

To: School Board, Ferndale School District (WA)
From: Linda Quinn, Superintendent
Date: December 17, 2019
Subject: 2019 Monitoring Report
Operational Expectations Policy 2 (OE-2)
Emergency Superintendent Succession

School Board's Monitoring Notes

(To be completed by each member individually prior to discussion by the whole Board)

Board Member: _____

Total Number of Monitoring Indicators = 3

Number Compliant=_____ Number Partially Compliant=_____ Number Non Compliant=_____

Commendations

Recommendations

Other Notes

Overall Rating: _____ Compliant _____ Non-Compliant

Superintendent's Introduction

The purpose of Policy OE-2 is singular and straightforward. The School Board has one employee -- the Superintendent -- whom they have charged with carrying out their vision, values, and goals within the School District. Through this policy, the Board is directing that Superintendent to make sure he/she has adequately documented the business and operations of the District and appropriately prepared one of more members of his/her team to take over if some unforeseen eventuality should prevent the Superintendent from continuing to serve.

The situation addressed by this policy is more than hypothetical for the members of the current Ferndale School Board. Two of them -- Lee Anne Riddle and Andrew McLaurin -- were serving on the Board in early 2009 when Roger Lenhert, the former Ferndale Superintendent of 19 years, decided to retire. Upon his announcement, the Board embarked on a search for a new leader, which ultimately resulted in their offering me the job the first week of March 2009. I was working out of state at the time; but between March and May, I talked to Dr. Lenhert on the phone several times a week. On May 15 of that year, I had an airline ticket to Whatcom County to meet with Dr. Lehnert in person for the first time. On May 11, Dr. Lenhert came to work in the morning as usual; he went home for lunch as usual; but he never came back after lunch. He had passed away.

Since I was under contract in my former school district for another month when Dr. Lenhert died, the Ferndale School Board appointed ESD 189 Superintendent, Jerry Jenkins, to serve as Interim Superintendent until I arrived. A veteran superintendent with extensive experience running school districts, Dr. Jenkins did an admirable job of keeping the organization running. However, it was not easy being thrown into the middle of things right at the time of the worst financial recession of the past 50 years. Not for Dr. Jenkins, and not for me when I arrived four weeks later.

The job of the superintendent is big and complex. I had a long list of questions for Dr. Lenhert, which I never got to ask. Fortunately, a helpful and hard-working Administrative Team and District Office staff were willing to roll up their sleeves and help me figure things out. However, a more formalized succession plan would have made the transition easier for me and, more importantly, better for the organization.

Hence the purpose of this policy: To ensure a more formalized succession plan.

Before going further, I want to say a few words about the organization of this report. Although it is much shorter than the other Phase Two Monitoring Reports we have provided you, its format is similar. It includes the interpretation and monitoring indicators you approved a year ago in our Phase One Report for Policy OE-2, so that you do not have to look back and forth between two documents. The color coding is as follows:

- The language from your adopted policy is written in bolded black.
- The language from our Phase One Report is written in blue.
- The monitoring indicators -- those measures of compliance you approved a year ago -- are written in bolded blue.

- Our response to each indicator, which follows it directly, is written in black and marked with a black arrow. This represents the new work we are providing to you as part of this year’s Policy OE-2 Monitoring Report.

Policy

The Superintendent will designate at least one other executive staff member who is familiar with the Board’s governance process and issues of current concern and is capable of assuming Superintendent responsibilities on an emergency basis.

Interpretation

We understand this means we need to have a plan in place that guarantees the District will continue to operate effectively, efficiently, and legally without interruption or impact if the Superintendent should unexpectedly become unable to provide leadership.

To meet the expectations of this policy, we must ensure that our Assistant Superintendents and Executive Directors are prepared to assume the Superintendent’s duties, under the direction of the School Board, with a deep understanding of priorities and services essential both to operating the organization and to maintaining our emphasis on student learning.

Monitoring Indicator(s)

We will know we are in compliance with this Operational Expectation when we can show evidence that our Assistant Superintendent(s) and Executive Directors are prepared to assume emergency leadership effectively.

- **They have clear understanding of both Administrative Policies and Governing Policies.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Compliant
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Compliant
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partially Compliant

➔ All five members of the Executive Team are well-versed in both the Administrative Policies and the Governing Policies of our School District.

Three Executives participated in five days of Coherent Governance training with the School Board and me in late 2017. All five of them have been involved in writing policy interpretations, indicators, and goals. All of them have engaged in the work of monitoring our compliance and/or progress with the policies. As evidence, I have attached to this report the detailed Coherent Governance Annual Work Plan showing their names attached to various policies as key contributors.

Our Executive Team also possesses a working knowledge of the District’s collection of Administrative Policies, which are divided into six categories and numbered accordingly (1000s, 2000s, 3000s and so on). Oversight of each category is assigned to a particular Executive. However, the work of developing, updating, and implementing the policies has been a collaborative effort. During the past year, the Executive Team’s knowledge of this set of policies has been enhanced as they have worked with Tammy Bengen,

Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and the School Board, to update the Procedures that accompany each of them.

- **They have established positive relationships with the School Board, the Administrative Team, and Union Leaders.**

___ Compliant
___ Non-Compliant
___ Partially Compliant

➔ All of the members of our Executive Team participate fully in all meetings of the School Board except Executive Sessions. Like ours, most districts, expect/require executive leaders to attend Board meetings to make presentations and/or answer questions. Unique to Ferndale, however, the members of our Executive Team actually sit with our elected officials at the Board table and regularly engage in discussions with the School Board. This physical arrangement facilitates relationships between the Executives and the Board, which are further nurtured by serving together on District committees; presenting together at conferences sponsored by WSSDA (Washington State School Directors Association), WASA (Washington Association of School Administrators), and AWSP (Association of Washington School Principals); learning together at professional development programs; and spending time together at social events. Our Executive Leaders view themselves as part of the Board's team.

Likewise, the members of our Executive Team work closely with the other members of our District Administrative Team, interacting with them regularly in one-on-ones, small groups, and all-hands meetings. The foundation for their relationship with other administrators is re-established each year during a five-day summer retreat focused on team building, goal setting, and collaborative learning. A new strategy for maintaining positive relationships throughout the school year grew out of the 2019 summer retreat. That is, each month the 30 members of our Administrative Team (which includes our Execs) is randomly assigned into a new group of three that is charged with finding a time during the month to get together outside the workplace for coffee or a soft drink and a chat. So far, these "Rock Groups" -- which is the name we have given them -- are reaping positive relationship results.

Finally, the members of our Executive Team constantly work to maintain positive relationships with the leaders of our unions. John Fairbairn, Executive Director of Human Resources, assumes responsibility for scheduling *regular* problem-solving meetings with the leaders of each of our five employee unions -- something that did not occur until eight years ago. All of the members of our Executive Team participate with John in one or more of these regular meetings. They have all made positive interactions with our union leaders an important priority.

- **They have strong knowledge of the District's established decision-making and communication processes and procedures**

___ Compliant
___ Non-Compliant
___ Partially Compliant

➔ All of the members of our Executive Team take part in two-hour meetings with me (the Superintendent) every Monday morning. Every major initiative --

from budget development to staffing to curriculum adoptions to union contracts -- are reviewed in this space; and most major administrative decisions are collaboratively made in this space. Although the rapid pace at which we work precludes everyone knowing everything everybody else is going to be doing in advance, we work very hard to keep one another in the loop. When major events occur that haven't been discussed ahead of time, we generally debrief them in one of our Executive Team meetings after the fact.

In short, we operate as a team; and I have worked hard to empower each member of the team to feel equal to each of the others. As such, our conversations do not reflect a hierarchical power structure. We practice an informal "first among equals" protocol, which is to say that the final authority for making a particular decision is often given over to the team member who is the most knowledgeable about the issue in question. We also regularly learn from one another, once again adhering to a "first among equals" protocol to determine who is teacher and who are pupils in any given moment.

In addition to our weekly meetings, the members of our Executive Team are kept informed by such regular communication tools as my Monday letters to the School Board, which summarize the news of the previous week, preview the events coming up in the week ahead, and offer a certain amount of editorializing about what it all means and how it all fits our District's mission, vision, and goals. Sometimes members of the Executive Team contribute to these Monday letters. Always they read them.

Superintendent's Final Remarks

This succession planning policy is aimed at ensuring we have a systematic approach to providing leadership continuity within our organization in the event of an unexpected vacancy in the Superintendent position. The focus is on identifying an immediate and short-term replacement. I feel confident assuring the School Board that we are in good shape on this front. Each of the members of our Executive Team has both the knowledge and the leadership capacity to run the School District should the need arise.

Every one of them is prepared to assume emergency leadership effectively as an Interim Superintendent. However, at this point in time, my strong recommendation would be that the School Board immediately appoint Assistant Superintendent for Business and Support Services, Mark Deebach, as Interim Superintendent in the event that I were unable to continue. My rationale for naming Mark as "first among equals" includes the following:

- He is the longest tenured member of our team.
- He has the greatest breadth of expertise related to legal and financial issues, which are two areas where a District can fairly easily get itself into trouble.
- He works most closely with the Executive Director of Human Resources and has had to develop a deep understanding of union contracts in order to ensure they are adequately funded.

- He has traditionally had the most involvement in School Board meetings because of his leadership role with finances, facilities, safety, and elections.
- He possesses a great deal of both explicit knowledge of the School District (all of those things that are codified in some written form) and also tacit knowledge of the School District (all of the insights, cultural norms, relationships, and “ways we do things around here”).
- His appointment as Interim Superintendent would “make sense” to our employees and our community.
- He has on numerous occasions made it clear that he is not interested in serving in the Superintendent capacity on a long-term basis and, if appointed, would see his role as assisting the School Board in searching for, finding, and hiring a new Superintendent.

I want to share one final note before concluding this report. My review of Policy OE-2 has caused me to consider the potential benefit of taking a broader approach to succession planning in our School District. While the Board’s purpose is to ensure continuity in the Superintendent position -- the one position for which they are solely responsible -- I believe the future of our organization could be better secured if we were to consider succession plans for other key leadership positions as well. This is a topic I intend to pursue further with the Executive Team.

Appendix A

Schedule for Governance Policy Monitoring Reports					
Policy Number and Title	Executive responsible for writing first draft	First draft due to the Superintendent	First draft provided to the School Board	Board discussion and suggested edits	Board approval of final draft on the consent agenda
OE-9 Learning Environment	Scott, Kellie, Paul	June 15, 2019	June 2019 Board Meeting	July 2019 Board Meeting	August 2019 Board Meeting
OE-5 Financial Planning	Mark	July 15, 2019	July 2019 Board Meeting	August 2019 Board Meeting	September 2019 Board Meeting
OE-7 Asset Protection	Mark	August 15, 2019	August 2019 Board Meeting	September 2019 Board Meeting	October 2019 Board Meeting
R-3 Citizenship	Paul	September 15, 2019	September 2019 Board Meeting	October 2019 Board Meeting	November 2019 Board Meeting
OE-4 Personnel Management	John	October 15, 2019	October 2019 Board Meeting	November 2019 Board Meeting	December 2019 Board Meeting
R-2.5 Social Studies	Scott, Kellie	October 15, 2019	October 2019 Board Meeting	November 2019 Board Meeting	December 2019 Board Meeting
R-2.6 Arts	Scott, Kellie	November 15, 2019	November 2019 Board Meeting	December 2019 Board Meeting	January 2020 Board Meeting
OE-2 Succession Planning	Linda	December 15, 2019	December 2019 Board Meeting	January 2020 Board Meeting	February 2020 Board Meeting
R-1 Mission	Linda	January 15, 2020	January 2020 Board Meeting	February 2020 Board Meeting	March 2020 Board Meeting

R-5 Early Childhood Readiness	Kellie	February 15, 2020	February 2020 Board Meeting	March 2020 Board Meeting	April 2020 Board Meeting
OE-11 Facilities	Mark	March 15, 2020	March 2020 Board Meeting	April 2020 Board Meeting	May 2020 Board Meeting
R-2.9 World Languages	Scott	April 15, 2020	April 2020 Board Meeting	May 2020 Board Meeting	June 2020 Board Meeting
R-2.8 Electives	Scott	May 15, 2020	May 2020 Board Meeting	June 2020 Board Meeting	July 2020 Board Meeting
OE-1 Global Expectations	Linda	June 15, 2020	June 2020 Board Meeting	July 2020 Board Meeting	August 2020 Board Meeting
R-4 Social & Emotional Learning	Paul	June 15, 2020	June 2020 Board Meeting	July 2020 Board Meeting	August 2020 Board Meeting
OE-12 Safety	Paul Mark	July 15, 2020	July 2020 Board Meeting	August 2020 Board Meeting	September 2020 Board Meeting
R-2.2 Math	Scott, Kellie	August 15, 2020	August 2020 Board Meeting	September 2020 Board Meeting	October 2020 Board Meeting
OE-6 Financial Administration	Mark	September 15, 2020	September 2020 Board Meeting	October 2020 Board Meeting	December 2020 Board Meeting
R-2.1 Literacy	Kellie	October 15, 2020	October 2020 Board Meeting	November 2020 Board Meeting	December 2020 Board Meeting
OE-10 Instructional Program	Scott, Kellie, Paul	November 15, 2020	November 2020 Board Meeting	December 2020 Board Meeting	January 2020 Board Meeting
OE-8 Communicating with the Board	Linda	December 15, 2020	December 2020 Board Meeting	January 2021 Board Meeting	February 2021 Board Meeting
R-2.3 Science	Scott, Kellie	January 15, 2021	January 2021 Board Meeting	February 2021 Board Meeting	March 2021 Board Meeting
OE-3 Relationship with Community	Linda	February 15, 2021	February 2021 Board Meeting	March 2021 Board Meeting	April 2021 Board Meeting
R-2.4 Technology	Scott	March 15, 2021	March 2021 Board Meeting	April 2021 Board Meeting	May 2021 Board Meeting
R-2.7 Health & PE	Scott, Kellie	April 15, 2021	April 2021 Board Meeting	May 2021 Board Meeting	June 2021 Board Meeting
R-6 Career Readiness	Scott	May 15, 2021	May 2021 Board Meeting	June 2021 Board Meeting	July 2021 Board Meeting