Washington School Board Standards

A framework for effective governance

Adopted by the Washington State School Directors' Association
Board of Directors, June 27, 2009

Special Thanks

The following individuals served on the WSSDA Board Standards Task Force, providing leadership and guidance in the development of these standards.

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Additional thanks to WSSDA staff and **Dr. Debora Boeck** for their assistance.

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Introduction

The Washington School Board Standards are intended for use by local school boards and individual directors as a common framework for school board governance. Two sets of standards were developed to encourage school boards and individual school directors to subscribe to the highest levels of professional and personal conduct and performance.

The standards identify the elements of good governance and effective board leadership as drawn from best practices and current research. They provide shared understanding of what constitutes good governance. They also validate and affirm the importance of the school board's role in ensuring student success.

School Board Standards

The standards encourage boards to focus on student achievement as their primary responsibility. For many school boards and individual directors, these standards will reinforce current practices. For others, they will provide a challenge and goals to be achieved. While use of the standards is voluntary, it is the hope that every school board will use them as a target for high performance.

The public also has an interest in the governance of its local schools, and the standards provide an opportunity for clarity of board roles and responsibilities and of the expected skills, knowledge and behaviors of school directors. These standards should serve to increase the public's confidence in local school boards.

Five core principles

The School Board Standards comprise five core principles:

1. Responsible school district governance
2. Communication of and commitment to high expectations for student learning
3. Creating conditions district-wide for student and staff success
4. Holding the district accountable for student learning
5. Engagement of the community in education

Benchmarks, indicators and references

Each standard has a set of benchmarks and key indicators to further define and help translate the standard into practice. The benchmarks identify the knowledge and skills that high performing boards demonstrate in meeting

"We intend the Washington School Board Standards to serve as a guide to help boards understand and apply common principles of good governance and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their own board governance to continuously improve their performance."

~ Martha Rice, WSSDA President and Director, Yakima School District

each standard. The indicators outline questions about what each standard looks like when applied at the local board level. A review of the professional literature provided references, which are identified for each of the standards and related benchmarks, and are included in a complete version of the standards, which can be found at **wssda.org** under "Popular Links."

Individual School Director Standards

The second set of standards, for individual school directors, describes healthy conduct of directors relevant to their relationships with one another, the community, staff, and students. These standards address professional behaviors needed to fulfill the obligations of being effective and responsible school directors.

Development of standards

The Washington School Board Standards were developed by the WSSDA Board Standards Task Force, which was established by the WSSDA Board of Directors in August 2008. The project began with face-to-face discussions among Task Force members and with internal and external stakeholders. The Task Force then drafted the standards over a period of nine months, soliciting input from all school directors, superintendents, WSSDA training consultants, and other education groups and revising them to incorporate input. The final Washington School Board Standards were adopted by the WSSDA Board of Directors on June 27, 2009.

Putting the standards into practice

Although school boards have adopted varying governance structures and each district and community is unique, WSSDA encourages all school boards to put the standards into practice in a way that is appropriate for their district. Not every benchmark and indicator under each standard will be directly applicable to all districts. Boards are encouraged to review and discuss the standards, and consider passing a resolution to adopt them in a format that is useful. Once adopted, the standards can be shared with staff and community to bring additional clarity of board roles and responsibilities.

The Individual School Director Standards can be used as a foundation for board protocols to which all board members agree, as a method of commitment by each school director, or as a self-directed learning plan.

Additionally, the Washington School Board Standards form the basis for the Boards of Distinction program, which replaces the WSSDA Boards of the Year and Diversity Awards. Other uses will include a board self-assessment instrument based on the standards, board workshops and training, and incorporation into curriculum.

School Board Standards

Standard 1

Provide responsible school district governance by:

a. Conducting board and district business in a fair, respectful and responsible manner.

b. Ensuring the board is accountable and open to the public including seeking divergent perspectives in its decision making process.

c. Respecting and advocating mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent.

d. Adopting policies based on well-researched practices that emphasize a belief that all students can achieve at high levels and that support continuous improvement of student achievement.

e. Promoting healthy relationships by communicating supportively, inspiring, motivating and empowering others, and exercising influence in a positive manner.

f. Working as an effective and collaborative team.

Standard 2

Set and communicate high expectations for student learning with clear goals and plans for meeting those expectations by:

a. Articulating the conviction that all students can learn and the belief that student learning can improve regardless of existing circumstances or resources.

b. Leading the development, articulation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by schools and community.

c. Adopting a collaboratively developed district plan focused on learning and achievement outcomes for all students.

d. Ensuring non-negotiable goals for student achievement are established and aligned to the district's plan.

Standard 3

Create conditions district-wide for student and staff success by:

a. Providing for the safety and security of all students and staff.

b. Employing and supporting quality teachers, administrators and other staff and providing for their professional development.

c. Providing for learning essentials, including rigorous curriculum, technology and high quality facilities.

d. Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for an efficient and effective learning environment.

e. Adopting and monitoring an annual budget that allocates resources based on the district's vision, goals and priorities for student learning.

We, as independently elected officials, recognize and accept the responsibility of our role and our personal authority to act only within the structure of a school district's board of directors. We commit to taking the time necessary to understand the beliefs, acquire the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to be effective school directors.

~ Washington State School Directors' Association Bylaws and Positions

Standard 4

Hold school district accountable for meeting student learning expectations by:

a. Committing to continuous improvement in student achievement at each school and throughout the district.

b. Evaluating the superintendent on clear and focused expectations.

c. Measuring student academic progress and needs based on valid and reliable assessments.

Standard 5

Engage local community and represent the values and expectations they hold for their schools by:

a. Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

b. Ensuring school board and district transparency through a process that is open and accountable.

c. Ensuring district information and decisions are communicated community-wide.

d. Soliciting input from staff and a wide spectrum of the community so that a diverse range of interests and perspectives on issues is considered.

"The Standards provide a foundation for the critical discussions and ensuing decisions that must be made to ensure student success."

~ Joan Skelton, Chair, WSSDA Board Standards Task Force, and Director, Evergreen School District

Contact us

If you have questions, or would like further information about the Washington School Board Standards, please contact Phil Gore at P.Gore@wssda.org or 360.493.9231.

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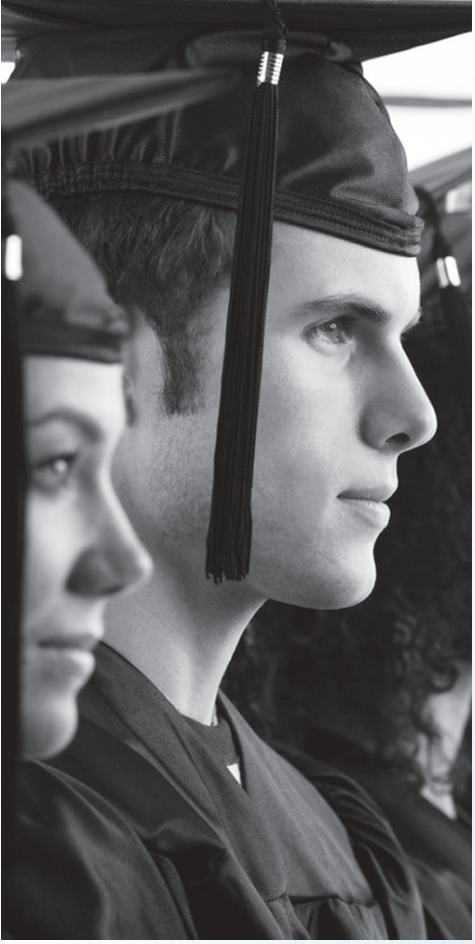

Individual School Director Standards

Standard 1. Values and Ethical Behavior

To be effective, an individual school director:

a. Places students' needs first.
b. Demonstrates commitment to equity and high standards of achievement for each student.
c. Commits to treating each individual with dignity and respect.
d. Models high ethical standards.
e. Advocates for public education.

Standard 2. Leadership

To be effective, an individual school director:

a. Contributes to thoughtful governance discussions and decisions by being well informed, open minded and deliberative.
b. Understands that authority rests with the board as a whole and not with individual directors.
c. Is able to articulate and model appropriate school director roles and responsibilities.
d. Actively participates in school director duties and responsibilities.
e. Demonstrates group membership and leadership skills, working within the board structure.
f. Respects the board's role in policy making and supports all adopted board policies.

Standard 3. Communication

To be effective, an individual school director:

a. Builds and maintains positive connections with the community and staff.
b. Communicates accurately and honestly, with awareness of the impact of his/her words and actions.
c. Listens carefully and with an open mind.
d. Maintains civility and treats all people with respect.
e. Maintains confidentiality of appropriate matters.
f. Refers and guides people with concerns to appropriate staff.
g. Welcomes parent, student and community input.

Standard 4. Professional Development

To be effective, an individual school director:

a. Commits the time and energy necessary to be informed and competent.
b. Keeps abreast of current issues, research, applicable laws, regulations, and policies that affect public education.
c. Participates in professional development, individually and with the board/superintendent team.

Standard 5. Accountability

To be effective, an individual school director:

a. Is accountable to the community.
b. Takes personal responsibility for his/her own words and actions.
c. Respects and abides by board decisions.
d. Meets expectations for transparency, including disclosing potential conflicts of interest and refraining from discussing or voting on those issues.
e. Complies with board policies/procedures and the law.

WSSDA
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WSSDA
Boards of *Distinction*

Aligned with the recently adopted Washington School Board Standards, the all new WSSDA Boards of Distinction recognizes all school boards that meet the established criteria. For more information on Boards of Distinction visit **wssda.org** and click on WSSDA Services/ Leadership Development.