

GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 30, 2025 @ 5:00 P.M.
SUBMARINE FORCE LIBRARY & MUSEUM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Beverly Washington-Chairperson, Adrian Johnson-Vice Chairperson, Andrea Ackerman, Dean Antipas, Matthew Shulman, Ian Thomas, Jay Weitlauf, Jennifer White, Michael Whitney

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Austin, Anne Marie Mancini, Nick Caruso (CABE)

Chairperson Washington called the meeting to order at 5:23 p.m. She stated that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct a board retreat and introduced Nick Caruso, Associate Executive Director for Field Services and Technology from CABE, who facilitated the retreat. This is part 1 of a series of professional development for the Board. The next professional development will be scheduled for July to discuss board goals.

Mr. Caruso led a discussion regarding board roles and responsibilities (attached). His presentation entitled, *Mistakes Board Members Make*, highlighted the following common errors that boards make:

1. Impatience (not taking the time to learn the role)
2. Poor behavior
3. Thinking the purpose of school is delivering content (vs. ensuring students learn)
4. Publicly challenge the board after a vote
5. Act like the "Lone Ranger"
6. Micromanaging
7. Drop the bomb on the superintendent (surprise superintendent of other presenters)
8. Vote along party lines
9. Become a "ball carrier" for others with hidden agendas
10. Not understanding the Freedom of Information Act
11. Consider staff the enemy (showing them no respect)
12. Ignore Policy

MOTION: Ackerman, Weitlauf; to adjourn at 8:21 p.m.

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Board of Education Roles & Responsibilities

Nick Caruso
Associate Executive Director
for Field Services and Technology



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1

Introductions



2

How many school board members does
it take to screw in a light bulb?



6

How many school board members does
it take to screw in a light bulb?

None!

It's up to the
board to say
*"let there be
light"*.

7

How many school board members does
it take to screw in a light bulb?



It's up to the
superintendent to decide
if it will be incandescent,
fluorescent, candle, solar,
neon or LED (and
designate his/her staff to
actually screw in the light
bulb).

8

How many school board members does
it take to screw in a light bulb?

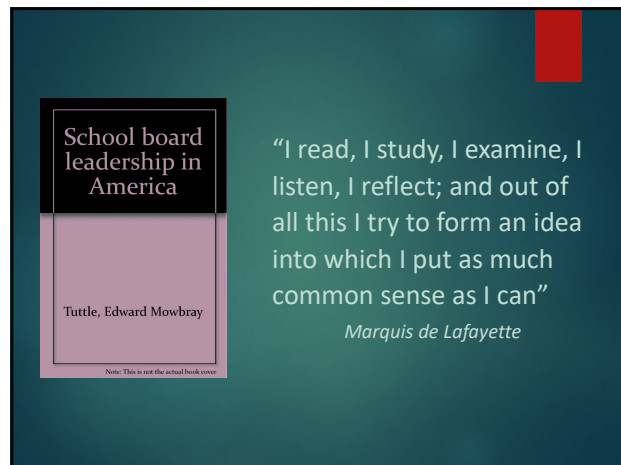


It's up to the board
to evaluate the
quality of lighting.

9



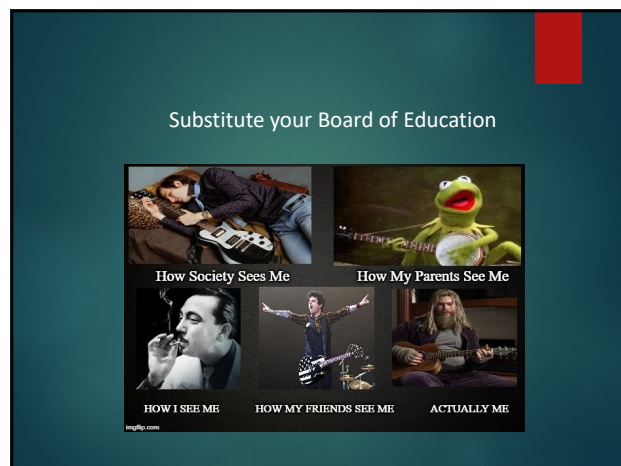
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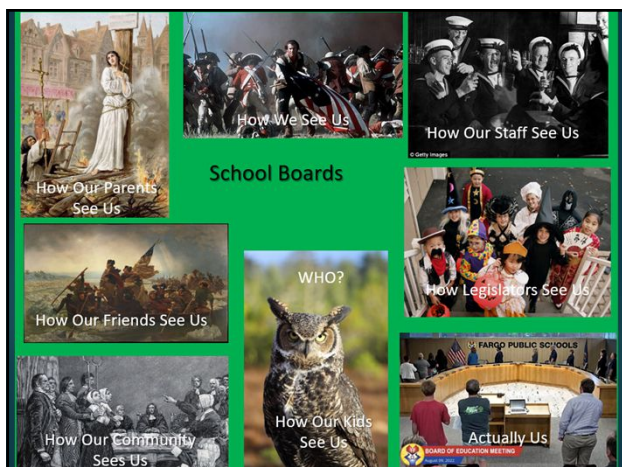
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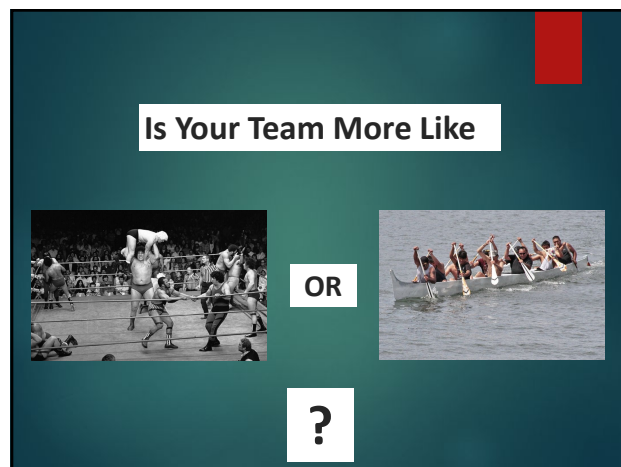
48



49



50



51

Is Your Team More Like



Ravioli &
Meatballs

OR

?



Lasagna

52

Mistakes Board Members Make

94

Mistakes Board Members Make

Name some Mistakes
Board Members Make

95

The Wrong Way!

1. Impatience

- Expecting the world to change overnight
- Thinking the board lacks intelligence for not agreeing with you
- Wanting to learn everything there is to learn... Immediately!!!

96

The Right Way!

- ▶ 1. Understand that it takes at least a year to really start to learn the basics, and longer to master the art.
- ▶ Try to understand what motivates others, and have patience with ideas different than your own.

97

The Right Way!

- You do not *automatically* gain respect from your colleagues.

You must **EARN** it!

98

The Wrong Way!



99



The Wrong Way!



2. Behave poorly!

- ▶ Throw temper-tantrums.
- ▶ Off-color language.
- ▶ Throw things.
- ▶ Threaten board members or the public.
- ▶ Insult board members, the superintendent, staff or the public.
- ▶ MIA
- ▶ MUI
- ▶ Fall asleep during public comment!

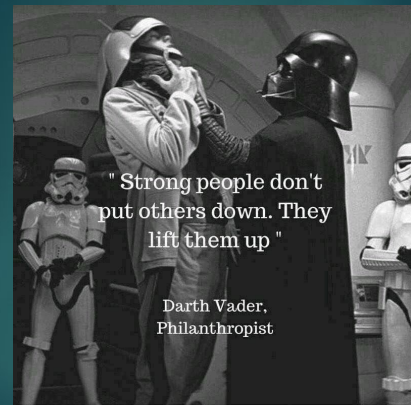


100

The Right Way!

- ▶ Board members often "act out" because they are frustrated.
- ▶ Act the same way you would expect the children in your care to behave.
- ▶ Honor the Code of Ethics

102



103

The Wrong Way!

3. Think the reason for school is delivering content.

104

The Right Way!

"You haven't taught it until someone has learned it!"

105

Why We Have To Work Differently

Old Rules

1. Some students will learn "it" and some won't.
2. If they don't learn "it", it's their fault.

New Rules

1. All students will learn "it".
2. If they don't learn "it", the policy-makers and professionals have to take responsibility.

106

Why We Have To Work Differently

Old Rules

- Time is the "Constant"
- Learning is the "Variable"

New Rules

- Time is the "Variable"
- Learning is the "Constant"

107

The Right Way!

It's all about learning!

110

The Wrong Way!

The Killer B's



111

The Wrong Way!

4. Publicly challenge the board after a vote.

- Publicly criticize board after vote.
- Do not contribute to the consensus when you disagree with an issue.

112

The Right Way!

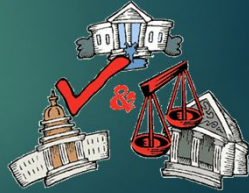
Checks and Balances

113

The Right Way!

Checks and Balances

- ▶ Legislative Branch
- ▶ Executive Branch
- ▶ Judicial Branch



114

The Right Way!

- ▶ Fight hard for what you believe in, and then accept the will of the board, and publicly support the decisions of the board.
- ▶ The majority should be sensitive to opposing views.

115

The Wrong Way!

5. Act like the “Lone Ranger”

- ▶ Speak for the board (especially on social media)
- ▶ “Investigate” school activities.
- ▶ School visits are disruptive.

117

The Right Way!

5. The board is a “Committee of the whole”.

You have no more authority than any other member of the public.

118

The Wrong Way!

6. Can’t See The Forest for The Trees.

(Micromanaging)



119

The Right Way!

6. Leave Administration to Administrators.

- ▶ Think Macro - Not Micro
- ▶ Think Why - not How
- ▶ Concentrate on Policy!

VISION

120

The Wrong Way!

7. Drop bomb on Superintendent at a board meeting.



121

The Right Way!

7. Call the board chair or superintendent if you are going to ask a difficult question to give them a chance to answer intelligently.



122

The Wrong Way!

8. Vote along party lines, putting politics before children.

125

The Right Way!

8. Never put politics above children.



126

The Wrong Way!

9. Become a “ball carrier” for others with hidden agendas.

•Allow “friends” (or politics) to influence how you look at an issue.

128

The Wrong Way!

9. Become a “ball carrier” for others with hidden agendas.

•Allow staff to manipulate you into taking their side against the Sup’t..
•Raise every issue you hear about during your board meeting

129

The Right Way!

9. Instruct anyone of the need to use the chain of command.

Listen to your conscience, study an issue until you understand it, (regardless of who is supporting the motion) and vote accordingly.

130

The Right Way!

Memorize This Statement!

"This problem could end up requiring board action, and if I am involved in it at this level, I will be unable to act on it as a member of the board because it could be a violation of due process. You really need to go through the proper channels."

131

The Wrong Way!

9b. Have your own hidden agenda.

132

The Right Way!

9b. Have a global perspective on the priorities of the board.

133

The Wrong Way!

10. Participate in "illegal" executive sessions.



134

The Wrong Way!

10a. Speak about confidential issues.

- Repeat things discussed in executive session to spouse.
- Speak about pending litigation before resolution.
- Discuss personnel/student matters with members of public.



135

The Right Way!

10. Be very careful to learn your responsibilities under the FOI statutes, and remind the board when you are straying.

136

The Right Way!

10. Keep your mouth...

SHUT!!!



137

The Wrong Way!

11. Consider staff
“the enemy”

138

The Wrong Way!

“we would have a lot more
money to help kids learn if we
didn’t have so many teachers
on the payroll”

139

The Wrong Way!

“They’re not the public –
they’re just staff...”

140

The Wrong Way!

“We have way-y-y too many
administrators”

141

The Wrong Way!

“I don’t believe anything I hear from the superintendent”

142

The Right Way!

- ▶ 11. The entire staff must feel part of the “team” if the district is going to be successful in educating every child!

143

The Right Way!

The entire purpose of the board, the Superintendent, the administrators and staff is to ensure the interaction between student and teacher is a successful one.

144

The Wrong Way!

12. Ignore Policy

145

The Wrong Way!

12. Ignore Policy

1. Don’t refer to policy when making decisions.
2. Overturn board policies on a regular basis.
3. Do not hold board/sup’t/staff to policy manual

146

The Right Way!

- ▶ Your Policy manual is law
- ▶ Policy should be adhered to.
- ▶ The board should be extremely careful when it overrules a policy.

147

The Secret of Life



148

The Secret of Life

The secret to educating all children is
to provide a quality curriculum
delivered through quality instruction!

Katie Haycock, CEO The Education Trust

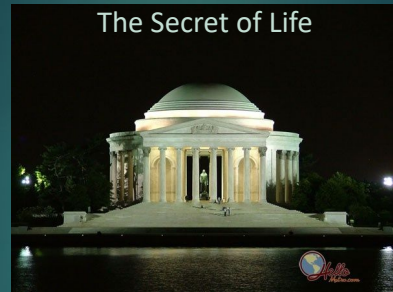
149

The Secret of Life



150

The Secret of Life



151

The Secret of Life



Agree on the problem –
the solution often finds itself

152

The Right Way!

What legacy do you want to leave?

“Tom was a great “counter-of-paper clips”

“Mary cared deeply about children and was a strong
advocate for public schools”

153

The Right Way!

What legacy do you want to leave?

You have now served on your local board of education for 8 years. You have decided that it is time to let someone else take your place on the board and have chosen not to run for re-election. Tonight is your last board meeting, and the local newspaper is running a story about your board service.

In a brief paragraph, tell us what you would hope to see in such an article.

154

Questions/Comments?

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155