

## **Eau Claire School Board Work Session**

**Wednesday, September 25, 2019**

*Generated by Meta Miske*

### **Members present**

Lori Bica, Aaron Harder, Laurie Klinkhammer, Joe Luginbill, Eric D Torres, Charles Vue, Tim Nordin

### **1. CALL TO ORDER - 7:00 p.m.**

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, President Eric Torres called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Board Secretary Meta Miske confirmed that the meeting had been properly noticed and was in compliance with the Open Meeting Law.

### **2. WORK SESSION**

Dr. Hardebeck introduced Mr. Randy Nelson, Superintendent of the School District of La Crosse as the presenter for the evening. He began his career as a high school teacher but has served as an administrator for the last 20 years. He is active on many boards and committees in the La Crosse area. His presentation was about the Policy/Coherent Governance Model utilized by the School District of La Crosse and its School Board.

Mr. Nelson said he's been the Superintendent in La Crosse for nine years. He has worked without the Policy/Coherent Governance model in previous roles and has utilized the model in La Crosse, so he has experienced both as an administrator. He believes the model provides a sound basis for the schools and community to work together. La Crosse adopted the Policy Governance Model 22 years ago and is now transitioning to a more modern approach called the Coherent Governance Model. There are approximately 15 school districts in Wisconsin working toward utilizing this model. His presentation will provide a big picture overview. This model is a journey, not something that happens quickly. It is a long-term commitment to how we govern and support our community. It can transcend change within the district meaning the model drives the work, not the individuals serving on the Board or as the Superintendent.

The model defines boundaries, and provides clarity, alignment and accountability. Mr. Nelson showed a chart of the Policy Governance Model which has four components: Ends Process, Governance Process, Board/Superintendent Relationship, and Executive Limitations. He said this model served La Crosse very well. Following the model has greatly helped with Board turnover. The model helps new Board members learn the system and roles.

Randy Quinn and Linda Dawson are the authors of the book "The Art of Governing Coherently." The authors have led the La Crosse Board through the transition from Policy Governance to Coherent Governance although the models are very similar.

In the new model, Ends Process has been replaced by Results. La Crosse has three results policies: Mega Result, Academic Performance, Involved Citizenship. The Superintendent is evaluated annually to see if he/she is making progress on the policies.

Board/Superintendent Relationship remained the same title. The relationship is critical – a Board must buy into the concept or not go down the path to Coherent Governance at all. La Crosse has six policies in the Board/Superintendent Relationship: Single Point of Connection, Single Unit Control, Staff Accountability, Authority of the Superintendent, Superintendent Accountability, and Annual Summative Evaluation of the Superintendent.

The Superintendent is the Board's sole point of connection to the operational organization. The Board directs the operational organization only through the Superintendent. In La Crosse, the Superintendent is the only person the Board holds accountable and evaluates. It is a big deal for a Board to give up some of their authority, choose one person to pay, hold accountable, not micromanage, and trust to do their job effectively. If a Board makes that change, the Superintendent becomes a community leader: working with groups and soliciting support for the district. Mr. Nelson leads the district but doesn't "manage." He doesn't delve into the little pieces as he has a good staff who he and the Board trust to handle the day-to-day tasks.

Single Unit Control says the Board only directs the Superintendent through official Board votes and proceedings. For example, if a Board member makes a request which will take hours of work, the Superintendent can say no, the request is unreasonable. That Board member must then ask the Board as a whole unit to make the request formal. Therefore, the Board always works as a single unit.

Staff Accountability means the Superintendent is responsible for day-to-day matters. The Board is not to direct any employee other than the Superintendent and may not evaluate employees nor get involved in the hiring/firing/disciplinary actions unless specifically defined in the policies.

Before Policy Governance, the La Crosse School Board used to spend hours talking about minute details. With this governance model, they give the Superintendent parameters and the Superintendent and his/her staff does

the work within those parameters while the Board focuses on results.

Executive Limitations has become Operational Expectations in the new model. There are 12 policies that give the Superintendent the authority to do all day-to-day things except as defined in the Operational Expectations. For example, Global Operational Expectations says the Superintendent shall not cause, allow, or fail to take reasonable measures to prevent any practice, activity, decision or organizational condition that is unlawful, unethical, unsafe, disrespectful, imprudent, in violation of Board policy, or endangers the district's public image or credibility. Treatment of Community stakeholders says the Superintendent will protect confidential information, appropriately handle complaints, and treat all stakeholders with respect, dignity, and courtesy. Learning Environment directs the Superintendent to create a positive learning environment that is safe, respectful, welcoming, inclusive, etc. Therefore, the Superintendent has a great deal of freedom to get the job done if he/she is doing so within the Global Operational Expectations.

La Crosse has two sets of Policies. They have Board policies which are expectations set forth for the Board and they have Administrative or District policies which are set forth for the Superintendent. Administrative Policies include the nondiscrimination policy, nutrition policy, etc. The Superintendent informs the Board when an Administrative policy has changed. The Superintendent facilitates discussions to change policies and ensure policies conform to laws and other requirements. Having two sets of policies worked on by two separate groups prevents long discussions at Board meetings. If there's a major policy that may cause community concern, the Superintendent may schedule a Work Session to gather Board input.

Operational Expectation includes an emergency superintendent succession plan, which means the Superintendent must ensure there are employees on staff who are able to take over if something happens to him/her. Administrative policies allow the Superintendent to hold the Executive Directors and Administrators accountable. They have clearly defined rules and expectations.

Instructional Program ensures they are aligning curriculum with standards, individualizing learning, etc. When a Superintendent isn't meeting the expectations, the Board evaluates their relationship with the Superintendent.

The limitations are rules that prevent the Superintendent from doing certain things explicitly defined as being within the Board's authority. In La Crosse, two examples would be naming a building and changing boundaries. The

Superintendent is not permitted to do those things; the Board has authority in those two areas

In the new model Governance Process has become Governance Culture. This is the commitment the Board makes to each other. Their policies include Board Purpose and Philosophy, Governing Committees, Board Job Description, Officers' Roles, and more. La Crosse is eliminating all committees starting January 1, 2020 except the Board's executive committee; all committees will become ad hoc and meet only when needed.

The Superintendent's evaluation takes only approximately 45 minutes each year. Administrative staff reports on one OE each month at a Board. The Board evaluates the Superintendent each December or January to meet statutory deadlines. Reporting and evaluating the OE's throughout the year forms a "report card" for the Superintendent's progress, which allows the Board's evaluation of the Superintendent to be quick. The Board goes into closed session, reviews the report card, discusses the Results policies, and determines areas where they'd like to see improvement. Altogether it takes a short amount of time because it's so well defined in advance. It helps prevents "getting stuck in the weeds" so the Board can focus on the evaluation and not specific incidents that may have occurred. This method provides a fair playing field; the Superintendent knows the expectations and performance is assessed publicly through the year. It would never be a surprise to anyone if a Superintendent was going to be renewed or non-renewed.

Mr. Nelson shared a report card from the Steven's Point Area School District where their Superintendent is on a 3-year evaluation cycle. They follow the Coherent Governance process and have all the OE's and Results stated on the report card. It's a continuous improvement model to help a Superintendent self-evaluate.

Mr. Nelson welcomed questions.

Commissioner Vue asked about culture and how they train new Board members to give them a good understanding of the practice. Mr. Nelson said Board members go through an onboarding process. They hold a meeting for those thinking of running for the School Board. There's an onboarding process to welcome new Board members two weeks after the Board election. That is part of the Board's duty and Administrative Assistant to the Board. The Superintendent is present at onboarding, but the Board President has the largest responsibility for onboarding newly elected members.

Commissioner Luginbill asked what the process is for establishing and

adopting a model like this. What comes first - a new Superintendent or the process? Mr. Nelson thinks the process doesn't need to be finalized before a new Superintendent is hired, and that might even hurt. However, the Board would want the new Superintendent to be aware of the process and at least be part owner of the process. The Board could have a commitment and some base pieces in place. It might help with the search so potential candidates know they would be committing to working through the process.

Commissioner Harder said the model appears to be attractive to a Superintendent to help deal with the vagueness that can come along with working with a Board. Has Mr. Nelson heard any negatives about this? Mr. Nelson said it's up to the Board President to provide a good onboarding. Board members should know their role is to create a vision and let the Superintendent run with it and make it happen. Sometimes he hears of a Board member who ran for School Board because of a specific issue or concern, and they are disappointed to learn about the process and that they can't just make changes. Sometimes Board members trap themselves when they run into community members who share complaints. A Board member who isn't well-schooled in the process can give inaccurate information.

Commissioner Nordin asked how often the policies change. Each Board policy is reviewed on an annual basis. For example, every February they look at a set of policies and do a self-evaluation. The Board votes on how compliant they've been with the policy. There's an opportunity to evaluate if the policy is still meeting its intent which can lead to a discussion of any necessary changes.

Commissioner Bica asked about the decision to disband the committees. What were some core issues involved in making that decision? Mr. Nelson wasn't entirely sure because the decision was made recently at a retreat and he was very surprised the Board wanted to disband all committees. His staff spends a lot of time preparing for committee meetings, so he was pleasantly surprised. He thinks it may be a way to move their process forward as a committee of the whole. He believes their Board feels they should hear everything together. Some committees were formed so Board members who wanted to get into the fine details could do so. This prevented some of the longer discussions at regular Board meetings. Dr. Bica said she's looking forward to hearing how it goes with the absence of committees.

Mr. Nelson shared that presenting OE's each month is great because there's a set schedule and everyone can plan. They plan the year in advance with a culmination in December or January, so everything is covered before the evaluation of the Superintendent. He said the Board hears many annual reports that have nothing to do with their alignment so he thinks through

this process they will begin to cleanse and eliminate unnecessary reports and focus on the decisions that impact children.

Commissioner Klinkhammer said a lot of this feels very attractive, particularly having one input. She asked how staff react to the model and what happens when the staff have concerns. Mr. Nelson said they have a system called linkages which are opportunities for the Board to hear from community members and staff. The Board goes to the schools on a rotating basis (3-year cycle), and the Board asks pre-planned questions to gather feedback directly from staff. Administration is asked not to attend so staff can speak freely about any concerns. Mr. Nelson said the authors of the coherent governance model would say that's wrong because the Board is circumventing their only employee and it's a violation of policy. The La Crosse Board is not ready to give that up. He said each district in the consortium uses the same basic 4-squared model but customizes to make things fit their district. Not all districts do the linkages, but he has found the linkages helpful and hasn't discouraged them.

President Torres asked how the questions for each linkage are created. They usually have three staff questions, which generally are about challenges, equity, and what makes them proud to work there. The whole year is planned so the Board Secretary can coordinate the linkages in advance and the Board can identify the questions in advance. They use the same questions for all staff meetings in the same year. They send the questions in advance so staff can be thoughtful about what they'll be asked. This year they happen to be using the same questions as last year.

President Torres asked from the linkages does their Board learn details about what's going on in the day-to-day experiences in the buildings and is that in addition to or complimentary to the reporting that already goes on with the principal and superintendent. Mr. Nelson said the Board doesn't ask about building-specific issues; they are looking for broad issues. Mr. Nelson reviews the notes from each linkage to see if there's anything that shouldn't be made public such as something that would identify a student or staff member. It's a big picture conversation and small things should be handled with the principal.

President Torres asked if the information that the Board receives through the linkages helps Board members understand additional aspects of the school performance that might not be included in regular reports. Mr. Nelson said when reporting to the Board, they present district results. It may be by grade level but not by building. He said through the SIP they work on improvements. He thinks the linkages validate the work they are doing as a District as a whole. It's usually the big picture that the Board comes back

with.

President Torres said as of last year the Board needs to understand what happens in each building because of ESSA. Therefore, the Board must have by-building data in order to make an equitable allocation. Mr. Nelson said the La Crosse Board receives the district results, and it's the Superintendent's job to allocate the money on an equitable basis. The big picture is the responsibility of the Board. The Superintendent and his/her staff get results. He said there are still a few pieces they bring to the Board as school specific, but for the most part the Superintendent just gets the job done.

President Torres said the OE's are like a school report card and each time a report is presented, it's checked off the list. Being presented means the Board approves it or it's just presented? And if the report is presented in March, what happens after March and how is it monitored? Mr. Nelson said they are annual reports, March to March. It's always a review of what happened in the last 12 months. But there is a provision that the Superintendent must make good decisions, so there is an opportunity for the Board to stop the process and address a concern if the Superintendent makes a misstep. There are failsafe mechanisms in place so it's not just a once-a-year review. Regarding the presentation, it's a presentation but there is also a vote on if the Superintendent made reasonable progress on that OE. If there's seven items within the OE, the Superintendent discusses all seven items in the presentation and the Board can vote if they are satisfied.

Commissioner Luginbill asked if the Board vote is held in open session? Mr. Nelson said yes, it is open session. Closed session is only at the end of the year when it's time to complete the evaluation. During the evaluation, the Board will review all the OE's that were presented throughout the year. If several of them had insufficient progress they can make objective judgements on how to move forward with the Superintendent. It also means the Superintendent isn't surprised by the discussion because he/she has been graded openly in public throughout the year.

Commissioner Vue said this model appears to help the efficiency and proficiency of the Superintendent and Board, but with the effect of the giving authority and trust completely to the Superintendent, taking the pinch off staff because they are given freedom to do their work. Does this method provide results? Mr. Nelson said they are making progress. It's a journey. When they work backward from the results in the classrooms, the model allows a certain degree of autonomy to the schools. It allows some uniqueness between buildings. While the schools have the same curriculum, the way they deliver it may differ. He thinks the principals appreciate the

autonomy because the staff isn't waiting for the District to give direction, they are waiting for the principal to "own" their building and the results. Sometimes with autonomy people can feel they have too much latitude and wish they had more direction.

Commissioner Harder asked about the importance of measures in the Superintendent evaluation for academics and citizenship. In terms of those two items, there's different ways to measure and define success. How does Coherent Governance allow for those measures? Also, when discussing the annual review of policies, what is the evolution of that process? Regarding policies, Mr. Nelson said there's an annual self-evaluation by the Board and the question is "how did we do on this?" The Board decides if they were compliant in that area or if there were violations. Each Board meeting has at least one report of the Board monitoring themselves or the Board monitoring the Superintendent.

When the Board is done with their self-evaluation, there's a motion about compliance, and a motion about if the policy is still serving its purpose so the Board can update language if necessary. Aside from the Board policies are the Administrative policies which the Superintendent must evaluate each year with input/feedback from other districts, administration, etc., and share any updates to the policy with the Board. The Board ensures policy changes are legal, ethical, etc., so the Superintendent is doing his/her job. Mr. Nelson has a team of 14 staff members who meets once a month for a couple hours to go through the policies which are on a cycle as well as policies that require changes due to legislature changes, DPI changes, etc. They rarely say yes to policy change at the first meeting, they often mull it over and read it again or get an attorney's perspective. In terms of measuring the success of citizenship and academic pieces, the question is how do you define success? Mr. Nelson believes schools become too result and test happy to the detriment of social/emotional learning and could sometimes prevent behaviors if they focused less on test scores. It's a challenge to measure progress on the social/emotional side but they do have some surveys for students.

Mr. Nelson said when completing the Superintendent's evaluation, it's not a summation of all the reports. The evaluation is judged based on the assessments. Mr. Nelson said that as they refine their OE's, there will be gaps. The goal is that every item inside an OE will have a measure. That will take some time but, in the meantime, they use artifacts to help support the OE.

President Torres asked Mr. Nelson for one suggestion to improve the Coherent Governance model. Mr. Nelson said he wouldn't say anything about



the model because they aren't close to perfection on it. La Crosse has areas to improve on in the model, so he cannot say what the deficits in the model are. In terms of their utilization of the model, La Crosse has work to do in the area of assessment. The old model was input-based. They are developing the new model as output-based, so it measures not what we do, but the impacts of what we do. Mr. Nelson said his biggest concern is not oversaturating their system with more measurements and surveys. They will look at what they are already doing, fit it into the new model, figure out where the gaps are, and decide what no longer needs to be done.

Commissioner Bica asked about the approach of Superintendent as leader not manager, is that part of the Coherent Governance model? Mr. Nelson said that's his take on leadership and management. It's not something specifically talked about in the book, it's based on his experience. However, he thinks the model speaks to it implicitly even though not specifically written in the book. Mr. Nelson said the two consultants for La Crosse shared that they are also working with the Altoona School District. He doesn't know the status of Altoona, but the authors said that if ECASD was interested and would like to work side-by-side with Altoona, that can happen or he can come back with members of his School Board to share more.

Commissioner Luginbill asked if ECASD would be the largest District to adopt this model. Mr. Nelson thinks Racine is the largest district in the state using the model. Chippewa, La Crosse, Shorewood, Deforest, Stevens Point and others are in the consortium of districts in Wisconsin using the model.

Dr. Torres thanked Mr. Nelson for sharing his time and experiences and wished him luck with the transition of the implementation of the new model.

### **3. ADJOURN**

Motion by Aaron Harder, second by Tim Nordin, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried

Yes: Lori Bica, Aaron Harder, Laurie Klinkhammer, Joe Luginbill, Eric D Torres, Charles Vue, Tim Nordin

Meeting adjourned at 6:57pm.