference between the two. How students and staff members feel about their school is climate. *Why* they feel the way they do is determined by culture—by the values and behavior of those in the school.

For example, an unresolved problem with bullies can have a detrimental effect on a school's climate. But why does the bullying exist? Are children not being taught to respect one another? Are teachers unresponsive to complaints, thus emboldening bullies and discouraging victims from speaking up?

Asking such questions—digging deeper into attitudes and behavior (the culture)—may be the only way to achieve real change, Perkins says. He recalls one school where, after conducting a climate survey, he found that 70 percent of students reported a lack of respect for teachers, and 90 percent of

teachers reported that they didn't feel as though they are respected.

The findings convinced the principal and staff to do some soul searching—and seek changes in the culture that had prompted such disrespect. They conducted focus groups with students, boosted teacher training, brought in speakers to talk to students, and established a conflict mediation program to help students and teachers deal with problems in a less-confrontational way.

Over the next few years, these efforts to change the school's culture led to improvements in the climate. Indeed, the impact went far beyond original expectations. Surveys showed an improvement in student attitudes about teachers, suspensions declined, fewer students were sent to the principal's office, daily attendance rose, and more students in class meant more time spent learning.

That's not surprising to Bulach, who says there's often a spillover effect when officials begin attacking negative attitudes and beliefs. "If you change behaviors related to respect to others, you'll change behaviors related to compassion, courtesy, kindness, consideration, forgiveness."

For that reason, Bulach suggests school officials make a focused response to the findings of a climate survey. Don't try to tackle too much, he says. Choose your battles carefully.

"The biggest problem I see with schools and their attempts to improve [school climate] is they are not focused," Bulach says. "Their school improvement plan has too many things in it. My belief is that if you want to improve culture and climate, you focus on one aspect and you hammer it."

John Shindler, director of the Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate, says survey results seldom show a school doing well in some areas of school climate and poorly in others. A school's climate is good, bad, or mediocre, he believes.

Some very basic factors are "at the heart of what makes a good climate," Schindler says. "You can't separate climate from in-

struction. You can't separate climate from leadership. You can't separate climate from the purposeful things you do to build a relationship with students. If a school is doing great on one thing, it tends to all fall in line."

#### LEADERSHIP IS EVERYTHING

In the final analysis, researchers say, any serious look at school climate and culture should lead policymakers to a simple—and challenging—conclusion: Almost everything depends on leadership.

Forget about fancy programs or interventions. Attitudes and behaviors in a school are not going to change unless the principal understands how to work with the existing culture—and knows how to help it evolve into a healthier one.

This reality puts school boards in a tough spot, says Larry Sackney, who has studied school climate as a professor of educational administration at the University of Saskatchewan. A serious effort to improve school climate—and thus to reform schools at all—means getting serious about hiring good principals who know how to change the school culture.

"You need a principal who has the ability to develop a team—and get it moving," he says. "Leadership plays a very important role in setting the tone in a school."

School boards also need to accept that some principals fall short of the mark. While mentoring and training can help, they might not be enough, and these principals will need to go. "Leadership is a funny thing," Sackney says. "For the principal who's in trouble, it's not easy to turn it around."

A similar hard line is needed with a school's worst teachers, Sackney says. School boards need to encourage and back principals who want to remove burned out and demoralized teachers.

"If you live in a climate where people are constantly bitching, it drags and wears people down," he says. "It's got a detrimental effect. If you can't see things turning

around, if there's constant negativity ... you may have to do some staff shuffling."

Finally, school board members who want to improve school climate should look in the mirror, Sackney says. Boards that bicker at meetings, badmouth superintendents, or put politics above instruction set a corrosive tone that eventually permeates the entire school district.

"It starts with the boards themselves and works its way through the system," he says. "If the staff doesn't have respect for the school board ... it really demoralizes and drags everyone down. The board has to set the climate—and that sets the tone for the rest of the system."

Cynthia Knox, a school board member in Texas' Fort Bend Independent School District, says her board started a discussion of race and culture several years ago, and it has been good for the school board and the community.

"It helps us look at the whole child," she says. "It helps us as board members to show sensitivity. Yes, we have a big focus on [academic] accountability, but we also need a big focus on children who don't want to be in school or who see too much fighting."

Feedback from students made clear that "things were happening in our school related to race," she says. The district has responded with a diversity initiative that involves an advisory council, staff training, and a No Place for Hate campaign developed by the Anti-Defamation League. The district also has participated in the CUBE survey.

"My hope is we will use the same kind of proactive, positive approach in response" to the survey findings, Knox says. "We need to show the value of this for students, what [the survey] has found for us, and what we will do about it."

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## 2014 Roles and Responsibilities

### I. Key Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards

#### 1. Set and establish policy. (Ed 303, Ed 306, various NH RSAs)

##### (A) Ed 303 – Duties of School Boards:

- Ed 303.01(a) – Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the recruitment, employment, evaluation and dismissal of teachers and other employees
- Ed 303.01(b) – Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the purchase of equipment, supplies, or services.
- Ed 303.01(i) – Adopt a rule to ensure that there shall be no unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, creed, color, marital status, national origin, or disability.
- Ed 303.01(j) – Establish a policy on sexual harassment

##### (B) Various NH RSAs

- Bullying
- Concussions
- Use of restraints
- Truancy
- Background checks
- Etc.

(C) Ed 306.04(a). The local school board shall adopt and implement written policies and procedures relative to:

- (1) Absenteeism and attendance;
- (2) Promoting school safety;
- (3) Discipline;
- (4) Records retention;
- (5) Character and citizenship;
- (6) Meeting the instructional needs of each individual student;
- (7) Student hazing;
- (8) Student harassment, including bullying, as required by RSA 193-F;
- (9) Sexual harassment;
- (10) Reporting of suspected abuse/neglect;
- (11) Promotion of a school environment that is conducive to learning and supports strong family and community partnerships;
- (12) Distance education, if the district chooses to offer distance education as provided in Ed 306.22;
- (13) Providing alternative means of earning credit toward a high school diploma or equivalent such as extended learning opportunities, and distance education to meet the requirements of RSA 193:1,(h) until July 1, 2015;
- (14) Providing alternative means of demonstrating achievement;
- (15) How a credit can be earned;
- (16) How a credit used to track achievement of graduation competencies;
- (17) Recommending developmentally appropriate daily physical activity;
- (18) Behavior management and intervention for students;
- (19) Homeless students;
- (20) Wellness;
- (21) Providing immediate and adequate emergency care for students and school personnel;
- (22) Meeting the special physical health needs of students;
- (23) Supporting the availability and distribution of healthy foods and beverages that create a healthy environment in all schools throughout all school buildings during the school day;
- (24) Air quality in school buildings as required by RSA 200:48;
- (25) Graduation competencies consistent with RSA 193-C:3 that students are expected to demonstrate for graduation in content areas no later than July 1, 2015 as follows;
- (26) Graduation competencies consistent with RSA 193-C:3.

2. **Set the school district's budget. (Ed 303; RSA 32)**
  - Ed 303.01(e) – Prepare an annual budget in accordance with RSA 32.
  - RSA 32:5 – Budget Preparation
  
3. **Hire a Superintendent. (RSA 194-C)**
  - RSA 194-C:4. Each school administrative unit or single school district shall provide the following superintendent services...
  
4. **Evaluate the Superintendent. (Ed 303; contract)**
  - Ed 303.01(k). School boards shall annually evaluate the superintendent based on written criteria established by the school board (s)/SAU board.
  - Usually contained in superintendent contracts.
  
5. **Conduct hearings and serve as an adjudicative body. (Various statutes and rules)**
  - A. Parents & Students
    - Manifest Educational Hardship
    - Long-term Suspensions (>10 days) and Expulsions
    - Discrimination/Sexual Harassment Policy
    - Transportation/Bus Removal
    - Bullying
    - Residency
    - Early Admission to First Grade
    - Curriculum
  
  - B. Employees
    - Dismissals
    - Non-renewals
    - Disciplinary Removals/Paid and Unpaid Suspensions
    - Constitutional Complaints (Free Speech, Academic Freedom, etc)
    - Labor/Grievances

**6. Collective bargaining. (RSA 273-A)**

- 273-A:3, I. It is the obligation of the public employer and the employee organization certified by the board as the exclusive representative of the bargaining unit to negotiate in good faith.

**7. Communicate with the public – keep the public informed of board actions.**

- RSA 91-A, The Right to Know law.
- Local school board policies.

**8. Strategic Planning – long and short-term goals, plans and objectives.**

- Ed 303.01(g) - determine the educational goals of the district, develop long-range plans and identify measurable and attainable short-term objectives.

## **II. What should guide school board action with respect to its roles and responsibilities?**

- (1) Vision – setting the vision for education in the community.
- (2) Structure – establishing the structure of the school district to implement the educational vision.
- (3) Accountability – establishing academic standards to achieve the vision, assessing the academic performance and formulating a plan to help all students.
- (4) Advocacy – being an advocate for the schools, students, staff and administration within your district.

### **III. The Hardest Lessons:**

Experienced board members from across the nation were asked to identify the most difficult lesson or fact they had to learn about board service. Here's what they said most often.

- Learning to acknowledge publicly that you have no power and authority as an individual board member; that only the board as a whole can make policies and decisions for the school district.
- Determining what your function is on the board and how to accomplish it effectively.
- That no matter what you *think* you know about board service when you first come on the board, you still have a lot to learn.
- Recognizing the difference between setting policy (the board's job) and administering the schools (the superintendent's job).
- That you must represent *all* the students. Your decisions must be made in the interest of the total school system and not made solely for special groups or interests.
- Learning how to respond to the complaints and concerns of citizens, school administrators, and other staff.
- That change comes slowly.
- That you can't solve everyone's problems by yourself.
- That effective board service means being able to hold the minority viewpoint when voting on a given issue; then openly supporting the majority vote of the board in your community.
- That the primary focus of all board decisions must be student achievement.

#### **IV. The Superintendent's Role: (Ed 303, Ed 303, RSA 194-C)**

##### **1. Implement School Board Policy (Ed 302, Ed 303)**

###### **(A) Ed 302.02 – Substantive Duties of Superintendents.**

- Ed 302.02(a) – Nominate all certified staff and appoint other employees in accordance with state law, the rules of the state board and school board policies.
- Ed 302.02(d) – Be responsible for developing and recommending to the school board or boards within the school administrative unit the annual budget for the support of the educational program and for the operation and maintenance of schools within the district or districts and the school administrative unit in accordance with school board policy.
- Ed 302.02(e) – Be responsible for developing and maintaining an accounting system and financial reporting procedures for all funds in accordance with local school board policy, and local and state laws.
- Ed 302.02(f) – Be responsible for the development of an educational plan including curriculum, instruction, and assessment programs for the district or districts and for recommending a program of studies suitable to the needs of the pupils and the community in accordance with local school board policies, state statutes and state board rules.
- Ed 302.02(r) – Be responsible for the implementation and review of school district policies.

##### **2. Nominate professional staff. (RSA 189:39; RSA 189:14-a; Ed 302)**

- RSA 189:39 - Superintendents shall nominate and school boards elect all teachers employed in the schools in their school administrative unit, providing such teachers hold a valid educational credential issued by the state board of education.
- Ed 302.02(a) – Nominate all certified staff and appoint other employees in accordance with state law, the rules of the state board and school board policies.

### 3. RSA 194-C:4

Each school administrative unit or single school district shall provide the following superintendent services:

I. An educational mission which indicates how the interests of pupils will be served under the administrative structure.

II. Governance, organizational structure, and implementation of administrative services including, but not limited to:

(a) Payroll, cash flow, bills, records and files, accounts, reporting requirements, funds management, audits, and coordination with the treasurer, and advisory boards on policies necessary for compliance with all state and federal laws regarding purchasing.

(b) Recruitment, supervision, and evaluation of staff; labor contract negotiation support and the processing of grievances; arrangement for mediation, fact finding, or arbitration; and management of all employee benefits and procedural requirements.

(c) Development, review, and evaluation of curriculum, coordination of the implementation of various curricula, provisions of staff training and professional development, and development and recommendation of policies and practices necessary for compliance relating to curriculum and instruction.

(d) Compliance with laws, regulations, and rules regarding special education, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act, home education, minimum standards, student records, sexual harassment, and other matters as may from time to time occur.

(e) Pupil achievement assessment through grading and state and national assessment procedures and the methods of assessment to be used.

(f) The on-going assessment of district needs relating to student population, program facilities and regulations.

(g) Writing, receiving, disbursement, and the meeting of all federal, state, and local compliance requirements.

(h) Oversight of the provision of insurance, appropriate hearings, litigation, and court issues.

(i) School board operations and the relationship between the board and the district administration.

(j) The daily administration and provision of educational services to students at the school facility including, but not limited to, fiscal affairs; staff, student, and parent safety and building issues; and dealing with citizens at large.

(k) Assignment, usage, and maintenance of administrative and school facilities.

(l) Designation of number, grade or age levels and, as applicable, other information about students to be served.

(m) Pupil governance and discipline, including age-appropriate due process procedures.

(n) Administrative staffing.

(o) Pupil transportation.

(p) Annual budget, inclusive of all sources of funding.

(q) School calendar arrangements and the number and duration of days pupils are to be served pursuant to RSA 189:1.

**4. Other duties and responsibilities determined by statute or local board policy.**

- Notably, all the areas and topics listed under RSA 194-C:4 relate to school board policy. Your board likely has policies covering all those areas and topics.

## **V. Better Meeting Guidelines**

- (1) Plan ahead.
  - Set your agenda in advance.
  - No “day of surprises” – if a member wants to discuss a matter – ask to have it put on the agenda or give your administrators and fellow board members advanced notice.
  - Read your materials before the board meeting.
  
- (2) Observe the rules of order. They allow the meeting to move forward in an orderly manner.
  - Public comments.
  - Agenda items.
  - Motions.
  - See “Becoming a Better Board Member” pages 58-60 for a checklist to use to establish effective and productive board meetings.
  
- (3) Practice respectful communication skills. It makes all the difference.

## **VI. Dealing With the Public**

- (1) Be sure the public attendees understand board meeting process. Set their expectations ahead of time.
- (2) Be gracious and welcoming, the public is a guest at your meeting.
- (3) Watch your tone, communication skills and non-verbal behaviors.
- (4) Listen well and reflect back to be sure you have understood what you heard.
- (5) Establish protocol via board policy. Have copies of the policy at the meeting in the event this becomes an issue.

## **PART Ed 302 DUTIES OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS**

### **Ed 302.01 Executive Officer.**

(a) The superintendent shall:

(1) Serve as the executive officer of the local school district or districts within the school administrative unit (SAU);

(2) Be responsible for the overall administrative and leadership services of the SAU; and

(3) Perform the duties specified in the section.

(b) The superintendent shall be responsible for planning and managing the administrative and leadership services of the local school district or districts within the school administrative unit subject to statutory requirements, these rules, and the policies of the local districts

(c) The administrative and leadership services shall be defined and directed by the governing body employing the superintendent.

(d) Such local district services shall include but not be limited to the following areas:

(1) Personnel;

(2) Finance;

(3) Communication/community relations;

(4) Student service;

(5) Maintenance/capital improvement;

(6) Curriculum;

(7) Instruction;

(8) Assessment;

(9) Short and long range planning;

(10) Governance for student achievement;

(11) Policy research;

(12) Implementation, and review; and

(13) Overall leadership on educational issues.

(e) The superintendent shall develop and maintain a system of public schools, staffed by certified educators, qualified professionals, and persons providing support services, subject to statutory requirements, these rules, and the policies of the local districts (s).

(f) The superintendent shall provide, develop and implement procedures to achieve educational objectives within the local school district or districts with the school administrative unit.

(g) The superintendent shall be directly responsible to the local school district or districts within the school administrative unit board.

(h) The superintendent may nominate for school administrative unit board appointment one or more assistants, including assistant superintendents, and business administrators. The superintendent may assign duties for the efficient management of the school administrative unit.

**Ed 302.02 Substantive Duties.** The superintendent shall in addition to those duties outlined in Ed 302.01:

(a) Nominate all certified staff and appoint other employees in accordance with state law, the rules of the state board and school board policies;

(b) Direct and supervise the work of all employees of the district or districts within the school administrative unit and shall have all powers necessary to make such direction effective, as outlined in RSA 194-C:4. While the superintendent has ultimate responsibility, he/she may delegate powers and duties to other personnel.

(c) Be responsible for the selection and purchase of textbooks and all other supplemental materials and supplies in accordance with the policies of the school board and the state board and see that the same are distributed to the school, accurately accounted for and economically used;

(d) Be responsible for developing and recommending to the school board or boards within the school administrative unit the annual budget for the support of the educational program and for the operation and maintenance of schools within the district or districts and the school administrative unit in accordance with school board policy;

(e) Be responsible for developing and maintaining an accounting system and financial reporting procedures for all funds in accordance with local school board policy, and local and state laws;

(f) Be responsible for the development of an educational plan including curriculum, instruction, and assessment programs for the district or districts and for recommending a program of studies suitable to the needs of the pupils and the community in accordance with local school board policies, state statutes and state board rules;

(g) Remove a teacher or other employee of the district in accordance with RSA 189:31;

(h) Recommend the dismissal of certified staff to the board, which has the authority to dismiss in accordance with RSA 189:13;

(i) Provide for temporary staff to fill vacancies and provide supplies immediately needed for the operation of the schools;

(j) Be responsible for maintaining records and filing reports as required by the state board of education and the local school boards;

- (k) Admit pupils to the resident school district in accordance with the laws of the state and the rules of the state board and policies of the local board;
- (l) Direct pupils to assigned classes and grades, consistent with local school board policies;
- (m) Maintain a safe environment for pupils free of hazardous conditions;
- (n) Be responsible for the evaluation of personnel and programs in accordance with local school board policies;
- (o) Be responsible for implementation of state board rules, which apply in the area of the superintendents jurisdiction;
- (p) Be responsible for developing and recommending to the school board or boards within the school administrative unit an annual maintenance program and long-term capital improvement plan;
- (q) Be responsible for the implementation and recommendation to the school boards or boards within the school administrative unit a community relations and communications program; and
- (r) Be responsible for the implementation and review of school district policies.

## **PART Ed 303 DUTIES OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

**Ed 303.01 Substantive Duties.** Each school board shall:

- (a) Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the recruitment, employment, evaluation and dismissal of teachers and other employees and may delegate authority to the superintendent of schools to carry out the provisions of such policies provided that no teacher shall be employed who is not certified or who has not been nominated by the superintendent of schools and elected by the school board;
- (b) Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the purchase of equipment, supplies, or services and may delegate to the superintendent of schools the authority to make financial commitments in accordance with such policy;
- (c) Provide, through documented planning and public meetings and quorum votes, accommodation for all pupils in approved schools or other facilities in accordance with state law;
- (d) Provide required transportation of students consistent with these rules and provide that all school buildings and other learning environments be maintained in a manner consistent with standards of health and safety as required by these rules;

- (e) Prepare an annual budget in accordance with RSA 32 and comply with all federal and state laws and rules;
- (f) Hold meetings for the transaction of business at least once in 2 months and require the attendance of the superintendent or designee. The board shall cause a written record to be kept of each meeting in accordance with RSA 91-A;
- (g) In consultation with the superintendent and in accordance with statutes and rules of the state board of education, determine the educational goals of the district, develop long-range plans and identify measurable and attainable short-term objectives. The school board shall require the implementation of educational programs designed to reflect the goals and objectives and, further, the school board shall review such programs and make public the results of such investigation;
- (h) Exercise all powers and perform all duties vested in and imposed upon the school board by law or rules of the state board;
- (i) Adopt a rule to ensure that there shall be no unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, creed, color, marital status, national origin, or disability in educational programs or activities consistent with local standards which may be stricter in specific areas than the broader statewide standards;
- (j) Establish a policy on sexual harassment, written in age appropriate language and published and available in written form to all those who must comply, which includes, at a minimum, the elements specified below:
  - (1) A statement that sexual harassment is against the law and against school district policy;
  - (2) A definition of sexual harassment with examples of actions that might constitute sexual harassment;
  - (3) The names and roles of all persons involved in implementing the procedures;
  - (4) A description of the process so all parties know what to expect, including time frames and deadlines for investigation and resolution of complaints;
  - (5) A prohibition against retaliation toward anyone involved in a complaint;
  - (6) A description of possible penalties including termination;
  - (7) A requirement that a written factual report be produced regardless of the outcome of the investigation;
  - (8) At least one level of appeal of the investigators recommendation;

(9) A clear statement that someone can bypass the internal process and proceed directly to the New Hampshire commission on human rights, with address and phone number, or office of civil rights, with address and phone number; and

(k) Annually evaluate the superintendent based on written criteria established by the school board (s)/SAU board.