

Christian School Board Governance

GOVERNING FOR EXCELLENCE

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Strengthening Christian schools through service, community, advocacy and vision

Notes:

Governing for Excellence

Governance practices can be learned, refined and improved; however, there will always be an intangible, intuitive aspect. There is no manual that anticipates every situation – leadership is art and science / intuition and logic

Change is a process, not an event

Board development and progression is a journey. Give yourself, personally and communally, space to walk this journey of change together. Board progression is complicated and rarely occurs in a linear fashion.

Learning Target #1 – Understanding your role

You are a trustee.

- You are given responsibility over a school.
- Your role gives you a degree of authority and power.
- Members of your school society trust you.
- The trust and respect of your community can be tenuous and fragile.
- A trustee is a keeper. You have been given a task in trust.

Trustee is defined as “an individual person or member of a board given control or powers ... in trust with a legal obligation to administer it solely for the purposes specified.”

The parable of faithful servants, Matthew 25 –

They were entrusted with a task and expected to do something, to be active not passive. The role of a board members is not to “duck and cover” but to actively advance the mission and vision of the school.

Power is vested in the board as a whole and is executed during duly constituted meetings as outlined in your bylaws. An individual board member has no power.

As a board member, you are minding the business of the board not the business of other roles you may have in the school e.g. parent, spouse or constituent group.

Prime directive – newsletter.scsbc.net/2015/11/the-prime-directive

“You commit to acting in the best interest of the school’s mission and vision on behalf of the society and its members.”

Keeping our roles straight – when you meet as a board or act on behalf of the board, you are minding the business of the school and acting in the best interest of the school. Perhaps you should have a board member business card! The role is neither volunteer-helper or watchdog, but trustee of a vision and a mandate.

Duties of Directors and Directors’ Liability

There are three main legal duties of directors of non-profit organizations under Canadian law:

The Duty of Diligence: Diligent directors act prudently and in the best interests of the organization. Directors are well-informed and act cautiously, foreseeing potential risks and taking reasonable steps to manage those risks.

The Duty of Loyalty: Directors are required to put the organization's interests first, ahead of personal or other interests. Directors also have an obligation to keep organizational matters private and confidential.

The Duty of Obedience: Directors must comply with the organization's governing documents, and ensure that its committees and staff do as well. Directors must also ensure the organization complies with external rules and laws, in particular with respect to statutory obligations to its employees such as paying salaries and government remittances, providing holidays, and ensuring a safe work environment.

Learning Target #2 Key Board Responsibilities

The board has three main responsibilities: to *protect*; to *direct* and to *inspect*.

Protecting involves:

- knowing about the school's mission and goals.
- actively supporting and promoting the school's mission, vision, strategic goals, and policy positions within the community.
- representing the best interest of the organization and separating this interest from that of a particular child or constituency.
- having fiduciary responsibility for sound financial management

What does the board protect?

- the mission and purpose of the school
- the integrity of the school
- the finances of the school
- the legal risk and exposure of the school

The board is responsible for understanding and supporting the mission, ensuring that Christian distinctiveness is protected for future generations, understanding the *times* and ensuring that we remain biblically relevant in a changing world.

Directing occurs through

- vision setting
- strategic planning
- policy development

Dave Koetje reminds us that directing is high-level and forward-looking, not micro-managing daily affairs.

Board and administration need to have a shared understanding of where the line is between strategic oversight and operational management.

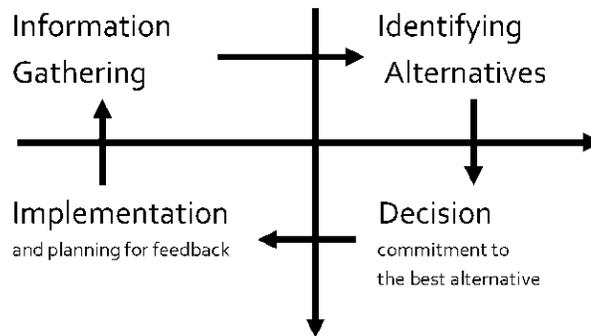
Selected standing committees can:

- support the work of the board to implement the school's strategic plan
- receive direction from the board – clear frameworks

- provide advice, options or recommendations to the board

Establish only essential committees such as finance and governance. Use task forces when possible. Avoid extremes of duplicating committee work or rubber stamping.

The Decision-Making Model



Inspecting includes:

- evaluating the lead educator
- self-assessing the board
- accessing community engagement

Policy for admin evaluation:

- have a clear cycle (SCSBC's recommendation is a two-year cycle of internal / external)
- engage the educator in the process
- base the evaluation on a clear job description, limits and accountabilities

The board needs to inspect itself by regularly monitoring its effectiveness. This is mostly self-assessment. Focus groups, interviews and surveys can be used.

Community stakeholders need to be engaged by the board and leadership to stay connected on significant issues – you want them cheering for your school.

Engagement happens at board discretion. Be intentional and focus on strategic objectives.

Use proven methods – town halls, surveys, focus groups, interviews.

Avoid engaging in and responding to the parking lot chatter of “armchair” principals.

Learning Target #3 – Board Procedures

Group Norms – your way of being together

- discussed
- agreed upon
- used as a guide
- reviewed and revised regularly

What agreed-upon behaviors, understandings, guidelines or norms will you personally need in order for you to safely and openly engage in this governing body?

In schools we sometimes *move intensely together!*

“If you continue to remain silent during incidents of brokenness, you are saying that this is how we do the business of living together here” ~ Lee Hollaar

Norms allow us to do so without creating undue friction.

Example – *CSC Standing Committee of Learning Group Norms* (reviewed before each meeting)

- confidentiality
- all voices and opinions are equally valued and solicited
- listen
- honesty, candor; differing opinions are acceptable
- structure through an agenda
- committing to be prepared for meetings
- option to defer rabbit trails / mindful of rabbit trails

A commitment letter articulates what is expected of you as a board members and formalizes your commitment. SCSBC has a sample available.

Confidentiality – What’s discussed in the board room stays in the board room. Board decisions are communicated by the board using an agreed upon method and time.

Accountability – One Voice – Unanimity is desirable on major decisions.

The Voice of Discussion and Dissent

Deliberate with many voices, but speak with one voice

The Voice of Consensus

The one voice that establishes policy to guide the school

The Voice of Unity

The importance of the peaceful voice of unity

What if a member cannot support a motion? Options? Take time to think, pray and review. Move to a position of support (accepting the communal wisdom of fellow board members) or ... resign.

Conflict of interest are unavoidable and okay if handled properly. The board should have a policy to regulate conflicts of interest. (An SCSBC sample is available.)

Any real or potential conflict of interest:

- needs to be declared
- needs to be discussed
- needs to have an action determined and recorded in the minutes

Board Membership – passing the baton

- Select candidates intentionally – interview and screen before nominating
- Select members who can fill a niche on the board (legal, finance, pastoral)

There is a fine balance between decision-making and engaging the community

- Regular strategic engagement is critical
- Not an invitation to micromanage but keeping them looped in at a high level
- Board controls when and how

There is a fine balance between confidentiality and communication

- What does your community need to know to maintain connectedness to the school and confidence in the leadership?
- How and when do you communicate with external constituency?

Learning Target #4 – A Governance Model

