

Executive Summary

April 14, 2026 – SLP Board of Education Study Session

Prepared for the Board of Education and Superintendent

School Board Retreat: Strengthening Governance, Accountability, and Community Trust

The retreat created important space for reflection, alignment, and clarity around the Board's role in advancing student success, strengthening governance practices, and deepening community trust. Across each discussion area, a **consistent theme** emerged: **effective governance requires intentional accountability, clear communication, and a unified commitment to the district's strategic vision.**

The Board affirmed that **governance excellence begins with clarity.** This includes establishing measurable indicators aligned to the strategic plan and Portrait of a Learner, strengthening communication norms, implementing a meaningful Board self-assessment process, and ensuring Superintendent evaluation systems are directly connected to strategic outcomes. Participants emphasized that accountability must be transparent, shared, and visible to the community. The Board recognized its responsibility not only to hold the Superintendent accountable, but also to hold itself accountable through SMART goals, governance practices, and continuous reflection.

Conversations around student achievement and instructional excellence centered on moving beyond theory into measurable impact for every learner. Board members emphasized the importance of college and career readiness, instructional alignment across schools, and ensuring that every student is seen, supported, and positioned for success. The **governance role** of the Board was identified as **one of oversight, resource alignment, and policy support** — ensuring the Superintendent and Cabinet have the tools, professional learning, and systems necessary to execute the district's vision with excellence. Success was consistently defined not solely by assessment scores, but by broader indicators including student growth, family confidence, and community belief in the district's direction.

Community engagement emerged as both a priority and an opportunity. The retreat highlighted the importance of creating authentic, culturally responsive systems for listening, communication, and relationship-building. Strategies such as listening sessions, advisory groups, surveys, Board Briefs, conferences, and community celebration events were identified as essential mechanisms for increasing trust and reducing confusion. Participants emphasized the need for clearer communication protocols, visible Board presence at district and community events, and systems

that ensure consistent Board representation and responsiveness. The overarching message was clear: **trust grows when communities feel heard, informed, and connected to decision-making processes.**

The Board also explored the district's role in **advocacy and legislative alignment**. Participants discussed the importance of establishing a more formal structure for legislative engagement and advocacy efforts that align district priorities with state and federal policy conversations. The Superintendent and Cabinet will play a critical role in identifying emerging challenges and priorities, while the Board will help refine key advocacy focus areas and amplify the district's voice with legislators and community partners. Success in this area will be measured by increased visibility of the district's story, stronger relationships with policymakers, shifts in legislative conversations, and ultimately, policy outcomes that better support students, staff, and schools.

Throughout the retreat, there was **strong alignment around a central belief: governance matters because students matter**. Effective Boards create the conditions for systems to thrive. When governance is clear, accountability is transparent, communication is intentional, and leadership is aligned, districts are better positioned to deliver on their promise to students, families, staff, and community.

The retreat concluded with a shared understanding that the work ahead is not simply about compliance or oversight — it is about leadership. It is about **governing with purpose, building trust through action, and ensuring every decision remains anchored in the district's mission, strategic priorities, and commitment to student success.**

Next Steps

I look forward to joining you at the next study session. Please let me know of the upcoming dates.

Burrage

Notes from the Study Session discussion

- **Governance Excellence and Accountability**
 - Clarity Check
 - We have metrics that align with our strategic plan and portrait of a learner that we can hold ourselves and the superintendent accountable to, including metrics on
 - Student achievement
 - Instructional excellence
 - Staff investment
 - Organizational capacity
 - Review of policy impacts as required by specific policies
 - Community engagement
 - We have established Board communication norms and they are followed
 - We have a Board self-assessment policy and it is being implemented
 - Improved student outcomes, staff capacity, community trust, communication, and understanding of Board expectations

- Governance lens
 - This is almost entirely the purview of the Board, however there is some manage up responsibility for the Superintendent and cabinet
 - The Board must own accountability for:
 - Establishing and following Board communication norms
 - Implementing and actualizing a Board self-assessment policy that holds the Board accountable to the metrics noted above
 - Ensuring the Superintendent evaluation process accounts for the metrics noted above and ensures that the Superintendent feels supported in their accountabilities and can regularly ask for and receive the support they need from the Board
- Communication & Community
 - Establishing an accountability framework –
 - Board members need to be accountable and transparent about what that accountability looks like
 - Community needs clarity on what we are holding our Superintendent accountable to and how
 - Need to provide clarity on how we are holding ourselves accountable to our strategic plan and mission
 - A clear message for community
 - We are holding ourselves and the Superintendent accountable to our strategic plan, with clarity on who is accountable for what
- Accountability marker
 - Indicators the Board should monitor regularly:
 - Is our evaluation process linked to our strategic plan and portrait of a learner
 - Are we using SMART goals (for ourselves and the Superintendent)
 - Specific
 - Measureable
 - Achievable
 - Relevant
 - Time-Bound
 - How will we know?
 - By using SMART goals!
- **Student Achievement and Instructional Excellence**
 - Clarity Check
 - What does this goal mean in practice (not theory)?
 - College and career readiness and aligning standards for all students
 - Ensure schools align
 - What would it look like if we were doing this well as a Board?
 - Student achievement ↑, destination deficit, happy community
 - Governance lens
 - What is the Board's Role vs Superintendent/Cabinet role in this goal?
 - Monitor implementation – obtain annual report
 - Ensure execution and resources align including professional development and accountability
 - What decisions, behaviors, or actions must the Board own to advance this goal?
 - Support standards; policy to support cabinet and superintendent to execute
 - Communication & Community

- How do we talk about this goal publicly in a way that builds trust?
 - Annual report (ex. State of the district)
 - Overtly sharing of our goal
 - Meeting every child where they are
- What is one clear message we want the community to understand?
 - See every child
- Accountability marker
 - What is one indicator the Board should monitor regularly?
 - Student achievement in all ways – not just tests
 - How will we know if progress is being made?
 - Achievement and happy parents

● **Community Engagement & Trust Building**

- Clarity Check
 - What does this goal mean in practice (not theory)?
 - Community Feedback
 - Listening Sessions
 - ParentSquare
 - Community Celebration events
 - Parent advisory groups
 - PTO
 - Coffee w/ principals
 - Conferences
 - Surveys
 - Board Briefs
 - What would it look like if we were doing this well as a Board?
 - Less confusion from community
 - Shared understanding
 - Close the communication loop
- Governance lens
 - Communication Protocols are going in the right direction
 - Clearly post protocols on the School Board page
 - What is the Board's Role vs Superintendent/Cabinet role in this goal?
 - Some distinct differences and some shared responsibilities
 - Establishing listening sessions and showing up to events
 - What decisions, behaviors, or actions must the Board own to advance this goal?
 - Attendance of events.
 - Need to establish a system that will identify board representation at events
 - How are we, the board directors, being culturally responsive in the ways we connect with community and build trust?
- Communication & Community
 - How do we talk about this goal publicly in a way that builds trust?
 - What is one clear message we want the community to understand?
- Accountability marker
 - What is one indicator the Board should monitor regularly?
 - How will we know if progress is being made?

- Need to establish a system that will identify board representation at events

- **Goal: Advocacy and Legislative Alignment**

- Clarity Check
 - In practice - means we have some sort of legislative/advocacy group set up
 - If we are doing this well, we will be communicating our messaging to appropriate legislators, and legislation that we align with will get passed.
- Governance Lens
 - Superintendent/Cabinet role will identify the issues they see as needing to be addressed
 - Board will help refine/identify key issues for a yearly focus
 - We will need to set up some sort of body – whether a committee of a board or a semi-autonomous commission or the like – to create a group that can help refine issues and do the advocacy work. There's a lot to consider, including who is part of the group, how is it led, what is the role of the board once it is set up, how do the tangible items (e.g. printed materials) get completed, does it need independent funding, etc.
- Communication and Community
 - We want the community to understand that we understand the big picture: that we operate under MN (and to a lesser extent federal) laws that bind and constrain us. But we do have the power to change things by advocating for ourselves (with community help).
- Accountability Marker
 - We will know we are making progress if –
 - People (Legislators) know our story
 - There is a change in the conversation because of our work
 - Legislation gets passed