

THE PROFESSIONAL GOVERNANCE BOARD

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Orienting your Professional Governance Board to Success

Practice makes perfect. Or so we were told throughout our childhood by parents, teachers and coaches. The lesson imparted was a simple, but valuable one. That expertise is not a gift or birthright, but is acquired through effort and application. This is not just true for math or basketball or playing the piano, but also holds true for any worthwhile endeavor, such as service on a professional governance board.

Service on a board of education is challenging, requiring familiarity with procedural rules, knowledge of educational trends, awareness of local conditions and student performance, and an understanding of what is required for professional governance. To simply expect that individuals will come to governance boards with this skill set, or that they will naturally and inevitably pick up the required knowledge and understanding during their service is, at best, optimistic and, at worst, unrealistic. In order to ensure that a legacy of professional governance is created and maintained, more is required, such as a thoughtful, focused program to acclimate new board members and train existing members.

Every professional governance board should make the training of its board members a priority. Such a commitment to a comprehensive orientation plan for new members provides numerous benefits. With meaningful orientation new members can quickly become comfortable with Board procedures and protocols, learn about board values and goals, understand the parameters and focus of the work of the Board, and be prepared to make meaningful contributions to the work of the school district. In sum, it's the difference between serving on a governance board, as opposed to merely sitting on one.

There are a number of measures that boards of education can utilize to provide valuable learning opportunities to their new members. Boards can offer opportunities to attend training opportunities provided by CAFE and other organizations; boards can provide formal orientation to candidates for office and new members; candidates for office can be invited to attend board meetings and tour district schools; and training materials, such as a board member handbook, can be shared with and explained to new members. These are just some ways that boards of education can ensure that new members are prepared to positively contribute to the work of the board upon being sworn in.

While there is flexibility as to the methods used by governance boards to provide orientation and training to its members, there should be no flexibility as to whether training and professional development are essential elements of a professional governance board. A culture of professionalism is not casually

acquired, and a legacy of good governance is an investment that must be continually made and remade. One of the best ways for a board of education to communicate its commitment to professional governance is to reach out to prospective members of the board and extend learning opportunities to them, letting them know that service on the board of education brings with it a responsibility to commit to continual learning.

Like any worthwhile endeavor, professional governance comes at the cost of focus and effort. An investment well worth making, as practice does indeed make perfect.