



# **OPERATING PRINCIPLES**

**Cascade School District #228**

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Trey Ising, Chair**  
**Cyndi Garza, Vice Chair**  
**Judy Derpack**  
**Zachary Miller**  
**Mike Worden**

## **SUPERINTENDENT**

**Dr. Tracey Beckendorf-Edou**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

Recognizing that individuals are unique and important will enhance our operating principles and develop a high level of organizational 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 is agreed upon by Board members and the Superintendent. As members of the management team, we agree to abide by these principles.

## **JUDGMENT AND TRUST**

*Board & Superintendent:* The complexities of operating a school district cannot be fully addressed in policy, procedures or operating principles. 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 school district operation.

## **DECISION MAKING**

The identification and evaluation of alternatives, an awareness of short and long-term consequences, an appreciation for the needs of the group as well as individuals, and sensitivity toward collective action are essential to the decision-making process.

*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 of re-evaluation
- Provide for input from all concerned
- Use a decision-making style appropriate to the situation

## **COMMUNICATIONS, COOPERATION AND SUPPORT**

*Board & Superintendent:*

- Recognize that open communication requires trust, respect and a fundamental belief in good will among Board members and staff
- Assume positive intent until learning otherwise

- Work to minimize misunderstanding and reduce conflict
- Address disagreements privately
- 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
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood
- 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

### **DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY**

*Board:* Exercise final approval over all policies. Study administrative reports on the implementation of policies and the effectiveness of policies. Once policies are approved by the majority of the members of the Board, support them even though you may have spoken against them initially. The Board must be five individuals with one collective voice.

*Superintendent:* Advise and assist the Board in developing policy. Share concerns about ideas that may not work. Once in place, support the policies of the Board whether or not you are in full agreement. Inform the Board of the manner in which policies are being administered, and when and if they may need to be revised. (Pertinent References: Board Policy 1310)

### **ISSUES THAT COME BEFORE THE BOARD**

#### **Public Input**

*Board:* The Chair states, “The board welcomes input from the public. Please state your name when called upon. Each person is allowed three minutes to speak. In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the board is not allowed to discuss items that are not on the agenda. The board will direct the superintendent to follow up on any items that arise during public comment as appropriate.”

#### **Information Items**

*Board:* Inform Superintendent of significant concerns raised by District patrons. Make 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 the progress of activities related to 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.

## **Discussion 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 fashion all issues, plans or programs that meet the following criteria:

- Likely to be sensitive in the community
- Major change in program focus
- Major cost item
- Major deployment of staff

The period for presenting such items to the Board should allow for Board deliberation and input. The Superintendent should provide options and alternatives to the Board, which include the strengths and weaknesses of the options.

## **Board Action Items**

*Board:* Read agenda materials, understand the issues and be prepared to discuss action items.

*Superintendent:* Use good judgment in determining whether an issue needs Board action. Provide ample time for the Board to read about, study and debate issues prior to voting.

- Establish a rationale for each decision
- Make decisions consistent with our expressed goals
- Communicate the rationale for making a decision that has been superseded by a higher level of authority to those involved before releasing the information

Administrative leaders are expected to be faithful to the district's overall mission and goals. If we are to lead by example, every act must adhere to our duty to serve our students. Being loyal does not mean we always agree. In any dynamic organization, debate and differences of opinion are expected and must be nurtured.

We need to foster an open, honest exchange of ideas so that our best thinking is stimulated. However, once a final decision is made, it is our individual and collective responsibility to give full support to its successful implementation.

## **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. Present programs/projects well enough in advance that suggestions for change proposed by the Board can be addressed without upsetting activities already in motion.

## **Be Prepared**

*Board:* Read all materials—call and ask questions in advance. Seek clarification and information when needed. When possible explain to the Superintendent in advance about concerns about a proposal.

*Superintendent:* Develop recommendations that combine the best interests of students and the needs of the District within the parameters of district priorities and district-wide Board adopted goals. Seek board input to the goal-setting process early on for high levels of success.

## **Disagree Without Becoming Disagreeable**

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

*Superintendent:* State your position but accept the will of the majority of the Board and follow through in action and in spirit.

*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:* Develop an agreed-upon procedure for dealing with controversy and sensitive issues at meetings. For example, agree that the President may call a short recess if it appears that people need to regroup or regain composure.

Or, agree to call a special meeting to deal with a topic that appears likely to take the entire night and/or may branch off into personnel/executive session areas. It may mean another meeting, but it could provide a cooling off period, an opportunity to discuss the issue with staff to be better prepared, and a time for concentrated attention to the issue.

The Board never takes final action on a complaint during the meeting at which it is presented. While we will respond in a timely fashion, we need to allow ourselves the time to give the issue the review and study it warrants.

The Board does not hear specific complaints related to individual staff members in open session. Complaints regarding staff will be directed to the employee's supervisor. Once the process has gone through all the supervisors, the board will hear complaints in executive session to protect the individual's rights.

Request that large groups identify a spokesperson and establish time limits for speakers when large numbers of people wish to speak. Three minutes per speaker is the limit.

## **Possible Responses**

### *Board:*

- Take the initiative to suggest to the Chair, “This issue might best be handled by the Superintendent and/or staff. It’s not that we aren’t interested, but the Superintendent is the person we hire to deal with these very issues.”
- Unanticipated controversy that is a non-agenda item should not be allowed to dominate an otherwise well-planned meeting. Stating up-front that, “There is a time limit and that the concern may be dealt with formally in the next Board meeting as an agenda item,” is an appropriate response.
- When involved parties become emotional, the situation can be defused by saying, “I recognize that this is a very important issue to you. We need a chance to gather more information. Our Superintendent will work with you to resolve this problem. Thank you for coming.”

*Superintendent:* Resolve complaints at administrative levels outside the Board area (example: the textbook complaint process), but prepare and forewarn the Board if a concern is likely to come its way. Assist the Board in upholding Board guidelines for dealing with controversial situations at meetings. For example, if the Board President calls a short recess in order to defuse a situation, use the break to make a personal effort to calm people.

## **DEALING WITH CITIZEN OR STAFF COMPLAINTS OUTSIDE OF BOARD MEETING**

*Board & 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. For example:

- Listen to the individual’s concern
- Inquire if the individual has discussed the issue with the person immediately responsible. If this has not been done, tell them how to contact the appropriate person. If the person has tried to resolve the problem with the appropriate person(s) and they are still dissatisfied, the board should then refer such criticism, complaints and suggestions to the Superintendent for study and recommendation.
- Explain that, as a final resource, a complaint can be submitted to the Board, but that the Board practice is to refer complaints to the Superintendent before taking any action. Explain that complaints raised against individuals cannot be addressed in a public meeting.
- Be cautious of giving the appearance of agreeing with the person, sometimes just listening makes people think you are on “their side”. Remember that anything you say might be understood as the “position of the Board or the Administration”.

## **PROCESS OF RESOLVING A CONCERN**

The Board and staff of the Cascade School District are dedicated to the health, safety and educational welfare of our students. If there are questions or concerns, we encourage first

seeking answers or resolution at the building level where the issue can be addressed most effectively. The following steps outline the procedures to be followed in answering questions and resolving concerns:

- Board members approached by a parent with a concern should direct them to seek resolution first directly with the teacher
- If the teacher is unable to satisfactorily resolve the matter, it should then be discussed with the building principal
- If the principal is unable resolve the issue, it should be brought to the attention of the superintendent
- If the superintendent is unable to resolve the issue, the concern may be heard by the Board at a closed hearing before a regularly scheduled meeting or at a separate time if necessary. This may be scheduled through the superintendent's office.

### **HIRING/RESTRUCTURING**

The responsibility for selection, placement and transfer of personnel shall be vested in the Superintendent. The Superintendent will have freedom to organize, reorganize and arrange the administrative and supervisory staff including instruction and business affairs which, in the Superintendent's best judgment, best serves the district.

### **EVALUATION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

*Board:* Establish strong and fair policies related to the evaluation of all District staff.

*Superintendent:* Support Board policies regarding evaluation and approach superintendent evaluation as well as the evaluation of those supervised with the serious intent to work toward improvement. Serve as a role model to those you supervise through your own willingness to be evaluated.

*All:* Commit to being supportive of other's recognition and reward achievements as well as counseling and assistance when concerns about performance arise. Commit to being pro-active in your own education, growth and development and be supportive of the growth and development of others.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media can be a powerful force in communication with constituents both positively and negatively. It is necessary to monitor the local sites and inform the superintendent when issues are noticed. Most negative posts regarding school district issues rarely include all the facts. Do not engage others on school district issues but refer the concerns directly to the superintendent. He or she will be the best person to engage the issues by providing the facts and other important information to the social media community.

Revised: January 8, 2018, June 20, 2019, December 7, 2020