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School Governance Position Statement June 2007

“Strong collaborative leadership from school boards and superintendents must be a driving force in dealing with the direct and indirect effects of the great changes and challenges facing society and our nation’s schools. Neither board members nor superintendents can operate effectively without a thorough knowledge of and support for the other’s role.”

Roles and Relationships: School Boards and Superintendents, (a joint publication of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA), 1994, p.6)

“As a leadership team the board and the superintendent must create a system-wide approach to improving student achievement, recognizing the board’s appropriate role as the community’s representative and the superintendent’s appropriate role as the professionally trained educator.”

Team Leadership for Student Achievement, (Henderson, Henry, Saks & Wright, 2001, a joint publication of the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators, p. ix)

Preface:

Idaho’s educational leaders recognize the power and potential to improve teaching, learning and student achievement in our public schools through cooperative, purposeful and professional working relationships between superintendents and Boards of Education. At a time when public education is under tremendous pressure from the newly enacted “No Child Left Behind Law”; the Supreme Court ruling finding private school vouchers constitutional; budget cuts at the state and local levels; and other issues, it is critical that this relationship be as strong as possible.

The position paper presented below is ISBA’s and IASA’s attempt to specifically communicate our view on the nature of and expectations for superintendent and board working relationships. It is presented as both a description for statewide reference and a call to actions for superintendents and boards to work toward strengthening these relationships, which, we believe will resulting in greater student success. It is our attempt to develop a “best practice” in this area, understanding that many of the issues addressed must be determined at the local level.

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Our hope is that this position paper becomes the focus of statewide discussions and local conversations among and between boards of educations and superintendents to provide the best leadership possible for the students in our schools.

For success, the board of education and the superintendent of schools in any school district must share the same goals and visions for providing students with quality education. While board and superintendent roles are different, they should complement each other. For the greatest success, board members and the superintendent must work collaboratively as a governance team, with each clear on their roles and areas of responsibility, each respecting the others' roles and responsibilities and collaborating effectively on those responsibilities that are shared.

In general, “the board is a legislative body that develops, evaluates and oversees education policies. The superintendent is the professional educator chosen by the board to implement policies and to provide professional leadership (and vision) for a district’s schools.” (AASA-NSBA, 1994, p. 7)

According to the 1994 study of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA), school districts with high-quality governance teams and high student achievement are characterized by excellent working relationships between the superintendent and boards of education.

The focus of both must always be “collaboration on behalf of children.”

References

- Fundamentals of School Board Membership, New Jersey School Boards Association, 1994.
- Getting There from Here, by Goodman, Richard H; Fulbright, Luann; and Zimmerman, Jr. , William G., New England School Development Council and Educational Research Service, 1997.
- Roles and Relationships: School Boards and Superintendents, a joint publication of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association, 1994.
- Team Leadership for Student Achievement, by Ellen Henderson, Jeannie Henry, Judith Brody Saks, and Anne Wright, a joint publication of the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators, 2001.
- Thinking Differently, by Richard H. Goodman and William G. Zimmerman, Jr., Educational Research Service and New England Development Council, 2000.

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The following delineation of roles and responsibilities should be followed with integrity and commitment to ensure that board members and superintendents fulfill the obligations to provide the best possible education for their school district's children.

Board of Education's Responsibilities

- To establish and regularly review all policies, ensuring they are lawful and designed to improve the quality of the school district.
- To hire, support, and work effectively with the superintendent of schools.
- To conduct an annual formal evaluation of the superintendent of schools.
- To refer administrative communications, to the superintendent, as appropriate, and to follow the board-established chain of command.
- To seek the superintendent's recommendation before taking action.
- To adopt, advocate for and oversee a school budget, which is responsive to district goals and meets the needs of all students.
- To delegate to the superintendent responsibility for all administrative functions, except those specifically reserved to the board through board policy.
- To conduct an annual self-evaluation of its own leadership, governance and teamwork.
- To support the professional development of the superintendent and membership in his/her professional organization.

Superintendent of Schools' Responsibilities

- To implement policies approved by the board and recommend changes, if appropriate and to develop, implement and inform the board of administrative procedures necessary to implement board policy.
- To serve as the school boards' chief executive officer and educational leader.
- To participate, as appropriate, in his/her annual evaluation.
- To respond to communications, as appropriate, and ensure the adherence and appropriate response through the chain of command, and to keep board members informed about district issues in a timely manner.
- To provide the Board with good information for informed decision-making, as appropriate.
- To prepare, advocate for and implement an annual budget that addresses district goals and meets the needs of all students; and reports regularly to the board on status of the budget and any concerns or other issues about which the board should be informed.
- To oversee the organization and management of the district's day-to-day operations.

- To ensure appropriate resources for the superintendent to carry out his/her responsibilities.
- To have the superintendent work with the board chair to develop meeting agendas.
- To determine and include in district policy, hiring procedures that clearly define board and superintendent responsibilities to participate in termination procedures and decisions as prescribed by Idaho General Statutes.
- To communicate and interpret the school district's mission to the public and listen, and incorporate appropriate community perspectives into board action.
- To ensure there is a supportive, smoothly, operating leadership team, which advocates for both children and the community.
- To participate as appropriate, in the annual self-evaluation of the board.
- To recommend appropriate resources to ensure he/she can carry out his/her responsibilities.
- To work closely with the board chair to develop meeting agendas.
- To, as pursuant to best practice and board policy, recommend to the board the hiring of personnel for the school district and to ensure that each employee is properly supervised and evaluated; and to make recommendations for termination of employment.
- To communicate community perspectives, research information, performance results and educational needs to the board for possible board action and to the school staff.
- To serve as a key, effective member of the leadership team.
- To work collaboratively with school staff on an ongoing basis.
- To support the professional development of the board through membership in their professional association and use of association programs and services.

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The following are joint responsibilities of the Board and Superintendent. These are areas in which each Board and Superintendent should determine their respective responsibilities.

Joint Board/Superintendent Responsibilities

- To work together with the community to develop a vision and goals for the school district and to monitor the achievement of those goals.
- To advocate for students and the school district and promote the benefits of public education.
- Provide community leadership on educational issues by creating strong linkages with appropriate organizations, agencies and other groups to provide support for healthy development and high achievement for all children.
- To collectively execute their legal responsibilities.
- To work collaboratively with each other's respective professional education associations, other school boards and superintendents to inform legislators of local concerns and issues relative to education.
- To participate in continuing education specifically regarding their roles and responsibilities and on relevant content areas.
- To support board actions and decisions.
- To semiannually set aside time, to discuss school board/superintendent relations.
- To belong to, actively support and participate in their professional organizations, and that each will encourage the other to do so.
- To institute a process for long-range and strategic planning that will position the school district for success. Leadership should also be distributed, as appropriate, throughout the school system, for the long-term stability and progress of the district.
- To ensure that quality professional development opportunities, consistent with district goals, are available to all school district employees.
- To serve as liaisons to the community.
- To ensure adherence to federal and state laws and board policies.
- To semi-annually set aside time for whole board training related to governance.

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The Relationship between the Board Chair and the Superintendent

By the nature of the position, the board chair plays a key role in ensuring the effective functioning of the governance team. The chair serves as the liaison between the board and the superintendent. The board chair will often have a very different relationship with the superintendent of schools than others on the board. Because of this relationship, it is crucial that board chairs be chosen carefully and that ability to serve as representative of the board and, as appropriate, partner with the superintendent, should be critical considerations in selecting the board chair.

The chair should also recognize that his or her role is dependent upon the support of the board, and that action generally requires the vote of the board.

Usually the chair and superintendent collaborate on developing the meeting agenda and other operational issues facing the board. The superintendent will depend on the chair for guidance, and the chair should look to the superintendent for the same, not only in setting the agenda, but also in carrying out other joint board/superintendent responsibilities.

The superintendent is a non-voting member of the district leadership team, and should be accorded the proper respect. Likewise, the superintendent is an employee of the board, and the board has a responsibility to insulate the superintendent from outside pressures, in particular, political pressure. The chair has a responsibility to ensure that the superintendent can do his/her job without undue outside interference. The chair must also ensure that individual board members understand their roles and responsibilities, not only in terms of the board/superintendent relationship, but also as the board relates to the students, community, staff, government agencies and others affected by the board. Understanding that board members are individuals, with different opinions, the board chair still has the responsibility, to the extent possible, for keeping everyone “on the same page”. In particular, the chair must make every effort to ensure that once district policy has been properly established, the board speaks “in one voice” as the superintendent implements that policy. This will, in the long run, pay dividends in terms of credibility of the board and will lead to more efficient and effective board action.

Conclusion

While this position paper attempts to outline the various roles and responsibilities of boards of education and school superintendents, its primary purpose is to emphasize the importance and necessity of a close working relationship between the two, based on trust, and understanding of each other’s unique roles and abilities, and a shared vision for the school district’s success. Not only is such a relationship a necessary prerequisite for this success, but also the lack of a trusting, collaborative relationship between a board of education and its superintendent is a blueprint for failure.

The focus for boards and superintendents must always be: How we can work together to ensure educational excellence for our children?