Washington School Board Standards, Benchmarks of Success and Indicators for Evaluation, with References

A framework for effective governance

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

Special Thanks

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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 each standard. The indicators outline questions about what each standard looks like

"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

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 > WSSDA Services > Leadership Development."

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.

Washington School Board Standards, Benchmarks of Success and Indicators for Evaluation, with References

School boards provide leadership focused on promoting student achievement through planning, policy setting, advocacy and monitoring of performance so each and every student succeeds. To fulfill these roles, school boards implement the following standards.

Standard 1. Provide responsible school district governance by:

Benchmarks of Success	Indicators for Evaluation	References
a. Conducting board and district business in a fair, respectful and responsible manner.	1. Does the board base its decisions on what is best for students? 2. Does the board conduct its meetings in a businesslike manner? 3. Do board meeting agendas and minutes provide meaningful details regarding the business of the board in a way that the public can understand the issues addressed and the decisions made? 4. Does the board ensure that time spent on each agenda item is appropriate in terms of the item's importance and impact on student learning? 5. Does the board use methods to study and gain a deeper understanding of issues (e.g., study sessions, work groups, board training or public forums)? 6. Does the board model civility in all its interactions?	Townsend, R.S., Brown, J.R. and Buster, W.L. (2005) *A practical guide to effective school board meetings*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Carol, L.N., Cunningham, L.L., Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W., McCloud, B.A., and Usdan, M.D. (1986). *School boards: Strengthening grass roots leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Standard 1. (*continued*)

b. Ensuring the board is accountable and open to the public including seeking divergent perspectives in its decision making process.	1. Does the board understand and comply with the Open Public Meetings Act? 2. Does the board encourage the public to attend board meetings and provide input on topics before the board, including hosting informal opportunities for the public to discuss issues and district performance? 3. Does the board make available to the public, with sufficient notice and time for input, information which supports board discussions and decisions? 4. Does the board follow a defined process for gathering input from the community, staff and other stakeholders prior to making critical decisions? 5. Does the board carry out annual evaluations of its own performance and set goals for improvement? 6. Does the board solicit input from the public regarding its own performance?	Henderson, E., Henry, J, Saks, J.B, and Wright, A. (2001) *Team leadership for student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. Carol, L.N., Cunningham, L.L., Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W., McCloud, B.A., and Usdan, M.D. (1986). *School boards: Strengthening grass roots leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership. Washington State School Directors' Association. (2008). *The evaluation process: Board self assessment and superintendent evaluation*. Olympia, WA: WSSDA.
c. Respecting and advocating mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent.	1. Does the board recognize the superintendent as an integral part of the governance team and model collaboration and commitment to a shared purpose? 2. Does the board delegate through written policy authority for the superintendent to manage district operations and implement policy? 3. Does the board provide the superintendent with a clear statement of its expectations for his/her performance which is used in the superintendent's evaluation? 4. Does the board honor the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and staff? 5. Does the board thoughtfully consider recommendations of the superintendent and staff prior to making decisions? 6. Does the board establish and commit to written protocols for respectful internal and external interactions?	Goodman, R.H. and Zimmerman, W.G. (2000). *Thinking differently: Recommendations for 21st century school board/ superintendent leadership, governance, and teamwork for high student achievement.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service. Carol, L.N., Cunningham, L.L., Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W., McCloud, B.A., and Usdan, M.D. (1986). *School boards: Strengthening grass roots leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Standard 1. (*continued*)

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.	1. Does the board govern using written policies that align with current laws and best practice research? 2. Does the board focus its policy decisions on what is necessary to further the achievement for all students at the highest levels? 3. Does the board conduct periodic reviews to identify and adopt policies needed or to revise and update existing ones? 4. Does the board communicate and collaborate with colleagues across the state and nation regarding current and emerging issues, trends and viable policy solutions?	National School Boards Association (2005). *Targeting student learning: The school board's role as policymaker.* Alexandria, VA: NSBA. Resnick, M.A. (1999). *Effective school governance: A look at today's practice and tomorrow's promise.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Danzenberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W. and Usdan, M.D. (1992). *Governing public schools: New times, new requirements.* Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
e. Promoting healthy relationships by communicating supportively, inspiring, motivating and empowering others, and exercising influence in a positive manner.	1. Does the board provide an opportunity for staff and students to make presentations to the board? 2. Does the board foster an environment of empowerment to promote a culture of continuous improvement and flexibility throughout the organization? 3. Does the board use its credibility and influence to mobilize resources and accomplish productive work? 4. Does the board promote school board service as a meaningful way to make long term contributions to the community? 5. Does the board treat all individuals, including fellow board members, staff, students and community, with respect?	Washington State School Directors' Association. (2007). *Serving on your local school board: A guide to effective leadership.* Olympia, WA: WSSDA. Baldrige National Quality Program. (2004). *Education criteria for performance excellence.* Gaithersburg, MD: Baldrige National Quality Program.

Standard 1. (*continued*)

f. Working as an effective and collaborative team.	1. Does the board work with the superintendent to achieve mutual trust and commitment to each other through teamwork and clear communication? 2. Does the board build its influence by learning from others and striving to continuously improve its expertise, knowledge-base, skills, reputation, credibility, character and effort? 3. Does the board as a team pursue professional development activities to improve their knowledge and governance skills? 4. Does the board demonstrate collaborative problem solving and decision-making? 5. Do the board and superintendent share responsibility for the orientation of new board members and work together to form a new inclusive team?	Goodman, R.H. and Zimmerman, W.G. (2000). *Thinking differently: Recommendations for 21st century school board/ superintendent leadership, governance, and teamwork for high student achievement.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service. Eadie, D. (2005). *Five habits of high-impact school boards.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group and the National School Boards Association.

"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

Standard 2. Set and communicate high expectations for student learning with clear goals and plans for meeting those expectations by:

Benchmarks of Success	Indicators for Evaluation	References
a. Articulating the conviction that all students can learn and the belief that student learning can improve regardless of existing circumstances or resources.	1. Does the board truly believe that all students can achieve? 2. Does the board articulate high expectations for all students? 3. Does the board engage the community in developing and sustaining the belief that all students can achieve and that improvement in student learning can be made regardless of existing circumstances or resources? 4. Does the board commit to creating the conditions which foster a culture of collaboration around a shared purpose of improving student achievement?	Learning First Alliance (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools.* Washington, D.C.: Learning First Alliance, www.learningfirst.org. Pellicer, L.O. (1999). *Caring enough to lead: Schools and the sacred trust.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Iowa Association of School Boards (2000). *The lighthouse study.* Des Moines, IA: IASB.
b. Leading the development, articulation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by schools and community. 	1. Does the board include stakeholders and the community in the development and revisions of the district's vision? 2. Does the board use the vision to drive planning, decision-making and evaluation of district operations and progress? 3. Does the board communicate its rationale for decisions to the community as a way to reinforce its commitment to the vision?	Bracey, G.W. and Resnick, M.A. (1998). *Raising the bar: A school board primer on student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. Dufour, R., and Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service. Eadie, D. (2005) *Five habits of high impact school boards.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group and the National School Boards Association.

Standard 2. *(continued)*

c. Adopting a collaboratively developed district plan focused on learning and achievement outcomes for all students.	1. Does the board, in collaboration with staff and the community, formulate and maintain a current plan with goals and outcomes? 2. Does the board incorporate educational research, local issues, educational legislative initiatives, and national and global trends in the district planning process? 3. Does the board ensure that stakeholders, staff, and constituents have easy access to and understand the vision/goals/mission articulated in the district plan? 4. Does the board base its ongoing policy development, decision-making and budgeting on the district plan? 5. Does the board continually monitor implementation of the district plan and progress toward the plan's goals and outcomes?	Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. Washington State School Directors' Association. (2008). *Data dashboards for school directors: Using data for accountability and student achievement.* Olympia, WA: WSSDA.
d. Ensuring non-negotiable goals for student achievement are established and aligned to the district's plan.	1. Do the board and superintendent agree on non-negotiable student achievement goals and review them regularly? 2. Does the board demonstrate responsibility for student learning by using the district plan and its non-negotiable goals to drive board decisions and actions? 3. Does the board continually monitor district progress toward non-negotiable goals to ensure they remain the driving force behind every action?	Waters, J.T., and Marzano, R.J. (2006, September). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement [A working paper].* Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Iowa Association of School Boards (2007). *Leadership for student learning: The school board's role in creating school districts where all students succeed.*

Standard 3. Create conditions district-wide for student and staff success by:

Benchmarks of Success	Indicators for Evaluation	References
a. Providing for the safety and security of all students and staff.	1. Does board policy support regular evaluation of safety and security risks and updating of risk mitigation plans, ensuring coordination with local safety agencies? 2. Does the budget adequately address concern for safety and security issues? 3. Does the board ensure that facilities meet the learning needs of students and comply with current health, safety, security and accessibility standards?	Henderson, E., Henry, J, Saks, J.B, and Wright, A. (2001). *Team leadership for student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.
b. Employing and supporting quality teachers, administrators and other staff and providing for their professional development.	1. Does the board require and support recruitment of highly effective staff? 2. Does the board have policies in place to hire, evaluate and retain qualified staff to meet the needs of students? 3. Does board policy support and promote continuous staff development and mentoring? 4. Does the board celebrate and publicize staff successes?	Togneri, W. and Anderson, S. (2006). *Beyond Islands of Excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools.* A project of the Learning First Alliance, www.learningfirst.org/.

Standard 3. *(continued)*

c. Providing for learning essentials, including rigorous curriculum, technology and high quality facilities.	1. Does the board ensure that a course of study and graduation requirements are established that align with the community's high expectations for the achievement of students? 2. Do the board policies and budget provide the necessary curriculum materials, supplemental tools, resources and staff development to maximize student learning? 3. Does the board have a curriculum adoption cycle and a process for selecting curriculum that includes involvement of the community and parents in curriculum selection? 4. Does board policy require rigorous evaluation of curriculum and supplemental materials on a regular basis to ensure that curriculum materials clearly align with state and district standards and are positively impacting student achievement? 5. Does the board have policy in place for the support, evaluation and updating of technology? 6. Does the board periodically review and evaluate district facilities and have in place a long term facilities plan for construction and maintenance?	Henderson, E., Henry, J, Saks, J.B, and Wright, A. (2001). *Team leadership for student achievement.* Alexandria, VA, National School Boards Association. Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.
d. Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for an efficient and effective learning environment.	1. Does the board ensure an organizational structure is in place that supports the district as a learning organization? 2. Does the board communicate an expectation that effective instructional resources and strategies are used consistently in all classrooms across the district? 3. Does the board establish a framework for the district's negotiated agreements to support a high level of student achievement? 4. Does the board support a process for internal and/or external evaluation of district operations?	Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

Standard 3. *(continued)*

e. Adopting and monitoring an annual budget that allocates resources based on the district's vision, goals and priorities for student learning.	1. Does the board keep the community informed about the financial needs of the school district and invite public input during the budget process? 2. Does the board provide guidelines for budget development, including a clearly defined expectation for a reasonable ending fund balance? 3. Does the board adopt a fiscally responsible annual budget that is aligned with the district's vision and plan? 4. Does the board regularly monitor the budget and fiscal status of the district?	Carol, L.N., Cunningham, L.L., Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W., McCloud, B.A., and Usdan, M.D. (1986). *School boards: Strengthening grass roots leadership.* Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership. Haycock, K., Jerald, C., and Huang, S. (2001). *Closing the gap: Done in a decade. Thinking K-16: New frontiers for a new century*, 5(2), 3-22. A publication of The Education Trust. Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2002). *School communities that work for results and equity.* Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. www.annenberginstitute.org.

Standard 4. Hold school district accountable for meeting student learning expectations by:

Benchmarks of Success	Indicators for Evaluation	References
a. Committing to continuous improvement in student achievement at each school and throughout the district.	1. Does regular communication from the board to the staff and community reinforce its commitment to high levels of achievement for all students? 2. Does the board establish and follow a schedule for the timely review of the district plan? 3. Does the board ensure a high degree of coherence between the district's plan and individual school improvement plans? 4. Does the board annually review district and school improvement plans? 5. Does the board publicly recognize the efforts of individuals and schools in improving student learning?	Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. Washington State School Directors' Association. (2008). *Data dashboards for school directors: Using data for accountability and governance.* Olympia, WA: WSSDA.
b. Evaluating the superintendent on clear and focused expectations.	1. Does the board establish a policy and a process for routine evaluation of the superintendent? 2. Does the board have written performance expectations for the superintendent and communicate those to the community? 3. Does the board solicit appropriate data for the superintendent's evaluation? 4. Does the board base the decisions about the superintendent's contract on the objective evaluation of the superintendent's achievement of performance expectations?	Goodman, R.H. and Zimmerman, W.G. (2000). *Thinking differently: Recommendations for 21st century school board/superintendent leadership, governance, and teamwork for high student achievement.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Standard 4. (*continued*)

c. Measuring student academic progress and needs based on valid and reliable assessments.	1. Does the board expect and model the effective use of data in monitoring student achievement and district performance? 2. Does the board review and understand the criteria, assessment tools and methods to measure student achievement and district performance? 3. Does the board regularly review data, including disaggregated student achievement data, to measure progress toward district goals? 4. Does the board regularly evaluate and adjust resources and strategies for closing achievement gaps to maximize their effectiveness?	Fielding, I. Kerr N. and Rosier, P. (2004). *Delivering on the promise.* Kennewick, WA: New Foundation Press. National School Boards Foundation. (2001). *Improving school board decision-making: The data connection.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

Standard 5. Engage local community and represent the values and expectations they hold for their schools by:

Benchmarks of Success	Indicators for Evaluation	References
a. Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	1. Does the board provide leadership on educational issues important to the community and advocate on behalf of students and the district? 2. Does the board exhibit cultural, racial and ethnic understanding and sensitivity? 3. Does the board establish partnerships to promote and expand educational opportunities for all students? 4. Does the board foster partnerships with community organizations in the use of facilities and sharing of services? 5. Does the board maintain legislative awareness and communicate with local, state and federal governments in its advocacy role? 6. Does the board follow an established process for referring citizens with questions, concerns, comments or feedback to the appropriate personnel and following up appropriately?	Boeck, D.G. (2002). *Closing the achievement gap: A policy action guide for Washington state's school directors.* Olympia, WA: WSSDA. Gulden, G. E. (2002). *Cultural diversity in school: A guide for school board members and school administrators.* Olympia, WA: WSSDA.

Standard 5. (*continued*)

b. Ensuring school board and district transparency through a process that is open and accountable.	1. Does the board ensure that the public is well informed of the board's roles and responsibilities? 2. Does the board make itself directly accessible to the public? 3. Does the board maintain visibility, participating actively in school and community affairs? 4. Does the board ensure that district and school staff operate with a customer focus? 5. Does the board ensure the district conducts business in a transparent and accountable manner? 6. Does the board ensure its policies are easily accessible to staff and community?	Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.
c. Ensuring district information and decisions are communicated community-wide.	1. Does the board ensure that a proactive communications system is in place to disseminate information and address issues in the schools and community? 2. Does the board identify and use key communicator groups to provide input and disseminate district information and decisions? 3. Does the board communicate district performance to the public in clear and understandable ways?	Eadie, D. (2005). *Five habits of high-impact school boards.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group and the National School Boards Association.
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.	1. Does the board seek input from parents, students, community groups, service organizations and local governing bodies on important matters? 2. Does the board seek meaningful input from staff on changes needed to strengthen instructional programs? 3. Does the board carefully consider community and staff input in its decision-making?	Gemberling, K.W. Smith, C.W. and Villani, J.S. (2000). *The Key work of school boards guidebook.* Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

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

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.

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Bylaws and Positions

For additional information, please contact Phil Gore at 360.493.9231 or p.gore@wssda.org. The Washington School Board Standards and School Director Standards are available at **wssda.org** > WSSDA Services > Leadership Development.