BOARD OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STANDARDS

What principles should affect school board decisionmaking? What are the behaviors of school boards—as well as individual school board members—that contribute to positive outcomes for students? The Board of Education Governance Standards were developed by school board members for school board members to provide a shared framework for effective school district governance.

Endorsed by the Michigan State Board of Education

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Note: *Shared understanding of terms and practices is essential for effective school district governance. Key terms are defined within the Glossary at the back of this document. To alert the reader, these terms are underlined throughout the text.*

Introduction

Why do citizens serve on boards of education? School board members consistently report coming to service on a school board because they care deeply about doing the right things for children.[1] In serving, school board members give countless hours to the governance of public schools and open themselves up to the scrutiny and, sometimes, acrimony of their fellow citizens. While school board service is most certainly not for the timid or uninformed, it is an excellent means of impacting the lives of children in one's community. There is, after all, a correlation between the work of school boards and student achievement.[2] But, for the school board's impact on student achievement to be positive, the service must be guided by principles that support excellent outcomes for students and are reflective of research-based practices of effective school boards.[2]

The Board of Education Governance Standards are intended for use by local and intermediate school boards as well as individual school board members. They were developed by school board members *for school board members* to provide a shared framework for effective school district governance. By design, the Governance Standards are in simple terms so as to be easily understood and promote understanding across the board table and throughout communities.

Developing the Governance Standards was relatively straightforward work—research has benchmarked the practices of effective school boards, and MASB has access to the perspective and experiences of literally thousands of school board members and superintendents. The more complex work related to the Governance Standards must occur at school board tables across the state—in *living* the Standards—in holding ourselves and fellow board members accountable to the Standards. We must be disciplined in *our own* governance behaviors. We must respect our board colleagues enough to expect them to be disciplined in their governance behaviors. And we must have the courage to speak up when the performance of individuals or the board is not in alignment with the Standards. This is the challenge we must overcome if we are to do the right things for children.

[1] *Bartusek, L. (Ed.) IASB's Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement. Iowa Association of School Boards, 2000.*

[2] *Dervarics, C. and O'Brien, E. Back to school: How parent involvement affects student achievement. Center for Public Education, 2011.*

Board of Education Governance Standards

Guiding Principles of the Board of Education:

Accountability | *Commitment to Learning* | *Inclusivity*
Stewardship | *Transparency* | *Vision-Driven*

❶ *The Board of Education, in cooperation with the superintendent and stakeholders, establishes and commits to a vision for the school district that emphasizes high expectations for achievement of all students and quality instruction.*

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

1.a. Has the Board of Education formally adopted a district plan that includes a concise vision statement?

1.b. Were stakeholders engaged in the district planning process?

1.c. Does the district plan include nonnegotiable goals related to student achievement and quality instruction?

1.d. Are school improvement or related turnaround efforts aligned to the district plan?

1.e. Has the Board of Education adopted a system to monitor progress toward goals?

1.f. Are resources aligned to the district plan?

1.g. Does the Board of Education proactively address barriers to implementing the vision even when doing so may be unpopular? (Such as with budget cuts, building closures, etc.)

1.h. Does the Board of Education establish goals for its performance based upon the district plan?

1.i. Are decisions of the Board of Education guided by the district plan and related goals?

❷ *The Board of Education governs in a manner that is dignified and worthy of trust.*

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

2.a. Does the Board of Education demonstrate a unity of purpose and articulate a common vision for the district?

2.b. Is school district business conducted in an ethical, civil and responsible manner?

2.c. Does the Board of Education demonstrate knowledge of school district governance, research-based practices in education and school finance, as well as school and labor law?

2.d. Does the Board of Education govern with board-adopted policies and procedures?

2.e. Has the Board of Education adopted a budget based on realistic projections reflecting expenses that are less than income?

2.f. Do the interactions and decisions of the Board of Education serve as examples of effective and responsible leadership for the district's students?

❸ *The Board of Education is <u>accountable</u> to the school district community.*

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

3.a. Is the Board of Education knowledgeable of the students, families and community it serves including factors such as conditions that impact learning and desired outcomes?

3.b. Does the Board of Education operate in an open and <u>transparent</u> manner?

3.c. Prior to deliberating, does the Board of Education inform itself by listening to a diverse range of views from around the board table as well as across the community it serves?

3.d. Is progress toward goals and student performance regularly reported to the community?

3.e. Is the Board of Education's performance evaluated on a regular basis with the use of a <u>valid</u> and <u>reliable</u> assessment (internally, externally or both) and reported to the community?

3.f. Has the Board of Education put policies in place that support successful implementation of the <u>district plan</u>?

3.g. Does the Board of Education's governance of the school district demonstrate due concern with regard to financial and legal matters?

❹ *The Board of Education holds the superintendent <u>accountable</u> for creating the outcomes identified in the school <u>district plan.</u>*

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

4.a. Does the Board of Education provide policies and systems for oversight of district resources, infrastructure and compliance?

4.b. Does the Board of Education receive regular reports regarding progress toward district goals?

4.c. Does the Board of Education monitor student academic progress based on assessments that are <u>valid</u> and <u>reliable</u>?

4.d. Has the Board of Education established clear expectations for the superintendent, as well as the means and timeline on which the superintendent is to be evaluated?

4.e. Does the Board of Education actively participate in the support, development and evaluation of the superintendent?

4.f. Does the Board of Education place an emphasis on continuous improvement despite challenging circumstances?

4.g. Has the Board of Education established quality instruction and the development of master teachers as critical district priorities to guide the superintendent's work?

4.h. Does the board spend more time on policies to improve student achievement and monitoring progress and less time on operational issues?

Individual Board Member Governance Standards

Guiding Principles of the Individual School Board Member:

Advocacy | Civility | Courage | Empathy | Inquiry
Integrity | Regard for Authority of the Board | Selflessness

❶ The individual school board member is motivated by and focuses on what is in the best interest of all students.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

1.a. Does the board member primarily concern him/herself with the goals that have been identified in the district plan?
1.b. Does the board member demonstrate concern for all students in action, deed and decisions?
1.c. Is the board member able to set aside personal issues and participate as a member of a board?
1.d. Does the board member maintain confidentiality when expected to do so?
1.e. Does the board member advocate for viable and effective PK-12 public education? (Such as by contacting legislators about PK-12 issues, legislation, state education funding, etc.; talking with parents and community members about how they can positively advocate for and participate in their district, etc.)

❷ The individual school board member believes in the importance of and actively engages in lifelong learning.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

2.a. Is the board member actively engaged in learning new concepts, skills or best practices?
2.b. Is the board member willing and able to develop competency in matters related to school governance such as school finance and policy, as well as school and labor law?
2.c. Does the board member seek out and engage in learning opportunities to improve his/her ability to serve effectively on a Board of Education?

❸ The individual school board member understands and respects both the authority and responsibilities of the Board of Education.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

3.a. Does the board member act in accordance with Michigan law, which does not vest individual board members with any type of independent legal authority?

3.b. Does the board member demonstrate a clear grasp of the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Education and the superintendent?

3.c. Does the board member follow established policies and procedures?

3.d. Does the board member support decisions of the Board of Education after a vote is taken regardless of his/her individual position prior to the vote?

3.e. Is the board member able to identify, discuss and resolve conflict with respect and civility?

3.f. Does the board member come to meetings having read the background materials and adequately prepared to address items on the agenda?

3.g. Does the board member demonstrate understanding of and respect for school district structure and protocols?

3.h. Does the board member declare and avoid engaging in conflicts of interest?

❹ *The individual school board member approaches school governance work with a spirit of inquiry.*

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

4.a. Is the board member open to discussion without prejudging issues?

4.b. Does the school board member seek clarity and understanding before forming an opinion?

4.c. Does the board member actively seek common ground and work to foster productive relationships with all other members of the Board of Education as well as the superintendent?

4.d. Does the board member seek out and respect perspectives that are different than his/her own?

Glossary

	Accountability is accepting responsibility for ensuring the conditions are in place for positive student outcomes and learning to occur.
	Advocacy is actively supporting that which is in the best interest of Michigan's public school students.
	Civility is about more than just politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements. It is political in the sense that it is a necessary prerequisite for civic action. But it is political too in the sense that it is about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone's voice is heard, and nobody's is ignored.[3]
	Commitment to learning describes a dedication to the belief that everyone can learn and that lifelong learning is key to an individual's ability to create positive outcomes.
	School board members become aware of information of which unauthorized disclosure could be prejudicial to the interest of the district and/or illegal.
	Courage is the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty.[4]
	At minimum, a district plan lays out the objectives a district intends to accomplish including the steps it will take to accomplish those objectives as well as the timeframe and metrics that will be used to evaluate progress. See Strategic Plan for the optimal alternative.
	Empathy is the capacity to understand, be aware of, be sensitive to and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts and experience of another.[5]
	Inclusivity is the policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.[6] This includes board members, stakeholders and students.
	Integrity is the concept of consistency of one's actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes.[7]
	Inquiry is an approach to understanding that is constructed in the process of people working and conversing together as they pose and solve problems, making discoveries and testing new knowledge in the course of shared activity.[8]

[3] *The Institute for Civility in Government, 2017.*
[4] *Merriam-Webster, 2017.*
[5] *Merriam-Webster, 2017.*

[6] *The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, 2017.*
[7] *Goree, 2007.*
[8] *Galileo Educational Network, 2016.*

Regard for Authority of the Board	Regard for the authority of the board is the ability of an individual board member to respect and support the vote of the board of education even if his/her position was contrary to the decision.
Reliability	The extent to which a measurement gives results that are very consistent.[9]
Selflessness	Selflessness is putting the needs and concerns of others ahead of one's self.
Stakeholders	Individuals and groups who have an interest in the welfare of a community's children and public school district including but not limited to district residents, students, business owners/operators, district staff members, union leadership, etc.
Stewardship	Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of the school district's resources including finances, facilities, human resources, etc.
Strategic Plan	A strategic plan is a document that empowers school districts to plan for continuous change and is used to communicate with the entire school community the Board of Education's vision for the district, goals related to making that vision a reality and the actions needed to achieve those goals, as well as related support materials such as timelines and measurements.[10] It is established via a process that engages stakeholders in assessing the internal and external environments, analyzes the implications or relevant trends, and identifies effective strategies for achieving the desired future state of the school district.[11]
Transparency	Transparency describes a board's obligation to share information with citizens. Information on how officials conduct the public business and spend taxpayers' money must be readily available and easily understood.[12]
Validity	Validity of an assessment is the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure.[13]
Vision	A vision describes in detail the desired future state of a school district. It announces to staff members, parents and students where a district is heading and why they should take the trip with you.[14]
Vision-Driven	Vision-driven describes a board that, in partnership with the superintendent and stakeholders, establishes a shared vision and plans for the school district to attain that vision.[15]

[9] *Wikipedia, 2017.*
[10] *Balanced Scorecard Institute, 2017.*
[11] *National School Board Association, 2006.*
[12] *The Encyclopedia of American Politics, 2017.*

[13] *Wikipedia, 2017.*
[14] *Farmer, P. & Gabriel, J., n.d.*
[15] *Iowa School Boards Association, n.d.*

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