

Governing to Improve Student Achievement: **Questions and Answers**

1. How will our governing system change?

Attend our meetings starting in August. You will find that we have developed governing policies – these are separate from our existing district policies – that establish:

- Clear, community-based standards for every part of district operations - and a vehicle for assessing whether operations are compliant with those standards;
- Rigorous expectations for student success and a process for evaluating whether each student is achieving those expectations.

In short, the board has established a systemic direction for our district and a systematic monitoring of organizational performance that focuses all of us on our job: student achievement.

2. What will this actually look like?

Agendas will be tightly focused for the majority of the time on achievement of student results. The written documentation will provide more information and certified data than the board has ever received about operations and achievement in a traditional board setting. This monitoring is done on the board's schedule, gathering data throughout the school system.

3. Why would our board want to change to this process?

Working on behalf of our diverse community, we have committed to intentionally discuss, deliberate and make the value-laden, tough decisions about matters that focus all of us, without exception, on student achievement.

We commit to you that we will engage in:

- the same continual improvement and evaluation of our own performance as we do from the district and the schools;
- individual discipline to contribute to the board and its discussions in a constructive, thoughtful and intelligent manner, and;
- strategic interaction with the broader community to gain their support;

4. Do individuals lose their ability to impact the system?

In the Coherent Governance environment, individual board members lose nothing they now have in terms of their ability to impact the system. All boards, those in Coherent Governance and those practicing traditional processes, are more than collections of individuals. Even in traditional governance, no individual member has any authority whatsoever, other than the power he or she assumes outside legal authority. Coherent Governance offers the full board, and each of its members working with that full board team, greater opportunity to impact the system. That happens through the establishment and monitoring of policies.

Board members still alert the superintendent, or his/her identified delegates in the system, to problems or concerns. Members can, in policy, require a follow up on how the concern was addressed or resolved.

5. How do members represent their constituent interests?

Short answer: the same as they do now. In order to accomplish anything, a member of the School Board needs the votes of a simple majority of his/her colleagues. The obligation of the board members is to commit to the open deliberation at board meetings, balancing these critical questions: What Benefit? For Whom? At What Cost? Vote as a majority and move on.

There is no governing system that sanctions the ability of an individual member to direct the activities of the organization the board governs. That is why boards are comprised of several members. Individuals are members of, not sub-boards themselves. As members of a governing board, whether at present or within the framework of Coherent Governance, individual members are expected to present constituent concerns to the place in the organization where the solution lies: to the superintendent, if the issue is an operational concern, or to the board if it is a policy concern.

6. Some of us have very strong political ties. How do we retain allegiance to our political party and work in this environment?

There is no reason why the issue of Coherent Governance should capture the interest of any party. It has nothing to do with politics; it simply is a process for the board to use for greater control over the organization it is responsible for. Anything can be made political, but this is not a logical candidate for becoming a political target or issue. Good Republicans can remain good Republicans, and good Democrats can remain good Democrats. Neither is limited in any way.

We will say that the school board, whether Coherent Governance or traditional, should be as free from partisan politics as possible. Otherwise, it begins to look like Congress; hardly an example to be copied by school boards.

7. The perception by many is that the board cedes all power to the superintendent and becomes a rubber stamp board. How do we speak to that perception?

This is a common misperception, but it is 180-degrees from reality. While the CG board does confer significant authority to its superintendent to do his/her job, the counter is unprecedented accountability.

For example, consider this language from one of the policies: “The performance of the district and the performance of the superintendent are considered by the board to be identical.” In other words, if the district succeeds, as success is defined in policy by the board, the superintendent has done his/her job. But if it does not, s/he singularly suffers the consequences. How many critics would be eager to accept that level of accountability?

As it is now, board approval of superintendent operational recommendations or decisions blurs accountability, since both the board and the superintendent share in making the same decisions. In Coherent Governance, the monitoring process unquestionably gives the board more information about, and more control over, operational matters than it has now. Other boards have gone before you – and they attest to the higher level of powerful leadership and accountability ... and knowledge.

7. The board is a group of strong, independent individuals who will fight to get their concerns addressed. How does Coherent Governance work for them? Does it become all group-think?

The fact the board is comprised of strong individuals will not change. See number 4 above. If individual members now are directing staff activities, or otherwise governing as individual members, they are stepping well outside their legal authority, even in a traditional system of governance.

But at the board table, these members are expected, even encouraged, to fight for their individual beliefs. Like it or not, the board is a GROUP of individuals. The group, not the individuals, has legal authority. This is true in any system of board governance.

8. Linkages. How do they work better for us than the current pattern of communications we have with our constituents now?

The formal linkage responsibility the CG board assumes can take any number of faces, but it recognizes that the board is governing an entire school district, not just a section of it. The board will be challenged to design a process to enable every member, not just a single member, to interface with the entire district of constituents as a means for understanding and interpreting the values the entire community holds for the district and its students. It is a full-board responsibility.

Individual members can and likely will continue to interface with individuals and groups in their own respective areas of interest or experience, but linkages are based upon the notion that the full board has need to interface with the full constituency base. The ownership, in other words, includes more than any one part. It includes the entire district, and individual members are responsible for all of it, not just a part of it.