

FROM STEWARDSHIP TO LEADERSHIP

Superintendents are uniquely positioned to be the axis for all that is good in public education. You are the educational leaders for the students and their families, the professional expert to the legislature, the community leader on education, the central manager for staff and the sole employee of the Board of Trustees. In these critical roles, the superintendent has great capacity to influence others and to foster best practices and nowhere is this more important than with your School Board.

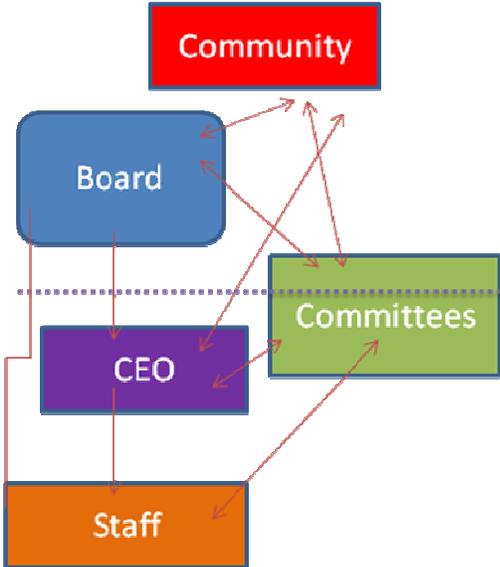
As my children grew up, they left behind a shelf full of books on how to care for pets. Sometimes these books were helpful in determining which pets would be a good match for our family. At other times, the information helped to make it possible for us to provide the best care for our new family addition so that we were well prepared to provide a safe environment where everyone would be happy. In extreme situations, the books helped us diagnose an illness so we knew what steps to take to bring a pet back into full health.

Like pets and people, Boards need the right environment in which to thrive. Most importantly they need a solid structure to frame and support the work that they do. There are relatively few Board members who are individually bad at governing but there are a host of Boards failing their communities because they do not govern well as a Board or a governing team. In the words of the authors Setterberg and Schulman, "The Board is a curious beast. For all of its collected heads, it often fails to see straight. Why then, do so many Boards act more like rabid squirrels, weak but terribly dangerous?" (Beyond Profit: The Complete Guide to Managing a Nonprofit Organization)

If you find that your Board has room for improvement, the following information will demonstrate the range of governing models that exist. Once a Board can see how they can change to become more productive their natural (or political) inclination will be to investigate the advantages of adopting a framework or model that will allow them to be more productive, inspire public confidence and create a structure of accountability. "Exceptional Boards add significant value to their organization, making a discernable difference in advancing their mission. Good governance requires the Board to balance its role as an oversight body with its role as a force supporting the organization. The difference in responsible and exceptional Boards lies in thoughtfulness and intentionality, action and engagement, knowledge and communication" (Twelve Principals of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards). The right vehicle will enable the Board to govern well, to be transparent, worthy of public trust and successful in fulfilling their vision.

In a magazine for school administrators, an article was published in December 2008, entitled “Sharpening the District Leadership Model.” (District Administrator) The author cited only two models of governance- the traditional model and a Policy Governance® model. There are, in fact, several models that cover the range from advisory Boards, to non-profit as well as corporate Boards. The following information will outline the different types of models and some of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each. Let’s begin with the traditional school Board model and then move on to some samples of other current models.

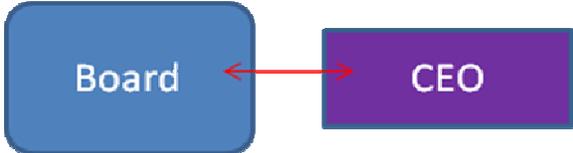
MODELS OF GOVERNANCE



TRADITIONAL SCHOOL BOARD MODEL

Model emphasis:

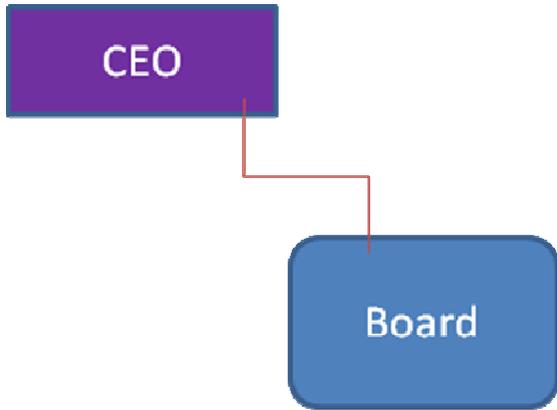
This model has varying levels of oversight vs. partnership between Board and CEO. (Represented by the dotted line.) Elections create constituent issues that can determine the effectiveness of the work of the Board and of the organization. There is a great deal of interaction and direction between groups including the staff and the Board which may exclude the superintendent.



ADVISORY MODEL

Model emphasis:

The CEO is the founder of the organization and creates a Board for three reasons: To create a panel of trusted advisors and skilled professionals, to establish credibility and to improve public relations.



PATRON MODEL

Model emphasis:

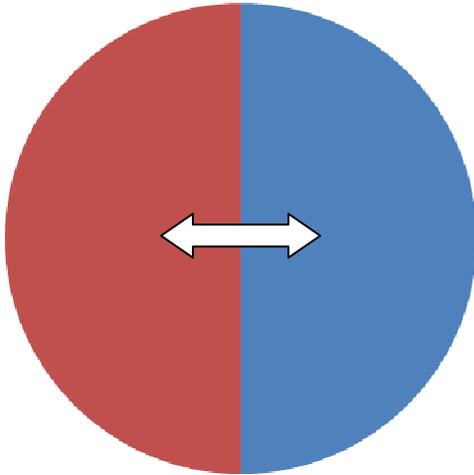
The Board has little influence over the organization. They meet infrequently. The Board is created to establish credibility but it rarely sets the vision, develops strategic plans or monitors for accountability and success.



CO-OPERATIVE MODEL

Model emphasis:

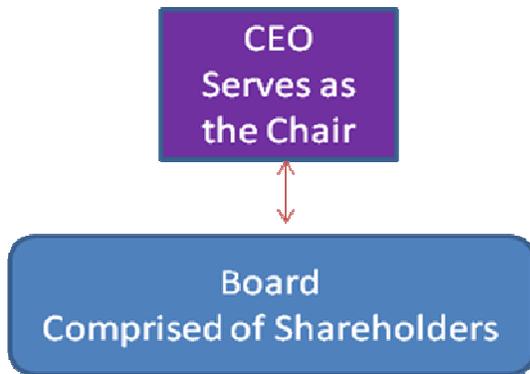
This model avoids hierarchical structures and relies on peer management. All decisions are shared and there is no CEO. No one in the organization has more power than another.



CONJOINT DIRECTORSHIP MODEL

Model emphasis:

This is a partnership approach that is based on the idea that important management roles can be thoughtfully and intentionally ascribed to Board members or staff based on their talents or skills.



ENTREPRENEURIAL MODEL

Model emphasis:

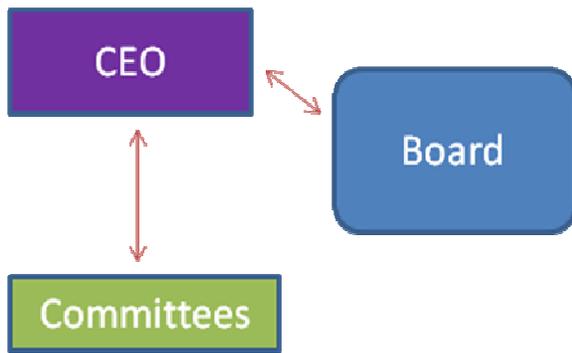
Here the emphasis is on efficiency and effectiveness measures, and on a culture which expects the survival of the "fittest." The Chair of the Board of Directors often acts as the Chief Executive Officer of the organization.



STRATEGIC OR VECTOR MODEL

Model emphasis:

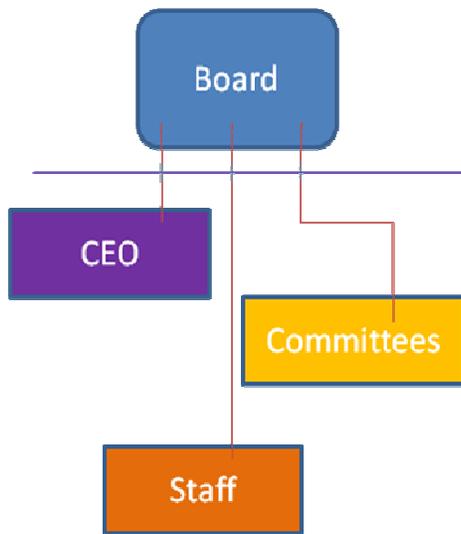
This is a hybrid of several models Based on an understanding of the purpose and mission of the organization. The structure exists to identify and achieve the organizational mission, goals and strategic outcomes. It is a model that is driven by strategic plans that clearly define expected results.



RELATIONSHIP MODEL

Model emphasis:

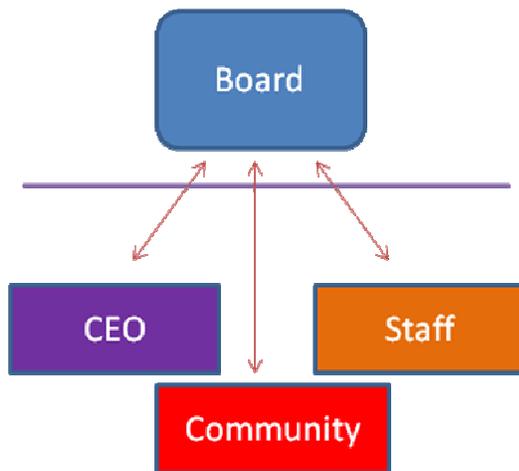
The CEO plays a key role in developing and advancing the working relationships with Board members and focuses on the human relationship in the governance model.



MANAGEMENT TEAM MODEL

Model emphasis:

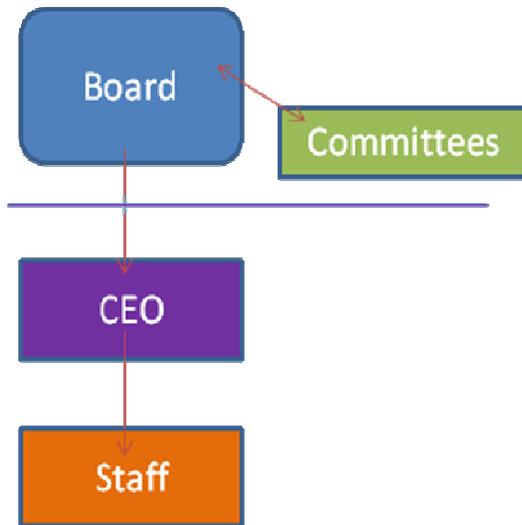
This model is highly directive of the CEO and staff at all level-- administrative and operational. Structurally it uses committees and sub-committees to direct fine details about programs, services and practices. Board members are usually stakeholders or professionally skilled in relation to the organization. This is the first of the models to clearly distinguish between the role of the CEO and the role of the Board. (Shown by the horizontal line.)



CONSTITUENT OR REPRESENTATIVE MODEL

Model emphasis:

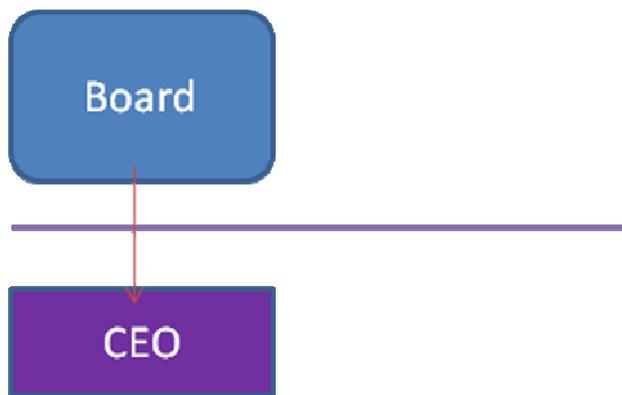
There is a broad base of participation and the power is decentralized. Constituents provide energy and participation is generally decentralized into committees which are action oriented. Communication is emphasized due to large numbers of diverse stakeholders.



POLICY BOARD MODEL

Model emphasis:

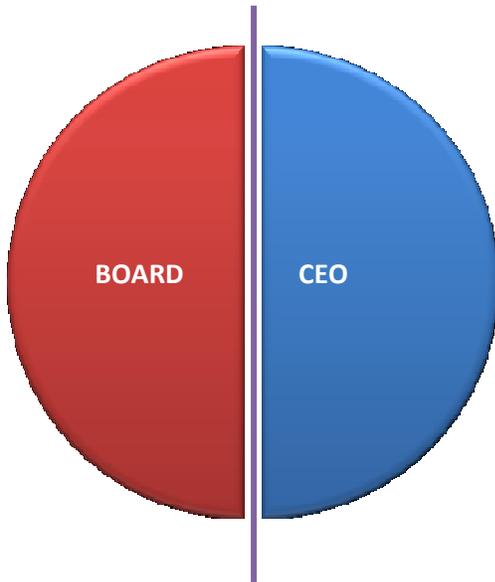
This model differentiates the Board role from the manager role. Each is clearly defined. Everyone is accountable. There are few standing committees, and more full Board activity.



CORPORATE BOARD MODEL

Model emphasis:

This structure organizes the Board in order to carry out the functions of governance, formulate and review policy, ensure accountability, evaluate performance, take corrective action as needed, oversee financial integrity, and manage its own functions separately from CEO.



POLICY GOVERNANCE® MODEL

Model emphasis:

This model is based on the general concepts of the Policy Board and the Corporate Board. It clearly distinguishes between leadership roles of Board and CEO. The Board role is defined as stewardship on behalf of ‘communities.’ There is a focus on vision, mission, values and strategic priorities. The framework ensures responsiveness to stakeholders and empowers staff. This is the most well-defined model with an emphasis on pre-defined structures that keep the Board and the CEO focused on their respective duties. It is one of the few models that distinguishes between the role of the Board and the role of the CEO but keeps a focus on the equal partnership required to accomplish the organizational goals.

COMPARISONS OF EACH MODEL

MODEL	THE ROLE OF THE BOARD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Traditional School Board Model	Elected by constituents. Defines policies, evaluates the CEO, monitors resources and determines progress toward goals.	The Board represents the values of a community. The closer a governing Board is to the organization, the	Very little Board professional development for continued improvement and training of new personnel. Goals can

MODEL	THE ROLE OF THE BOARD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
		better the decisions will be for producing meaningful change.	be sabotaged by special interest groups. Personal agendas can detract from goals.
Advisory Model	Advise and help the CEO	Informal, task oriented. Agenda developed by CEO. Board actively involved in daily operations	Exposes the Board to significant liability in failing to provide accountability.
Patron Model	Serves as a figurehead and fund-raising arm of the organization	Can be used in addition to a governing Board.	Does not meet legal requirements.
Co-operative Model	Democratic style of management	Vote is by consensus, all stake holders can be represented by putting Board members, staff, volunteers and clients as a single governing body.	Strong philosophical commitments aren't always negotiable for consensus. Very difficult to implement an accountability structure. Difficult to maintain over time with changes in personnel.
Conjoint Directorship Model	Board members are active participants in the function of the organization.	Allows all abilities and resources to be used to forward the goals of the organization.	Board members are managed to some extent by the CEO which weakens accountability measures.
Entrepreneurial Model	"Investors" in the organization are proportionately represented in its governance through a shareholder structure which elects the Board of	Efforts are clearly focused on the "business" of the organization. Emphasizes efficient and effective work processes.	A disproportionate focus on bottom-line returns to the organization. Broad-based societal needs are often discounted. There is

MODEL	THE ROLE OF THE BOARD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
	Directors.	Resources are allocated to readily adopt best practices.	no particular incentive for innovation on behalf of public gain.
Strategic or Vector Model	The Board's role is clarified by responsibilities determined by the business focus.	Results oriented with the ability to adapt and change based on the needs of the organization, market demands, etc.	If the structure is not clearly defined, processes and mission-critical issues may not survive over time or with new personnel.
Relationship Model	Supports the efforts of management to serve the needs of the community.	Board members have a deep understanding of the services and goals of the organization. Board is well trained with pre-meetings on specific issues.	Weak accountability system. Time commitments might cause disparities in Board members level of information. Staff time is spent in subcommittee activities.
Management Team Model	Very involved, with extensive time commitment to direct a large part of the work.	Works well for all volunteer or non-professional organizations.	Does not draw a line between governance and management. Easily dissolves into micro-management. Can lead to a lack of consistency in decisions and lack of attention to accountability.
Constituent OR Representative Model	Strict policies govern the composition and election/appointment of Board members representing specific constituents.	Allows a vision to emerge that is inclusive of constituents' perspectives. Major emphasis on broad based issues.	Pressures and demands for communication to be clear create difficulties in meeting constituent's high expectations.

MODEL	THE ROLE OF THE BOARD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
			Dispersion of work may be unproductive. Conflicts are not always resolved.
Policy Board Model	The Board establishes guiding principles, assigns authority to the CEO and monitors for the successful compliance to policies.	High levels of trust and confidence between Board and CEO. The Board receives professional development to keep new members current and the Board effective.	Specific costs associated with Board development that may draw off needed resources.
Corporate Board Model	The Board approves the mission and goals, defines the ethics, monitors progress, and hires the CEO.	Accountable, highly structured, and predictable.	Requires maintenance. Higher involvement by Board in regard to its own responsibilities and oversight of CEO.
Policy Governance® Model	Sets clear expectations, assesses performance, defines its own role, and commits to performing the role of a Board with “one voice.”	Clarity of roles and responsibilities, vision and accountability. Focus is on outcomes. The model empowers and supports the CEO.	Difficult to transition to. Requires on-going commitment over time with new personnel. May be difficult for a Board with diverse personal agendas.

SUMMARY

In over thirty resources used to complete the model comparisons, John Carver, the author of Policy Governance, was referred to as the expert on governing systems and Policy Governance

as the most well defined governance model. In fact, more than one of the models listed above have their roots in the Policy Governance model. Carver reminds us in his book, *Boards That Make a Difference*, "Governance is not about budget lines, personnel issues and field trip approvals. It is about values and vision and strategic leadership. The re-invention of the school Board calls for a new paradigm, a firm reconstruction of what the work of the Board is to be."

In order to access the best ways to make changes that will create and sustain a governing team, the following questions might be helpful in evaluating your current situation and making a determination as to the need for change, as well as determining whether you have the necessary commitment and resources to make a successful transformation.

- Does the Board have a clear and written understanding and agreement on the purpose of our organization?
- What are the basic values which guide our organization and our Board? Are they written down?
- How much time is each Board member willing to give to the organization in the next year (or until the end of his/her term) to improve governance structures?
- How much trust does the Board have in the ability of the CEO to ensure that the organization operates in an effective and ethical manner?
- What is the record of each Board member and committee with respect to meetings and results?
- To what extent do committees duplicate staff jobs?
- How satisfied is the public with the current Board performance?
- Who thinks we should change our governance model?
- How much time and money will the Board be willing to devote to increasing their knowledge and skills to improve performance as Board members and ultimately the organization?
- How does our Board deal with differences of opinion?
- How does the Board and staff deal with decisions when we disagree?
- To what extent is it necessary for Board members to be involved in the delivery of programs and services?
- Who attends our Board meetings? Why do they come?
- Are Board members accountable to ALL the stakeholders?
- How effective is the current Board professional development programs?

As a district administrator, you probably have your own shelf full of "how to" books. Hopefully, this information will add to your toolbox and assist you in providing the best care for your Board. While changes to governing methods can be complicated and time consuming, they are

well worth the effort if the results produce an improved system for fulfilling community expectations of public education. Good governance also requires that the Board find the right framework or vehicle to enable it to govern well, to be transparent, trustworthy, and successful in fulfilling their vision. Benjamin Franklin said, “We stand at the crossroads, each minute, each hour, each day, making choices...Each choice is made in the context of whatever value system we’ve selected to govern our lives. In selecting that value system, we are, in a very real way, making the most important choice we will ever make.”

RESOURCES

- A Work of Recovery, Imprimis, December 2008
- What I Wish I’d Known Before I Ran for the Board, American School Board Journal, September 2000
- Future Forces Affecting Education: 2006-2016, Knowledge Works Foundation at www.iftf.org
- A Practical Guide to Promoting America’s Public School, Learning First Alliance at www.learningfirst.org
- Board Self-Evaluation, Jannice Moore
- Iowa Association of School Boards Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement at www.iasb.org
- Effective Governance, California School Board Association
- Continuum of Change, Ed Barlow
- Board Leadership: Policy Governance in Action, John and Miriam Carver
- Boards That Make a Difference, John Carver Models
- What's Right for Your Board, Nathan Garber
- The Art of Virtue, Benjamin Franklin

AUTHOR

Ruth L. Johnson served as a three term Board member for the Clark County School District, one of the largest school districts in the nation. She was repeatedly elected by her peers to serve as president of her Board and also served in other officer positions including president of the Nevada Association of School Boards and Vice-president of the Pacific Region of the National School Boards Association. She has developed policy and presented on governance issues for local, state, regional and national educational organizations. She can be reached at admin@investk12nevada.org.