

A Policy Governance Tutorial

Many of you may have heard that NMSD Board of Directors operates within a framework of rules that is formally known as “Policy Governance”.

This Policy Governance framework originally came from a business sector model, and was modified to work for school governance. It has some special features that make it different from school board work in other districts.

One of its key features is that under Policy Governance, the board takes seriously the notion of governing the district through policy directives; indeed, the school board specifically removes itself from micro-managing the district on a day-to-day basis by directing the superintendent to run all aspects of the district’s work.

Another way of understanding this is to say that the school board directs the superintendent via a set of policies stating what the superintendent will do and not do while overseeing the day-to-day operations of the district.

Built in to this policy governance process is a monthly review of the superintendent’s performance on a portion of her duties, so that after a year has gone by the entire business of the district has been examined for compliance with the board’s governing policies.

With each monthly look at a portion of the superintendent’s work, any changes that become necessary are discussed and adopted if warranted. Each September at the beginning of the new school year, the evaluation process begins all over again.

Overseeing the superintendent’s work this way becomes a constant and regular feature of every board meeting. Anyone can review this work and the assessments of the superintendent’s work by the board by looking it up via the district website, meeting minutes and supporting documents.

Another key feature of Policy Governance is that the board specifically streamlines its meetings to get through legally required approvals and reviews of school business via a “consent agenda”. This consent agenda makes the board meetings more efficient, while not eliminating the opportunity for individual board members to question items about which they may have concerns.

Individually, board members review the consent agenda prior to the board meeting so that serious questions and concerns can be brought up to the superintendent before the meeting and either resolved or removed for further work before being later presented to the board.

A board member can also bring up questions and concerns about consent agenda items at the board meeting itself. At least three board members must agree that an item warrants special consideration, however, for it to be removed from the consent agenda at the meeting.

In short, the consent agenda is a tool to more efficiently deal with routine and regulatory matters that must be considered by the school board.

There is quite a bit more to say about this policy governance process we use at NMSD, but due to space limitations I will stop here.

If you have further questions, please feel free to send me an email at awightman@northmasonschoools.org. Thank you.

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