# Washington State School for the Blind

# Board of Trustees - Operating Principles

Original date: July 2, 1993

Updated: August 7, 2006

Updated: October 8, 2021 (mission and purpose statement / changed ‘visually impaired to low vision’)

## INTRODUCTION:

The manner in which the Board and Administration conduct their business becomes a model for students, teachers, parents, and staff on how problems are solved.

Recognizing that each individual is unique and important will enhance our operating principles and develop a high level of organization self-esteem and confidence.

Operating principles define the beliefs, values, and methods of working together.

Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. To assure quality operations, leaders must agree on basic ways of working together.

The following principles outline a philosophy of cooperative behavior that will help the board and administration work in the best interest of the school and services to blind and low vision chilldren on a statewide basis.

## JUDGMENT AND TRUST

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 operation.

## COMMUNICATIONS, COOPERATION, AND SUPPORT

Board and Superintendent:

* Recognize that open communication requires trust, respect, and a fundamental belief in good will among Board members and staff.
* Work to minimize misunderstanding and reduce conflict.
* Support each other constructively and courteously.
* Maintain confidentiality.
* Allow ourselves and others the freedom to admit mistakes.
* Focus our discussions on issues, not personalities - free of defensiveness.
* Encourage constructive disagreement.
* Balance our honesty with sensitivity toward others.
* Uphold the integrity of every individual.
* Pursue thorough understanding.
* Involve those parties who will be affected by the decision and solution.
* Commit to getting to know one another and the ideas and issues that are important to that individual.

## ISSUES WHICH COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Information Items

Board: Inform the Superintendent of significant concerns raised by patrons. Make the Superintendent aware of issues/programs on which the Board wishes to be particularly well-informed.

Superintendent: Keep the Board informed of all new developments and progress of activities related to the Board goals and major programs. Be sure to inform the Board in advance of any complaint, concern, or issue likely to come before the board.

Input/Option Items

Board: Let the Superintendent know about issues of concern and interest to the Board so that it is easier for the Superintendent to distinguish between items the Board wishes to discuss and items the Superintendent should handle independently.

Superintendent: Bring to the Board in a timely manner all issues, plans, and/or programs that meet the following criteria:

• Likely to be sensitive.

• Major change in program thrust.

• Major cost item.

• Major deployment of staff.

## EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

### No Surprises

Board: Share ideas about new programs and new directions with the Superintendent and other members of the Board before presenting publicly.

Superintendent: Bring matters to the Board in a timely fashion. Keep the Board well-informed. Present new programs/projects well in advance to secure Board input.

### Be Prepared

Board: Read all materials mailed to the Board ahead of time and bring your information to the meeting for discussion.

Superintendent: Come prepared to each meeting with recommendations for projects and solicit board input.

### Disagree without Becoming Disagreeable

Board: Use executive sessions to address complaints related to staff. Try to resolve major disagreements with one another or staff in private.

Superintendent: State your position but accept advice of the Board. There is nothing wrong with healthy disagreement, but resolution on issues must be attained. It is the responsibility of the Superintendent to make important decisions, but with board advice and direction.

All: Disagree with each other in a positive and constructive fashion. Tone of voice, choice of words, and other actions can spell the difference between discussion, debate, and argument. Handle personal/ personnel concerns in private. Give as much attention to the manner in which you disagree with people as you do to the particular issue.

### Handling Controversy at Meetings

Board: If the Board can't agree on how to proceed, call a short recess, regroup, and regain composure. Or, agree to call a special meeting to deal with the topic. The entire meeting shouldn't be absorbed by one topic when other business needs to be completed. The Board chair may ask the Superintendent to gather more information on a topic and report back to the Board, and/or to bring in additional people to help explain and/or discuss issues of concern to the Board or some Board members.

Superintendent: Resolve complaints at an administrative level, if possible, without consuming precious Board time. Listen and work with the Board on other controversial issues. Gather additional information ahead of time if the issue is known and be prepared to present and be a resource to the Board.

## DEALING WITH CITIZEN OR STAFF COMPLAINTS OUTSIDE OF BOARD MEETINGS

Board and Superintendent: Agree upon a process for dealing with complaints and the actions that will be taken when a board member is contacted by a community member who has a complaint.

## DECISION-MAKING

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

• Resolve problems at the lowest level possible.

• Clearly communicate decisions.

• Build into each decision a point or re-evaluation.

• Provide for input from all concerned.

• Use a decision-making style appropriate to the situation.

## BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT EXPECTATIONS

Superintendent can expect from the Board members:

• Their trust and confidence.

• A clear understanding of role and relationship.

• A willingness to consider staff recommendations.

• Preparedness to do their jobs.

• Adherence to high standards of ethical behavior.

• Realism, confidence, patience.

• A striving for educational, not personal, goals.

• A fair, honest job evaluation.

• No surprises.

Board can expect from the Superintendent:

• Personal integrity - will not bend under pressure.

• Sensitivity to feelings, beliefs, and commitments of public, staff, and board.

• Understanding that board members are appointed by the Governor and represent congressional districts.

• Adherence to highest standards of ethical behavior.

• Skill in communication and delegation.

• Ability to develop a long-range financial plan.

• Ability to work within the legislative process.

• Acting as key to development of his/her relationship with the Board.

• Always acts in the best interest of programs for blind/low vision children.

• No surprises.

### Vision

Every blind and low vision student in Washington has the supports and services they need to succeed (Version 1.1 September 2020 [WSSB Strategic Plan](https://www.wssb.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/WSSBVisionStrategySummaryV1.1_092220.pdf))

### Mission

To empower blind and low vision individuals to reach their full potential

### Core Values

* Student Centered
* Equity
* Accessibility
* Relationships
* Continuous Improvement