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# MT. VERNON THSD 201

# DISTRICT PLANNING: SESSION 1

## JULY 22, 2008

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ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

# *Foundational Principles of Effective Governance*

As the corporate entity charged by law with governing a school district, each School Board sits in trust for its entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes some fundamental duties on the Board:

## *1. The Board Clarifies the District Purpose.*

As its primary task, the Board continually defines, articulates and re-defines district ends to answer the recurring question — who gets what benefits for how much? Effective ends development requires attention to at least two key concerns: student learning and organizational effectiveness.

- Ends express the benefits the school district should deliver, thereby providing the entire system with clarity of purpose and a clear direction. A School Board rarely creates district ends; rather, it most often detects them through listening and observing.
- In effective school districts, every part of the organization is aligned with the ends articulated by the School Board in written Board policy.
- Well-crafted ends enable the School Board to effectively and efficiently monitor district performance and assess organizational success (Principle 5).

## *2. The Board Connects With the Community.*

The School Board engages in an ongoing two-way conversation with the entire community. This conversation enables the Board to hear and understand the community's educational aspirations and desires, to serve effectively as an advocate for district improvement and to inform the community of the district's performance.

- Effective communication is essential to create trust and support among community, Board, Superintendent and staff.
- The School Board must be aggressive in reaching out to the community – the district's owners - to engage people in conversations about education and the public good. In contrast, people who bring customer concerns to Board members should be appropriately directed to the Superintendent and staff.
- A Board in touch with community-wide concerns and values will serve the broad public good rather than being overly influenced by special interests.

## *3. The Board Employs a Superintendent.*

The Board employs and evaluates one person — the Superintendent — and holds that person accountable for district performance and compliance with written Board policy.

- An effective School Board develops and maintains a productive relationship with the Superintendent.
- The employment relationship consists of mutual respect and a clear understanding

*(over)*

of respective roles, responsibilities and expectations. This relationship should be grounded in a thoughtfully crafted employment contract and job description; procedures for communications and ongoing assessment; and reliance on written policy.

- Although the Board is legally required to approve all employment contracts, the Board delegates authority to the Superintendent to select and evaluate all district staff within the standards established in written Board policy.

## 4. *The Board Delegates Authority.*

The Board delegates authority to the Superintendent to manage the district and provide leadership for the staff. Such authority is communicated through written Board policies that designate district ends and define operating parameters.

- Ultimately, the School Board is responsible for everything, yet must recognize that everything depends upon a capable and competent staff.
- "Delegates authority to" means empowering the Superintendent and staff to pursue Board ends single mindedly and without hesitation. A Board that does (or re-does) staff work disempowers the staff. High levels of Superintendent and staff accountability require high levels of delegation.
- Delegation is difficult for anyone accustomed to direct action. However, to appropriately stay focused on the big picture and avoid confusing the staff, members of the School Board must discipline themselves to trust their Superintendent and staff and not involve themselves in day-to-day operations.

## 5. *The Board Monitors Performance.*

The Board constantly monitors progress toward district ends and compliance with written Board policies using data as the basis for assessment.

- A School Board that pursues its ends through the delegation of authority has a moral obligation to itself and the community to determine whether that authority is being used as intended.
- Unless the Board is clear about what it wants, there is no valid way to measure progress and compliance.
- A distinction should be made between monitoring data (used by the Board for accountability) and management data (used by the staff for operations).
- The constructive use of data is a skill that must be learned. The Board should have some understanding of data, but will typically require guidance from the staff.

## 6. *The Board Takes Responsibility For Itself.*

The Board, collectively and individually, takes full responsibility for Board activity and behavior – the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work. Individual Board members are obligated to express their opinions and respect others' opinions; however, Board members understand the importance of the Board ultimately speaking with one clear voice.

- The School Board's role as trustee for the community is unique and essential to both the district and community.
- While the Board must operate within legal parameters, good governance requires the Board be responsible for itself, its processes and contributions. Board deliberations and actions are limited to Board work, not staff work.
- The Board seeks continuity of leadership, even as it experiences turnover in membership. The Board accomplishes this by using written Board policies to guide Board operations, by providing thorough orientation and training for all members, and by nurturing a positive and inviting Board culture.

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**MT. VERNON THSD 201**
**DISTRICT PLANNING: SESSION 1**
**TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2008**
**AGENDA**

- Introductions and Overview of Evening
- Identifying Values and Beliefs for Education (of those living in the Mt. Vernon District)
- Review of the District Mission Statement
- Session 2 Overview
- Wrap-Up

## Identifying Values & Beliefs

***Individual Work*** — *Using the post-it notes on your table, please write what you believe and what you value for each of these five questions-one belief or one value per post-it.*

QUESTIONS:

1. What core beliefs and values do I hold about learning and students?
2. What core beliefs and values do I hold about teaching and teachers?
3. What core beliefs and values do I hold about the purpose of education?
4. What core beliefs and values do I hold about the responsibility of the schools to the community?
5. What core beliefs and values do I hold about the responsibility of the community to the schools?

**YOU WILL HAVE 15 MINUTES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS FROM THIS SECTION**

***Small Group Work***

The facilitator's role is to help focus people on the conversation, keep the group on track, and elicit participation from all members of the group. The facilitator should identify one person to serve as the group recorder.

The objective of this activity is to take the individual responses to the questions about values and beliefs and summarize them into no more than three common ground statements for each of the questions. In order to accomplish this, the group will need to do the following:

1. Take the various post-its for each question and group them into similar categories.
2. Identify the key ideas or themes represented. This may require the group to do some prioritizing if there seems to be more than three key concepts for each question.
3. Articulate each key idea into a belief statement (i.e., We believe that…) and record it on chart paper.

**YOU WILL HAVE 20 MIINUTES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS FROM THIS SECTION**

**Re-Visiting our Mission Statement Worksheet**

**MT. VERNON THSD 201**
**Mission Statement**

**The mission statement expresses the purpose for which we exist and the functions we perform. The mission of Mt. Vernon Township High School, a community including students, parents, staff, and citizens, is to provide challenging educational and social experiences that will create in all students' lifelong learning and responsible citizenship in a diverse and changing world.**

*The mission of a district should state its purpose for existence.*

In your small group, please discuss and answer the following questions:

- Does our mission reflect our shared values and beliefs?
- Is our mission timeless (applies to today and in the future)?
- Do we have a shared understanding of our mission's meaning?
- Does the mission state the purpose of this district?
- Does the mission need to be revised?

Your group will have 10 minutes to complete this activity.

**MT. VERNON THSD 201**
**DISTRICT PLANNING: SESSION 1**
**TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2008**

**SESSION 2 OVERVIEW**
**AUGUST 12, 2008**

- Look at the District's strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Review of the District's current goals
- Goal development