



Central Okanagan
Public Schools
Together We Learn

Central Okanagan Public Schools

TRUSTEE HANDBOOK

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GOVERNANCE BEGINS WITH TRUSTEES

The seven trustees of the Central Okanagan Board of Education work together to form a governance team that is capable of leading the school district to high levels of achievement. The trustees demonstrate a deep commitment to students, collaboration, integrity, trust and service to the community. They understand the importance of working together to raise student achievement for all children in the District.

The Board also demonstrates an understanding that effective governance is challenging work. Creating and sustaining an effective governance structure for the District requires a high level of commitment to teamwork, concentration, focus and patience.

The Board governs the District, and trustees serve together as a unified team. Effective Boards are composed of effective trustees; individuals who govern with trust, integrity and a commitment to leadership on behalf of all the students in the District.

Governance Culture:

“Well-functioning, successful teams usually have chemistry that can’t be quantified. They seem to get into a virtuous cycle in which one good quality builds on another.”

- Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, Harvard Business Review September 2002

Effective Boards operate with formally adopted protocols that provide an operational framework for how Board members will work together. Protocols are simply descriptions of the “way we do things here” and are very important as guides for what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Protocols exist whether they are identified or not. When they are not overtly stated, they become the habits by which groups perpetuate behaviours, some of which can become toxic and very detrimental to the effective operation of the Board.

An excellent governance culture for a district is characterized by a Board that operates in an environment of trust, respect and professional demeanor at all times. The Board sets the tone for the entire district in how it carries out its governance responsibilities.

Dr. David Walker of Queen's University, in his writing on Canadian Leadership, provides one of the best descriptions of effective leadership "style". He writes:

"Our style is effective, a quiet exercise of leadership with no flash or ostentation, but charisma. It is solid and trustworthy, humble and collaborative, attentive, and based on values. We like fair play and rules, peace, order and good government. We are an honest broker. As the world becomes smaller and more global, the Canadian style is more prized."

He further explains:

"The Canadian leadership brand as encompassing five key things:

Integrity – we value ethical, honest and fair practices.

Quality – we focus on producing high-quality work and taking accountability for our actions.

Resourcefulness – we are very resourceful and display a can-do attitude and hopefulness for the future.

Inclusiveness – we seek, respect and integrate different perspectives into one through collaboration.

Harmony – we are very strong at collaboration, problem-solving and conflict resolution which is why we're respected for our peace keeping abilities around the world!"

FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TRUSTEES

The fundamental characteristics are:

Mindfulness:

The single most important characteristic of effective trustees is the development of a governance mindset. Knowing how to think about governance, and always applying that knowledge and understanding during Board operations, are the essential characteristics of trustee leaders. Governance mindfulness is understanding the role and responsibilities of the governing Board and how individual trustee leadership can enhance the positive, value-added impact.

Focus:

Mindful trustee leaders always maintain a strategic focus in their Board work. They understand that they are not on the Board to administer the District, but rather to govern it. They understand that governance requires a broad, systemic view of the District, and approach all their Board responsibilities with a clear sense of focus on achieving the strategic outcomes they have set.

Manner:

Mindful trustee leaders are always respectful of other Trustees' opinions. They understand that how they govern is often more important than what they say or do. Working toward a common goal with other independently elected individuals in a collaborative setting, requires patience, understanding, respect and most importantly, common courtesy. They model the civic behaviour that they expect the students in the district to exhibit when they are adults.

Preparation:

Mindful trustee leaders are always prepared. They do their preparation work. They are committed to doing the hard work of being a trustee and leading on behalf of the community they serve. They are committed to making decisions based on quality information, evidence and data.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMING BOARD

High performing Boards have four essential characteristics that are the building blocks of effective governance:

High performing Boards operate as a unified Board, with a unity of purpose, working together toward common goals.

High performing Boards understand, agree and work within the defined role and responsibilities of the Board.

High performing Boards create and sustain over time, a positive governance culture.

High performing Boards establish and work within Board protocols and policies that create a structure for the Board's work.

I. UNITY OF PURPOSE

Definition of Unity of Purpose:

Finding common ground from which to govern is at the heart of Board of Education leadership. This is the single most important characteristic of effective governance. An organization or system simply cannot be governed effectively with a consistently divided Board. Divided Boards are characterized by rigid, locked-in positions that degrade into fixed voting patterns. However, being unified does not mean not having disagreements and spirited discussions. On the contrary, highly effective Boards are often characterized by having thoughtful and spirited discussions and dialogue about policy alternatives prior to decisions being made. A unified or united Board does not require unanimous votes. It is not a “rubber stamp” Board.

Highly effective Boards manage their disagreements; they do not let disagreements manage them. They are defined by their effectiveness as a team and the results in the District, not by who wins their arguments or succeeds in having their individual agendas implemented. The test of a unified Board is not how they vote, but what they do after the vote.

Why is it important for a Board to govern in a unified manner?

Three realities:

1. Trustees campaign as an individual but serve as a member of a team.
2. Trustees do not have the authority to affect the education system individually.
3. A Trustee’s success as a Board member is inextricably tied to the success of the Board.

The beliefs the Board shares about students, schools, and the community are reflected in the District’s mission statements, vision, values and strategic goals, and represent the glue that bonds the Board together.

The Central Okanagan School District has adopted documents that reflect these values and beliefs. They are:

Purpose: "To educate students in a safe, inclusive, equitable, and inspirational learning environment where each learner develops the attributes and competencies to flourish in a global community."

Vision: "Together We Learn"

Cultural Values: "Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, Equity and Empathy"

Overarching Goal: "Our learners will develop foundational skills and core curricular competencies so that they can be empowered to follow their passions and strengths and thrive holistically as resilient and engaged global citizens."

Student Achievement:

The Board is committed to student achievement which is reflected by the District's:

- committed teachers
- focus on being a learning organization
- high standards of excellence
- concern for the most deserving, those at risk, and the less fortunate
- collaborative relationship with our staff, our community and our parents
- commitment to continuous improvement
- programs and opportunities for all students
- graduation rate

Characteristics of Effective Boards:

The Board identified the following seven characteristics as the standards appropriate for the Central Okanagan Public School Board which reflected its core beliefs.

Standards of Board effectiveness:

1. Stay focused on student achievement and student wellness.
2. Govern together – as a team with a common focus and purpose.
3. Govern in a transparent, open and accessible manner.
4. Govern in collaboration with the superintendent and staff.
5. Maintain a high standard of integrity.
6. Make high quality policy decisions based upon evidence and data.
7. Undertake continuous learning as individuals and as a Board.

II. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Definition of Role:

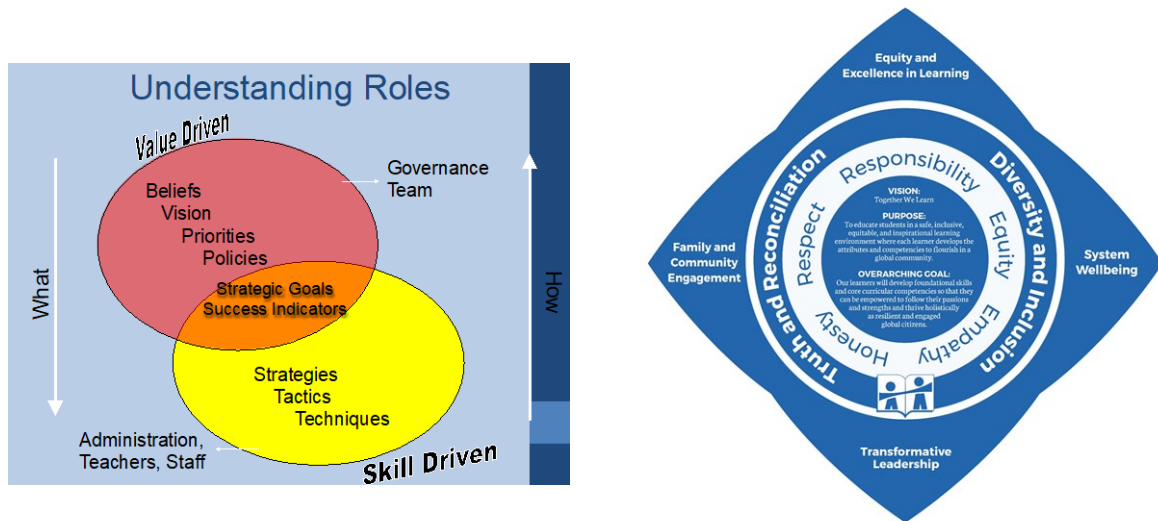
One of the most important characteristics of effective Boards is their understanding and agreement of the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the superintendent in governing the school district. The Central Okanagan School District has a definition of the role of the Board in Policy 125 “Trustee Code of Ethics”:

4.3 “... the primary function of the Board is to establish policies by which the schools are to be administered, and that the administration of the educational program and the conduct of school business shall be left to the Superintendent of Schools and his/her staff.”

Generally, governance is about setting policy by defining the “what” of the organization, and administration is focused on the “how” policy gets implemented. If the discussion is focused on long-term outcomes, they tend to be strategic; if it is about short-term objectives or incremental steps, they tend to be administrative. But rarely is it that simple. Since the line between policy and administration can vary from topic to topic or issue to issue, it is essential that the superintendent and the Board have a clear, mutually agreed upon understanding of how the responsibilities will be defined.

While the line between policy and administration can sometimes be blurred at the Board level, the individual Board member's role is well defined. Individual Board members have no authority as individuals to take action or direct policy beyond their work as collective members of the Board as a whole.

Often the Board's role is defined as a belief-based role as depicted in the Venn Diagram pictured below. The staff's role is skill-based.



Responsibilities:

In addition to the role of the Board as belief-based and strategic or policy based in nature, there are clearly defined responsibilities that are common to most, if not all, Boards as governing organizations. They are:

1. Set Direction for the District
 - Assess District needs utilizing evidence, data and advice provided by staff.
 - Generate, review or revise initiatives that set direction (beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators).
2. Establish an Effective and Efficient Structure for the School District
 - Employ the superintendent and set policy for hiring of other personnel.
 - Monitor implementation of curriculum and approve new Board/Authority Authorized (BAA) courses, Academies, new programs and/or Memorandum of Understandings.
 - Set budget priorities and adopt the budget.
 - Set capital priorities and oversee facility issues.

3. Provide Support

- Recognize exemplary performance by students and staff.
- Make consistent decisions and provide resources that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals.
- Be prepared to explain and defend Board decisions, while being free to express their own personal opinion.
- Participate in school and District events.
- Use every opportunity to speak positively about the District's programs and activities.
- Be knowledgeable about District efforts enough to explain them to the public.

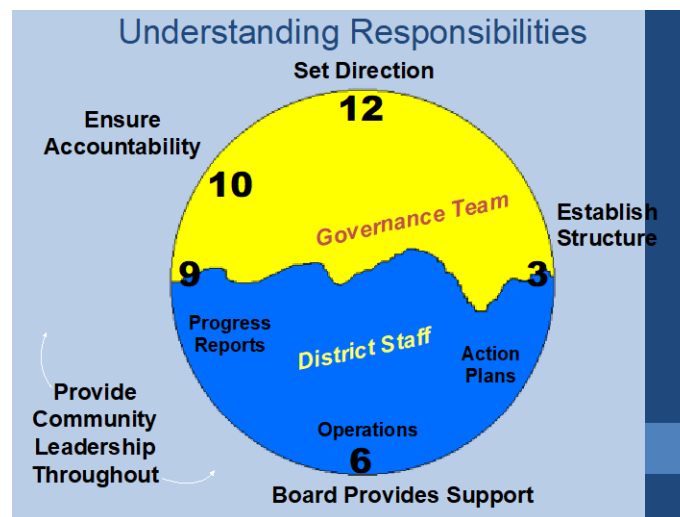
4. Ensure Accountability to the Public

- Evaluate the superintendent.
- Monitor, review and revise policies.
- Monitor student achievement and program effectiveness and effect program changes as indicated.
- Monitor and adjust District finances.

5. Provide Community Leadership

- Engage and involve the community in district schools and activities.
- Communicate clear information about policies, programs and fiscal conditions of the District.
- Educate the community and the media about issues facing the District and public education.
- Advocate for children, District programs and public education to the general public, community, and Provincial leaders.

The policy clock graphic below is a helpful way to visualize the five responsibilities and their relationship to each other. The wavy line between the governance team and District staff was noted as a reflection of the fluid and adaptive relationship between the work of the Board and the work of staff.



III. GOVERNANCE POLICY

Governance Policy, operating with similar principles, will govern at the highest level of effectiveness and excellence. The Board of Education's Policy 125 outlines a Trustee Code of Ethics that describes current protocols. They are:

“Respect the rights of fellow trustees, employees, students and parents by:

- 5.1 Encouraging free expression of opinion by trustees and seeking regular communication between the Board and students, staff, and the community;*
- 5.2 Listening to what other trustees and other individuals or groups may have to say before making final decisions based on all available facts;*
- 5.3 Working with other trustees in a spirit of harmony and cooperation to observe proper decorum and behaviour, to encourage full and open discussions, to treat others with respect and consideration, and not to withhold or conceal any information necessary for making informed decisions;*
- 5.4 Refraining from making unjustified personal attacks on the reputation or views of other trustees or staff, but reserving the right to make honest and respectful criticism;*
- 5.5 Abiding by majority decisions of the Board, (while being free to repeat and support their own personal opinion); and,*
- 5.6 Maintaining confidentiality on all school district business which, if disclosed, may harm individuals or the schools.”*

IV. PROTOCOLS

One of the most important characteristics of effective Boards is the development of an organizational structure that provides a well-defined framework for governance of the District. To support this framework, the Board has established protocols which stand alone and provide ongoing, day-to-day guidance to the work of the Board.

The following protocols were developed to support and promote the effectiveness of the governance team and to ensure a positive and productive working relationship among the trustees, the superintendent, District staff, students, and the community. The protocols were developed for and by the members of the governance team, and may be modified over time as needed.

CENTRAL OKANAGAN SCHOOL DISTRICT PROTOCOLS

1. COMMUNITY OR PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION WITH TRUSTEES

Rationale:

- Board members want to be accessible, responsive, consistent and fair in dealings with complaints and concerns from staff, students and the community.
- The Board values open communication and a timely resolution of issues.
- Board members may take receiving complaints as an opportunity to explain the role of Trustees.

Protocol:

Communication – Dissemination of School District Information

- Use discretion and deal with as appropriate. Trustees must ensure that the appropriate confidentiality of sensitive information is maintained.

Concerns or Issues

When approached with an issue or concern:

- As outlined in Policy 460 “Appeals”, encourage addressing the issue with the individual who can most directly help them with their concerns, e.g. Teacher, Principal, Director, Assistant Superintendent, or Superintendent, understanding that they may have already exhausted these avenues. (Trustees should use their discretion depending on the issue.)
 - Ensure the individual is aware of resources that are in place, e.g. policies, or COPAC information/Executive Member contact information.
 - Advise the person that an advocate (e.g. family, friend, or union representative) may accompany them to an appeal.
 - If appropriate, advise them of the BCCPAC Advocacy resources www.bccpac.bc.ca
- Listen openly, being careful to remain neutral.
- Remind staff and members of the community that no individual Trustee has the authority to solve the issue/concern.
- As appropriate, explain the District’s appeal process.
- Be satisfied that the complaint/issue has been handled (follow up with the person involved).

2. ROLE OF THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Rationale:

- Every year the Board of Education will elect a Board Chairperson.
- The Board Chairperson is the spokesperson for the Board and sets the tone and shape of the public’s perception of the School Board.
- The Board Chairperson acts as a mentor and provides guidance and assistance to Trustees.
- Each Board member must have the opportunity to express his or her viewpoint during Board deliberation.

Protocol:

The Board Chairperson:

- Serves as the primary spokesperson for the Board.
- Presides at all meetings in accordance with Board policy and, in the absence of policy, with *Robert's Rules of Order*.
- Is an ex-officio member of all standing and ad hoc committees.
- Provides, on behalf of the Board, appropriate public comment on Board actions when requested to do so (or when, in the Chairperson's judgment, such comment will improve public understanding of Board action).
- Provides an annual report at the Board's annual meeting, except in an election year when the report shall be provided at the Board meeting prior to the inaugural meeting.
- Works with the Superintendent, following the Board meeting, to ensure that there is appropriate follow up and clarification of possible options for the Board.

3. ROLE OF THE BOARD COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**Rationale:**

- Every year the Board of Education will elect the Board Committee Chairpersons.
- The Board Committee Chairperson is the spokesperson for the Committee and sets the tone and shape of the public's perception of each Committee.
- Each Committee member must have the opportunity to express his or her viewpoint during Committee deliberation.

Protocol:

The Board Committee Chairperson:

- Serves as the primary spokesperson for the Committee.
- Works with the senior staff representative to draft the Committee Meeting Agenda.
- Presides at all meetings in accordance with Board policy and, in the absence of policy, with *Robert's Rules of Order*.

- Provides, on behalf of the Committee, appropriate public comment on Committee actions when requested to do so (or when, in the Chairperson's judgment, such comment will improve public understanding of Committee action).
- Works with the senior staff representative, following the Committee meeting, to ensure that there is appropriate follow up and clarification of possible options for the Committee and the Board. The main responsibility of the senior staff member assigned to the committee is to provide information and support to the Chairperson of the committee.
- Ensures that all policies directly pertaining to the Committee function are reviewed and evaluated at least once every three years.
- Introduces Committee recommended motions at the Board Meeting.

4. QUESTIONS ANSWERED BEFORE THE BOARD MEETING

(What is the appropriate protocol for wanting more information before a Board meeting regarding an agenda item?)

Rationale:

- Board members need to be fully informed before making a decision.

Protocol:

- Phone the Superintendent of Schools/CEO or the staff support to the Board Committee, to forewarn them that you will be asking for more information at the Board/Committee Meeting (this allows information to be gathered for the meeting).
- Upon receiving such a request from a Trustee, the Superintendent of Schools/CEO or the staff support to the Board Committee will ensure that the Trustee is advised if providing an answer to the question will require an extensive amount of time.
- If it is a minor item, with no consequence to the rest of the Board, and requires minimal staff time, contact the Superintendent of Schools/CEO for the answer without a follow up at the Board Meeting.

5. BOARD GOVERNANCE/SELF-EVALUATION

Rationale:

- Conducting a governance self-evaluation demonstrates accountability to the community and the willingness of the governance team to strengthen and improve governance practices.

Protocol:

The Board supports continuous improvement through ongoing evaluation of governance effectiveness.

- The self-evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect, evaluate, prioritize and focus on strengthening the governance team. This may include individual Trustee evaluation.
- The Board will participate in at least one workshop annually to review the governance goals, governance team agreements and processes, and to participate in a self-evaluation process.
- The evaluation process will align with assessment of progress on District goals and the Superintendent's evaluation.
- At the conclusion of the annual governance self-evaluation, the Board will reach agreement on one to two governance goals/objectives that are directly linked to the District goals.

6. TRUSTEE COMMUNICATION (Social Media and E-mail)

Rationale:

- Board members should be fully focused on the business at hand at the Board table.

Protocol:

- Electronic devices should only be used for effective meeting operation.
- Technology should be available to support individual choice, in order to enable Trustees to perform their duties as effectively as possible.
- Ensure that electronic communication is sent out in a format that is pertinent to all respondents and clearly indicates that the information should be read and replied to.
- The School District E-mail should be used for business purposes only.

7. LIAISON TRUSTEES

Rationale:

- Schools in the District are divided between Trustees to ensure that Trustees have knowledge of their liaison schools and the programs that are achieving the District's goals.
- Liaison Trustees show appreciation and support and help celebrate student, staff and community successes. Parents and community members are then aware of their Liaison Trustee contact.
- The Trustee will act as a liaison between the schools and the Board of Education.
- Being a liaison to a school will provide Trustees with an opportunity to explain the role of individual Trustees and the Board of Education.

Protocol:

Trustees will:

- Call individual site principals ahead of time to arrange a visit.
- Be cautious about interrupting the learning environment. Teachers will understand that they do not need to interrupt a lesson when a Trustee visits a classroom.
- When first appointed, introduce themselves to the school administration and staff.
- Request that they be kept informed of any assemblies or special functions and receive a copy of the school newsletter and/or bulletins.
- Attempt to visit each liaison school at least twice in the school year.
- If possible, take part in activities at other schools throughout the District.
- Help facilitate communication between the school community and the Board of Education.
- Attend school PAC meetings when invited. (Trustees will contact the school PAC President and advise of their availability for PAC meetings.)