

**SPRING BRANCH
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

BOARD TRAINING

TEAM OF EIGHT

“DIFFICULT DECISIONS 101”





SPRING BRANCH **INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT ASSESSMENT

- How do you feel today in a word?
- What do you view as the primary strengths of the district?
- What do you view as the primary challenges of the district?
- Describe SBISD in the next 3-5 years.



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MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT IS A VITAL **BOARD RESPONSIBILITY**

What does the board need to know?

- Are children, employees, others safe?
- Are the district's assets secure?
- Are laws and policies followed?
- Does fairness prevail?
- Are major business systems effective and efficient?



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RELATIONSHIP SPHERES

- Other board members
- Superintendent
- Business and civic leaders
- Other elected officials
- Teacher groups
- Journalists
- Vendors
- Constituents
- Parents
- District employees



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DO'S AND DON'TS **FOR HEALTHY BOARD RELATIONSHIPS**

DO

1. Ask questions for better understanding
2. Listen
3. Respect the group as a corporate board
4. Uphold your oath
5. Exhibit honesty
6. Keep it in the family
7. Look for common ground for common action



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DO'S AND DON'TS **FOR HEALTHY BOARD RELATIONSHIPS**

DON'T

1. Attack a fellow member
2. Talk over one another
3. Go solo - No lone rangers
4. Personalize issues
5. Assume the worst/conspiracies
6. Play games
7. Undermine a decision of the board



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BOARD CHALLENGES

- Build trust
- Sticking together
- Avoiding internal attacks
- Working together
- Our role – community volunteer or community politician to broker the system?



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COLLABORATION PRINCIPLES

- Never show disrespect or speak ill of one another, especially in public.
- Listen when colleagues speak and consider other points of view.
- Unanimity is not required, but common courtesy is.
- No surprises.
- Practice self-discipline.



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POWER IS NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME

- A strong school board makes a superintendent more powerful.
- A strong superintendent makes a school board more powerful.



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SCHOOL BOARD CHECKPOINTS

- Asking questions is okay.
- School boards are responsible for *all* the people.
- Every issue is special.
- Board members are simply citizens until there is a quorum, and the meeting is called to order.
- It is important to have a board “understanding”.
- School board members are targets.



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SCHOOL BOARD CHECKPOINTS, cont...

- When a majority of the board votes to support A, it is time to stop lobbying for B.
- Executive sessions are permitted by law so that certain matters can be discussed in confidence.
- When school board members play “stump the stars”, everyone looks bad.
- Being visible is important.
- Communication means different things to different people.



Oregon School Board Association



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you think there is a global mistrust of government?
- Does this make supporting administration difficult?
- How well does the board and individual trustees do in handling social media (monitoring vs. posting)?
- Are unanimous votes (7-0) desired? Why? Why not?
- How difficult should it be to gain unanimity?



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QUESTION TO PONDER

How many high-stake issues can a school board or community deal with each year?



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HIGH-STAKES ISSUES

- National pandemic – COVID 19
- Virtual instruction vs. face-to-face
- Masks or face coverings
- Critical Race Theory
- Appropriate instructional (library) materials
- Transgender students (athletic competition)
- Legal challenge – single member districts



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HIGH-STAKES ISSUES, cont...

- What is the cumulative impact?
- What or who is the heart of SBISD?
- Does the board try to create a positive environment in the district? Why?
- Is the SBISD “family feel” important to parents and teachers?
- Have the high stakes issues caused drama in the district?



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HIGH-STAKES ISSUES, cont...

- Have these issues infiltrated the schools?
- Do teachers notice the drama or tension?
- Do these issues affect the “family feel” the district has evoked?
- What makes great teachers come to Spring Branch?
- Does a perceived decline in the environment impact teacher retention?



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IS TEACHER RETENTION IMPORTANT?

Why? What do polls say?

- Student achievement, performance
- Accountability rating
- District reputation
- Community perception
- Business, realtor, parent confidence
- Property values
- Future growth opportunities
- Board credibility



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PREPARING FOR A DIFFICULT **DECISION**

- Timing
- What to avoid
- Introduction of the issue - 3-6 months
- Information item - analysis rational
- Discussion item - short-term and long-term considerations
- Public input
- Additional discussion and review
- Big, difficult decisions do not need to look rushed
- Final vote with a commitment to review in 24-36 months



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BOARD GOVERNANCE **DURING DIFFICULT TIMES/CRISIS**

- What is the board's role?
- What does it look like when governance is happening well?
- What are the dangers of missteps to look out for?



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BOARD GOVERNANCE **DURING DIFFICULT TIMES/CRISIS, cont...**

- Is the mode of governance different in a crisis versus “business as usual”? If so, what is the difference?
- What happens when the board members disagree on how the crisis should be handled?
- How do you work toward a productive end so that everyone can feel that their ideas and thoughts were considered?
- Is it important to move forward with one voice?



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WHEN A BOARD MAJORITY IS NOT ENOUGH **CERTAIN DISPLEASURE**

There are issues that tend to split the board and are the very ones that cry out of unanimous support. Why? Because simple majority support indicates the issue is not yet dead. The board may have voted, but opponents are likely to keep fighting, hoping the district will drag out implementation, that the board will reconsider the vote, or the next election will flip the board. A unanimous or even supermajority vote sends the opposite message: The issue is settled once and for all. It is time for everyone to move on.



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WHEN A BOARD MAJORITY IS NOT ENOUGH, cont... **PURSuing UNANIMITY**

If less than the entire board does not think something big is worth voting for, that is a problem. Sometimes a majority is not enough.



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THE BIG DECISION

Can we retain what has made us great - a lighthouse school district in Texas?

The Board of Trustees – all 7 members – should lead in this effort!

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EFFECTIVE
BOARD
GOVERNANCE

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE



SPRING BRANCH **INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Sec. 11.051.

*GOVERNANCE OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT;
NUMBER OF TRUSTEES. (a) An independent school district
is governed by a board of trustees who, as a body corporate,
shall:*

- (1) oversee the management of the district; and*
- (2) ensure that the superintendent implements and monitors
plans, procedures, programs, and systems to achieve
appropriate, clearly defined, and desired results in the major
areas of district operations.*



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*(a-1) Unless authorized by the board, a member of the board may not, individually, act on behalf of the board. The board of trustees may act only by majority vote of the members present at a meeting held in compliance with Chapter **551**, Government Code, at which a quorum of the board is present and voting. The board shall provide the superintendent an opportunity to present at a meeting an oral or written recommendation to the board on any item that is voted on by the board at the meeting.*



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GOVERNANCE-MANAGEMENT
SCENARIOS



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Scenario 1:

Board member Smith makes an appointment with the superintendent, goes to her office, sits down, and says, “Madam Superintendent, I’ve been hearing a lot of complaints from principals and parents about the performance of the area superintendent in my part of town. I really think you need to move her to another part of the district, or into central office because there is so much discontent about how this person is performing her job.”

Scenario 2:

Board member Jones calls the superintendent one day and says, “Mr. Superintendent, I want an update on the contract negotiations that are going on right now for the sale of the Main Street property. What’s the status of offers and how are negotiations going?”

Scenario 3:

Board member Enders goes to the board president and says, “Mr. Chair, I would like to put an item on an upcoming board agenda to reconsider our district policy of not naming schools after people who are still alive. Would you please do that?”



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Scenario 4:

Board member Beazley, during a regular board meeting, says: “Madam Superintendent, I have a suspicion that we are spending too much to build our new schools. What is our cost per square foot, and how does this compare with the costs for neighboring districts?”

Scenario 5:

School board member Ketchum arrives unannounced at school one day, steps into the principal’s office and requests a tour of the building.

Scenario 6:

A board member calls up the superintendent and says, “I just had breakfast with a group of civic leaders, and there is a lot of anxiety about your upcoming recommendations to the board regarding the timing of a bond proposal. I just wanted to share this information with you and give you a heads-up, in case you haven’t heard this already in your circles.”



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Scenario 7:

The Edge City School Board, operating in its judicial capacity, is meeting to hear a grievance from a teacher with a medical problem that requires her to use the bathroom often. The teacher has filed a grievance because the principal has assigned her to a classroom far away from the bathroom despite her request to be near one. At the grievance hearing, board member Shilling makes a motion to sustain the grievant and require the principal to reassign the teacher to a classroom near the bathroom. Shilling's motion is approved by the board. *(Contextual notes: State law gives principals the right to make teacher assignments. Also, the district has no policy requiring principals to take teacher's medical conditions into consideration when making placements.)*

Scenario 8:

During its regular monthly meeting, board member Smithers raises his hand and says, "Mr. Superintendent, I am very concerned about bus safety in our district. I am hearing stories about reckless driving and buses not being adequately maintained. I want to know what your perception is and what your plans are for dealing with this?"



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Scenario 9:

During a board workshop, board member Smith asks the superintendent, “What do you think of our district’s policy on nepotism?”

Scenario 10:

Board member Hazard meets with the superintendent one day and says, “I think we should consider launching a major district initiative around incentive pay for teachers. I wish you would start educating the board about this in preparation for eventual action.”

Scenario 11:

Board member Grouse is known for grilling staff during board meetings, asking them tough questions about various data and practices in their departments.



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VIDEO