# Board/Superintendent Operating Principles

## Introduction

Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. To assure a quality operation, leaders must agree on basic ways of working together. Clearly defined organizational values, vision, and mission provide the pathway for operating principles.

Board members will ensure that the district operates legally and ethically, in an accountable and transparent fashion. The manner in which the Board and Superintendent conduct their business becomes a model throughout the District for students, teachers, parents, and staff on how problems are solved.

The following principles outline a philosophy of cooperative behavior that is agreed upon by the Board and Superintendent in the Longview School District. As members of the leadership team, we are committed to upholding these principles.

**LEADERSHIP TEAM ROLES**

| School Board | Superintendent |
|---|---|
| **GOVERNS**<br>(Guides, Directs, Envisions) | **LEADS**<br>(Manages, Administers, Operates, Envisions) |
| Reviews and Suggests What | Decides How |
| Requests Information | Seeks and Provides Information |
| Considers Issues | Provides Recommendations |
| Creates, Reviews, and Adopts Policy | Recommends Policy and creates Procedures |
| Approves and Reviews Vision, Mission and District Strategic Plans | Implements Plans and Reports Progress |
| Approves Contracts with Personnel | Supervises Hiring Process and Practices and recommends Personnel; Supervises and Evaluates Personnel |
| Establishes Superintendent Evaluation Criteria and Procedures and Conducts Annual Superintendent Evaluation | Provides Evaluation Portfolio information for the Board |
| Approves, Reviews, and Monitors Budget | Formulates, Reviews and Monitors Budget |
| Approves Recommended Curriculum Materials | Recommends Curriculum Materials |
| Represents Public Interest | Acts in Public Interest |

School boards are most successful when they are able to constructively integrate the diversity of their members into a strong, clearly communicated plan of action for the district. That necessitates productive working relationships among Directors, the Superintendent, and staff in ways that neither extinguish individuality nor foster conflict.

Effective working relationships are most likely when all parties know and agree to accepted ways of working together. To that end, the Longview School Board and its Superintendent have adopted the following operating procedures.

**Communications/Cooperation and Support**

Open communication requires trust, respect and a fundamental belief in goodwill among board members and the superintendent. We will work to minimize misunderstandings and reduce conflict by:

- Supporting each other constructively and courteously.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Focusing our discussions on issues, not personalities.
- Encouraging constructive disagreement.
- Upholding the integrity of every individual.
- Pursuing thorough understanding.
- Expressing our opinions and positions on issues honestly and openly while being sensitive to others' opinions.
- Dealing ethically with board colleagues, the superintendent, and the community.

The board will give direction to the superintendent as a total board through adopted policies or action taken at a board meeting. Board members realize they have no individual power and can only make decisions as a member of the full board when it votes.

If a board member is acting outside his/her defined role, the board president or other board member(s) will talk with the individual board member regarding the problem.

The board will give the superintendent feedback on his/her performance on a regular basis.

The superintendent will let the board know as soon as possible of any major issue that may arise which could be problematic for the district.

The board president will be the official spokesperson for the board when communicating the board's position. The superintendent will be the official spokesperson for areas of district operation. If the media directly contacts an individual board member, they should refer this inquiry to the board president or superintendent. If an individual board member chooses to interact with the media when contacted, they shall always clarify that they are speaking as an individual and not representing the board and its position, while remaining cognizant that once a final decision has been made on a proposal, board members and the superintendent will individually and collectively support successful implementation.

Board members will notify the superintendent and board president if they are contacted by the media.

Board members should notify the superintendent when visiting schools in the capacity of a board member. Board members should call the school principal or stop in the office prior to visiting classes or the campus.

**Judgment and Trust**

The complexities of operating a school district cannot be fully addressed in policies, procedures or operating principles. Working with people and handling difficult and controversial issues on a daily basis requires good judgment, common sense and a strong trust relationship between board and superintendent. Every complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved; every issue or concern will not be foreseen. For these reasons trust in each other, allowance for error, and team efforts to address problems are a key part of an effective school district operation. We will approach these situations with the belief the other person is working in good faith with good expectations.

**Decision Making**

The identification and evaluation of alternatives, an awareness of short- and long-term consequences, an appreciation for the needs of the group, as well as individuals, and sensitivity toward collective action are essential to the decision-making process.

In order to formulate and execute sound decisions, we agree to:

- Resolve problems at the lowest level possible.
- Provide for input from all concerned when possible.
- Use a decision-making style appropriate to the situation.
- Reevaluate the effectiveness of the decision when appropriate.
- Clearly communicate decisions that are made.
- Involving those parties who will be affected by the decision and solution.

Using this process, we recognize that a decision may sometimes be superseded by a higher level of authority. When this occurs, the rationale will be communicated to those involved before releasing the information.

**Dealing with Citizen or Staff Complaints**

When a board member or the superintendent is contacted by a community member or a staff member who has a complaint, he/she will:

- Listen to the individual's concern.
- Inquire if the individual has discussed the issue with the person immediately responsible. If this has not been done, tell them how to contact the appropriate person.
- Explain the district process for resolving concerns and conflicts. Describe the appropriate channels that should be followed if the complaint is not resolved.
- Explain that, as a final resource, a complaint can be submitted to the board, but that the board practice is to carefully investigate complaints before taking any action.

Explain that complaints raised against individuals will not be addressed in a public meeting. To protect the rights of individuals, these concerns are scheduled for executive sessions.

- Be cautious of giving the appearance of agreeing with the person, sometimes just listening makes people think you are on "their side." Remember that anything you say might be understood as the "position of the board or superintendent."

Board members will contact the superintendent (if superintendent unavailable, contact the appropriate Cabinet member) directly when they hear concerns in the community regarding issues relating to district administration, programs or personnel.

**Board Meetings**

1. The public will have input to the Board of Directors at study sessions and public comment section of regular board meetings.

   A. Study session public comments will be held at the end of board discussion and before the conclusion of the meeting.

   B. At regular board meetings, there will be a public comment section at the beginning of the meeting. Comments will be limited to a time period established by board policy. Members of the audience may comment on “Action” items listed on the agenda and may also comment on policies at first and second readings.

2. Board members and staff will not debate or argue with public during board meetings. If the board is questioned by the public during the public comment section, the board president may do the following:

   A. If the question is concerning district policy: Ask the superintendent to take note and answer the person later after consulting with the president for direction if needed.

   B. If the question is concerning areas of district operation: Ask the superintendent to address the issue with the person at a later time.

   C. Factual responses to simple questions may be given by the board President if the information is publicly available.

   D. Thank the public for making comments to the board (without follow-up comment by the president).

3. Contact the superintendent’s secretary or the superintendent with corrections to minutes prior to the board meeting. In most cases, changes to minutes will not be addressed at meetings. An updated copy of the minutes will be given to each board member and to the public at the scheduled meeting.

4. Board agendas will be developed as a partnership between the board president, vice president and the superintendent. The board president and the superintendent will review

the agenda in detail prior to the board meeting. Board members requesting items for the agenda will contact the board president with the items, or request during the board meeting under “Future Agenda Items”.

5. Board meeting agenda and background material on agenda items will be provided by the superintendent to all board members at least two weekdays before regular board meetings.

6. Board members will review all material provided and seek clarification or additional information as needed prior to board meetings and board committee meetings. When possible, board members will discuss proposals they have concerns about with the superintendent and/or board president prior to the board meeting.

7. Board members wanting information from staff for board meetings will do so through the superintendent. All items addressed to the board for action or discussion by staff will be given in an objective fashion explaining both the positive and negative aspects of the decisions. If board members feel "rushed" or feel they do not have enough information, the board member will request to table or postpone discussion or action until such time as adequate information is presented.

8. Open and honest discussion of issues, ideas and positions on proposals is encouraged.

9. In conjunction with the Open Public Meetings Act, there will be no online communications between board members during meetings. Members will give their full and undivided attention to the business at hand.

10. Once a final decision has been made on a proposal, board members and superintendent will individually and collectively publicly support successful implementation.

11. All discussions that occur during closed and executive sessions and those that pertain to personnel matters are privileged and shall not be shared with anyone.

**Listening/Communication**

Listening expresses our concern for others by showing an interest in not only the information but the other person. Active listening benefits each party and is a key to effective communication. We should take sufficient time to summarize and paraphrase what we have heard.

A healthy climate for communication requires trust, respect and a fundamental belief in the goodwill among team members. Messages are open, honest, and tactful. We work to minimize misunderstanding and reduce conflict. We strive for mutual understanding and support.

As a leadership team, we make the following commitments:

- Keep the tone and demeanor of discussions professional by avoiding defensiveness and personalized anger.
- Demonstrate that we have recognized the other's point of view.
- Share information with all people affected in a timely manner.

**Honesty, Loyalty, and Disagreement**

A sustained commitment to a group, person, or organization survives and is nurtured in an open environment that recognizes the need and right of the parties to construct, express, examine, and synthesize divergent thought. Understanding opposing viewpoints helps us to better represent the Longview School District's interests.

We accept the challenge of pursuing a common intent through a review of opinion and fact, to an end that is understood and defensible by all. Once a final decision is reached, each member will support the decision.

By way of fulfilling our commitment to the challenge, we agree:

- To support each other constructively and courteously.
- To maintain confidentiality.
- To allow ourselves and others the freedom to admit mistakes.
- To focus our discussions on issues, not personalities, free of defensiveness.
- To pursue thorough understanding.

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