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Assistance provided by LEAD Connecticut and the Connecticut State Department of Education.

School Governance Position Statement Spring 2016

“The school leadership team – school board and superintendent – is critical to the success of public education. Great things can happen when the elected and executive leadership of a school system are in agreement about goals and expectations. That requires candor and collaboration, and a shared commitment to the mission of ensuring that all children have access to a great education.”

Thomas Gentzel, Executive Director, National School Board Association, and Daniel Domenech, Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators, 2014

Preface:

Connecticut'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. The functions of our publicly elected Boards and hired Superintendents are subject to shifting demographic, cultural, and regulatory pressures. Meanwhile, in this continually evolving context, robust working relationships between school Boards and Superintendents, based on proven practices, consistently prove to be key drivers of high-achieving school districts.

This document is CABE and CAPSS view on the nature of and expectations for working relationships between Boards of Education and Superintendents. We intend it as a statewide reference for both groups to work toward strengthening strategic partnerships that empower student achievement. Our attempt is to capture best practices in this area, understanding that many of the issues addressed must be determined at the local level. We recognize that Superintendent/Board relationships vary, reflecting the diversity of our cities and towns.

We hope that this reference will continue to facilitate ongoing statewide discussions among and between Boards of Education and Superintendents for the districts that serve our students.

For success, the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools in any school district must share the same goals and vision 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, respecting the others' roles and responsibilities and collaborating effectively on shared responsibilities.

Our stance aligns with the AASA-NSBA foundational position: 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.”

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 the relationship must always be collaboration on behalf of children.**

Governance Statement: Uses for This Document

This Governance Statement is intended to be used as a tool for discussion between boards and superintendents. It takes into account the thoughts of board members, former and current superintendents and others versed in leadership. It is not designed as a one-size-fits-all recipe. Rather, it is based on what the authors see as the best road to take to build that strong relationship.

We recommend that all boards and their superintendents discuss their expectations for each other as soon as any of the members of the Leadership Team (the Board of Education and the Superintendent) change. Thus, with changes due to board elections, appointment of a new board member, the hiring of a new superintendent or whenever the board and superintendent believe it is in the interests of their relationship to have a discussion of expectations, the Team should take part in a retreat. The Governance Statement can serve as a good starting place for those discussions.

These discussions should occur in a retreat format, usually with a trusted facilitator. While certainly the companion Board Self-Assessment contained in the Team Assessment document should be used to pinpoint the views of both board members and the superintendent, the Governance Statement itself, with its list of board responsibilities, superintendent responsibilities and those they share, should be well-known to new and experienced board members and superintendents.

Every district has different board members, a different superintendent, different demographics, and other unique characteristics that will help inform such a retreat. That is to be expected and is actually a strength of Leadership Teams: local control is based on an understanding that different localities have different needs and wants.

Because of that, we encourage your Leadership Team to discuss the responsibilities and determine how best you can work together to ensure they are carried out in a thoughtful, positive way, all aimed at strengthening your student achievement. At times when difficult, contentious issues come before the Board, it can be helpful to return to the Governance Statement and have another discussion of expectations.

Joint Board/Superintendent Responsibilities

The primary responsibility of a Board and Superintendent is to foster a district culture that makes student achievement its primary focus. These are specific joint responsibilities that will accomplish this goal.

- To work together with the community to develop a vision for the school district with a primary focus on student achievement.
- To develop goals that align with the vision for the district and foster continuous improvement.
- To institute a process for long-range and strategic planning that aligns with the vision for the district.
- To communicate and interpret the school district's mission to the public and listen, and incorporate appropriate community perspectives into Board action.
- To 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 participate in professional development specifically regarding their roles and responsibilities and on relevant content areas.
- To support Board actions and decisions.
- To collectively execute their legal responsibilities.
- To set aside time, at least semi-annually, to discuss school Board/Superintendent relations.
- To belong to, actively support, and participate in their professional organizations, and encourage each other to do so.
- To ensure that professional development opportunities, consistent with district goals, are available to all Board members and school district employees.
- To ensure district adherence to federal and state laws and Board policies.
- To advocate, at the national and state levels, for students and the school district and promote the benefits of public education.
- To collaborate with other school Boards, Superintendents, agencies, and other bodies to inform state and federal policy makers of local concerns and issues relative to education.
- To work collaboratively with agencies, and other bodies, as appropriate, on an ongoing basis.

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Board of Education’s Responsibilities	Superintendent of Schools’ Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To hire, support, evaluate and work effectively with the Superintendent of Schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work effectively with the Board, serving as the school Board’s chief executive officer and educational leader for the Board, district, and community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish and regularly review all policies, ensuring they are lawful and designed to improve the quality of the school district. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with the Superintendent, to conduct an annual formal evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools that: 1) reflects the significant complexities and wide variety of responsibilities inherent to the role; 2) identifies areas of success and targeted professional development; and 3) focuses on student achievement in the proper context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate, as appropriate, in his/her annual evaluation, by providing data and other information that will inform the evaluation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform the Superintendent, through the established chain of command, of potential barriers to the realization of the board’s vision for the school system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To proactively identify and address potential barriers to the realization of the board’s vision for the school system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To refer communications such as questions complaints and personnel inquiries to the Superintendent, as appropriate, and to encourage adherence to the established chain of command. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To seek the Superintendent’s recommendation before taking action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide the Board with well-informed recommendations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make decisions based on data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To facilitate effective, data-driven decision making.

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Board of Education’s Responsibilities	Superintendent of Schools’ Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To adopt, advocate for and oversee the school budget, which is responsive to district goals and meets the needs of all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prepare, advocate for and implement the annual budget that addresses district goals and meets the needs of all students; and report regularly to the Board on the status of the budget and any concerns or other issues about which the Board should be informed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To delegate to the Superintendent responsibility for all administrative functions, except those specifically reserved to the Board through Board policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To oversee the organization and management of the district’s day-to-day operations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To conduct an annual self-evaluation of its own leadership, governance and teamwork and take appropriate action pursuant to that evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate, as appropriate, in the annual self-evaluation of the Board, and assist with follow-up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide leadership development opportunities for the Superintendent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage in leadership development opportunities provided by the Board.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have the Board leadership work with the Superintendent to develop meeting agendas that include student achievement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work closely with the Board leadership to develop meeting agendas that include student achievement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine and include in district policy, hiring procedures that clearly define Board and Superintendent responsibilities, and to participate in termination procedures and decisions as prescribed by Connecticut General Statutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To, as pursuant to Board policy, hire personnel for the school district and ensure that each employee is properly supervised and evaluated; and to make recommendations for termination of employment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish, in accordance with state statute, a professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To implement the Board-established professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance, in accordance with state statute.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure there is a supportive, smoothly-operating Board/Superintendent leadership team, which results in an effective and efficient school district. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To serve as a key, effective member of the Board/Superintendent leadership team and to lead the district staff to meet the district’s goal.

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Board of Education’s Responsibilities	Superintendent of Schools’ Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To share relevant information for the betterment of the district with the Board/Superintendent leadership team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate research information, performance results and educational needs to the Board for possible Board action.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To hold Superintendent accountable for alignment of district activities with district vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that actions of the entire district align to the district vision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belongs to, actively supports, and participates in professional organizations (e.g., CAFE, NSBA and encourages the Superintendent of Schools to actively support and participate in their professional organizations. (CAPSS, AASA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belongs to, actively supports, and participates in professional organizations (e.g., CAPSS, AASA and encourages the Board of Education to actively support and participate in their professional organizations (CAFE, NSBA)

For more information on the specific duties of the Superintendent, it is recommended that the Board and Superintendent examine the Connecticut Superintendent Leadership Competency Framework, developed by LEAD Connecticut. It is intended to focus specifically on effective superintendent leadership and is included at the end of this document.

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. 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. (Sometimes Board officers do this with the Superintendent.) 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. Both the Board Chair and the Superintendent should develop and maintain a close, positive working relationship.

The Superintendent is a non-voting member of the district leadership team, and should be accorded the proper respect. The Board and the Superintendent work together to ensure that they make all decisions consistent with the ethical standards they’ve established.

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The Chair has the unique role of communication with all Board members and provides appropriate information on any issues that arise in the district. The Superintendent also has a role in seeing that the Chair gets any help or information they need to make sure this communication takes place.

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 and agendas, 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.

For more information on the work of the Board Chair, please see the CABE publication, “Who’s In Charge? A Guide for Board of Education Chairs”.

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, an 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 can we work together to ensure educational excellence for our children?

References

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