

November 9, 2022

Draft Governance Standards Proposal

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To: The VSBA Board of Directors

From: Mark Koenig, Chair of the Governance Standards Task Force

The Governance Standards Task Force met four times over the past three months. Appointed by the VSBA President Neil O'Dell, the task force drafted a set of proposed governance standards for consideration by the VSBA Board. This work came at the request of Secretary of Education Dan French.

The Secretary asked that the "initial version of governance standards should be clear, defensible, and general in nature. These standards should not endeavor to describe every aspect of school district governance, but rather general principles of good governance that most school boards in Vermont would view as being important." He asked that the standards include a description of community engagement in meeting educational outcomes for all students, a regular evaluation of the superintendent, and transparency and ethical governance practices.

We sought a balance between local flexibility and supporting state-level assurance for local education governance. Our intent was to develop a proposal with essential elements of good governance that is not overly prescriptive. During our four meetings, we heard from national governance researchers, considered articles and frameworks for governance, and brought examples from our experiences on local school boards. We also heard from a successful superintendent, received input from board members and superintendents through a survey, and solicited input from attendees in Regional Meetings as well as Annual Conference.

The proposed draft governance standards have been well vetted, and we hope the VSBA is able to forward this recommendation without substantial changes to the work.

Proposed Governance Standards

Preamble

We recognize that effective governance by school boards is an essential component in district quality. Governance Standards are an essential component of School District Quality Standards required by [Act 127 of 2022](#). The following standards do not attempt to repeat requirements listed in current statute or rule. They assume that each school district or supervisory union board shall ensure that students are furnished educational and other services in accordance with state and federal entitlements and requirements. We also recognize that the roles and responsibilities of the school board of any district, supervisory union or career center district must conform to applicable provisions in [Title 16 of Vermont Statutes](#) regarding authority and duties.

In addition to state and local requirements, effective school governance should incorporate the following three areas of focus and actions:

Governance Priorities – Through an equity lens, the board adopts a vision and measurable goals to support continuous improvement and monitors student academic progress and wellness.

- A. The board follows an inclusive process to invite and incorporate community input into the vision and goals for the school system.
- B. At least annually, the board sets measurable goals and regularly reviews the progress toward those goals.
- C. At least annually, the board monitors student academic progress and wellness.
- D. At least annually, the board formally evaluates the performance of the superintendent, based in part on the superintendent's progress toward meeting agreed upon goals.

Governance Protocols – The board adopts, reviews annually, and revises as needed, Operating Protocols for how it does its work, and annually reads foundational documents such as articles of agreement.

- A. The board annually assesses its performance, including adherence to agreed norms, protocols, procedures, and policies.
- B. The board annually reviews whether and/or how its actions and contributions have impacted the school system's success in meeting goals.

- C. The board annually evaluates the effectiveness of community engagement and public communication efforts.
- D. The board undertakes its own continuous learning and development and provides members with opportunities for ongoing training and support to maintain and increase their skills and understanding.

Governance Processes – The board establishes and follows inclusive, transparent, and predictable methods to conduct its work.

- A. The board discusses, adopts, and revises policies on a regular basis to ensure the system is supporting and meeting the needs of every student.
- B. The board ensures its annual budget aligns with its stated priorities and provides an equitable distribution of resources to help meet the needs and goals of every student.
- C. The board ensures its members are aware of conditions set forth in negotiated agreements and contracts.
- D. The board ensures its members understand and comply with Vermont statutes and regulations relevant to board work and public education.
- E. The board stays apprised of proposed legislation and policy-making that may affect its school system and students.
- F. The board maintains an ongoing relationship with locally elected officials.

Definitions

1. **Governance** – the system and methods by which entities are directed and overseen including structure, processes for making decisions, accountability, how goals are set and achieved, how risk is assessed and mitigated, and how performance is maximized.
2. **Priorities** – agreed understanding of what is most important to accomplish.
3. **Protocols** – agreed norms of behavior and interactions to promote transparency, predictability, and functional group dynamics.
4. **Processes** – established structures to support consistency, clear expectations, organization, and shared understanding for how the work will be accomplished.