



BOARD MEMBER HANDBOOK

All Students Empowered and Future-Ready!

Introduction

This handbook is a summary of the governing approach adopted by the North Thurston Public Schools School Board. It is developed for the benefit of its current and future members as a way of explaining how the Board fulfills its responsibilities.

The Board understands that public education is the *paramount duty* of the state, as boldly declared in the Washington State Constitution. As a legal entity, and therefore an agent of the state, our Board fully accepts its obligation to fulfill this state responsibility at the local level for the students of our district.

To provide the necessary and appropriate leadership for the North Thurston Public Schools School District, the Board of Directors – collectively – and each member – individually – commits to governing as a professional governing board. This means a shared understanding of and commitment to the values, principles, policies, practices, and procedures adopted by the Board, a focus on continuous learning and improvement in our governing skills, and a willingness to serve as a model of governance for students, staff, the North Thurston Public Schools community, and our colleagues on other school boards.

Because the handbook is written in abbreviated form, the language in state law, regulation, or actual board policy supersedes any questions or possible conflicting interpretations that may arise from the language found herein.

Acknowledgment

The idea and draft version of this handbook came from WSSDA consultant, Rick Maloney.

I. The Board of Directors

- a. **Purpose.** The North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) Board of Directors is committed to governing with excellence, to assure on behalf of the community that the district achieves its mission: committed to excellence: Preparing all students for rewarding careers, fulfilling lives, and compassionate global citizenship.
- b. **Board Work.** Under the Policy Governance structure, the NTPS school board defines its job as the ongoing development of three essential work products:
 1. **Policymaking.** The Board sets expectations for the district, incorporating community values and priorities into principles that provide guidance for the superintendent, and self-guidance for the Board itself.
 2. **Assurance of Organizational Performance.** The Board monitors district and Board performance and compares evidence of what is with criteria it has written in policy, describing what ought to be.
 3. **Community Connection (Linkage).** The Board connects with the community to learn its values and priorities. It then uses those values as a guide in setting policy to govern the community's schools.
- c. **Governance Approach.** The North Thurston Public Schools Board of Directors governs through policy that guides the Board in its own work, policy that guides the Superintendent in conducting district business; ongoing monitoring of district and Board performance; and a commitment to continuous improvement through individual and board professional development.
- d. **Core Values.** The Board commits to the following values, and will:
 1. Believe that all students can learn and succeed at a high level.
 2. Deliberate in many voices but govern as one. It will encourage vigorous and thorough examination of all sides in debate, then take a board vote to speak with one voice by putting its decisions in writing.
 3. Cultivate a sense of group responsibility, understanding that the Board, not the staff or administration, is responsible for excellence in governance.
 4. Actively lead the district through policies that provide a clearly articulated vision for the district with a shared understanding of the community's desired end results, broad and clearly written values, and principles to guide the staff in operational planning, and continual monitoring of district, school, and student performance.
 5. Uphold high standards of excellence in governance, including a willingness to hold itself and individual Board members accountable for their actions.
 6. Insist on the pursuit of excellence by all those who have a role in the school district – staff, students, and Board members.
 7. Continually monitor its own process, performance, and progress.

8. Commit, both individually and collectively, to being well-informed on local, state, and national educational issues.
9. Formally and informally recognize and celebrate district, school, staff, and student success.
10. Regularly communicate with the community about school district performance, direction, initiatives, issues and ideas.
11. Intentionally and intelligently advocate for the school district and its students at the local, state and national level.
12. Always strive to act in the interest of what is best for all students.
13. Serve as a model of positive professional and ethical conduct.

II. Board Authority

The authority exercised by the School Board is derived from the state constitution, state laws pertaining to schools, and policies established by the Board itself.

- a. **Washington State Constitution.** Washington has the strongest language of any of the 50 states regarding support of public education:

Article IX, Section 1 of the Washington State Constitution states: "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex."

Article IX, Section 2 also states: "The legislature shall provide for a general and uniform system of public schools."

- b. **Revised Codes of Washington (State Law).** Washington state law empowers the Board with specific and broad authority over the administration of North Thurston Public Schools. For example, legislation assigns to the Board responsibility (and requisite authority) to set policy for the district, prescribe a course of study, ensure quality in the education program and curriculum standards, employ, and evaluate the superintendent, determine instructional hours, adopt a budget, and approve curriculum and textbooks.
- c. **Board Policy.** The Board of Directors is a part time governing board responsible for establishing a vision for student learning, setting policy for carrying out that vision and monitoring progress to ensure that the district achieves what is desired. The Board of Directors does not function as a full-time manager responsible for day to day operations, but instead holds the Superintendent accountable for operating in a prudent, ethical, and responsible way to achieve the vision set forth.
- d. **Authority of Individual Board Members.** Individual Board members have no authority except through the actions of the collective/entire Board. The statements or actions of individual Board members do not obligate the Board, except when authorized by an official act of the Board.

Board members should never speak or act, nor imply they are speaking or acting, on behalf of the Board or the school district when they have not been so authorized by the Board.

- e. **Authority of the Superintendent.** The Superintendent acts under the delegated authority of the Board to bring about organizational end results that the Board has established in writing, while ensuring that the district operates within limits also established by the Board in writing. As long as the district remains in accord with the Board's written policies, the Superintendent has full authority over the district and can select the means by which to achieve Board-established ends.

III. Elective Office

- a. **Election of Directors.** The North Thurston Public Schools Board of Directors is a five-member, non-partisan Board. Board members serve four-year terms, with two or three members up for election every odd-numbered year. Each Board Director must have permanent residence in their district area (1-5).
- b. **Board Member Qualifications.** To be eligible to serve on the Board of Directors, individuals must be citizens of the United States and the State of Washington, and registered voters residing within the boundaries of the North Thurston Public Schools School District. Beyond the minimum statutory requirements, it is expected that Board members share a commitment to providing an exceptional educational experience for all students, a willingness to work and study to become well-versed in board governance, public education in general, and North Thurston Public Schools in particular, and a sincere desire to be part of a high-functioning governing body that takes the responsibilities of public service seriously.
- c. **Filing for Election.** In order for an individual's name to be placed on the November ballot, he/she must file for election at the Thurston County Auditor's office during the designated filing period - usually one week in May/June of odd-numbered years for those positions up for election/reelection in November.
- d. **Filling a Vacancy on the Board.** If a vacancy occurs between elections, the Board fills the vacancy by appointment. The Board will publicize the vacancy, seek applications, and interview candidates. The appointment of an individual to fill a Board vacancy will be effective until the next scheduled Board election, when the appointed member's seat will be on the ballot, either to fill the remaining two years of the term or to serve a new four-year term, whichever is applicable.

IV. Board Administration and Board Member Expectations

- a. **Board Member Orientation.** As part of its commitment to good governance, the Board will provide orientation opportunities for new members and candidates. Once candidates for the Board are elected, they will be provided with a series of on-boarding opportunities under the guidance of the Board Chair.

In accordance with Policy 1112 – Director Orientation: Upon election to the Board, newly elected members will be expected to participate in all orientation opportunities, including professional development offered by the Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA), even if such opportunity occurs before being officially sworn in.

- b. **Oath of Office.** Upon election or appointment, before being seated each board member takes an oath or affirmation to support the Constitution of the United States and the state of Washington and to faithfully discharge the duties of the office according to the best of their ability.
- c. **Individual Board Member Duties and Job Expectations.** As an elected public official, an individual Board member owes ultimate allegiance to the public. However, the Board expects individual board member commitment to Board member principles and the collective effectiveness of the Board.
- d. **Compensation.** Board members are entitled, under state law and board policy, to receive compensation for attendance at ordinary or special board meetings, at a rate of \$25 for at least one hour and \$50 for two hours or more in a day. Compensation may be claimed monthly on forms provided by Fiscal Services.
- e. **Conflict of Interest.** A conflict of interest is considered to exist whenever a board member is or may reasonably appear to be able to request or receive, directly or indirectly, anything of value for or on account of his or her influence as a member of the Board of Directors.

Board members are expected to communicate with the Board Chair whenever they have an interest in an issue that might compromise or call their judgment into question, and to refrain from voting on that issue.

- f. **Board Member Professional Development.** The Board is committed to continuous improvement and understands that in order to perform at a high level, its members must be well informed about the North Thurston Public Schools, board governance, and educational best practices. The Board will participate in professional development opportunities. The district will reimburse members for reasonable in-state and pre-approved out-of-state expenses for professional development offered by third parties.

Examples of these professional development opportunities include annual conferences, regional meetings, workshops, or training sessions conducted by WSSDA, NSBA conferences, and other similar and relevant opportunities.

Board members are also encouraged to read, share and exchange professional articles from school board and governance publications and journals.

- g. Board Member Requests for Information.** It is important for Board members to be informed about the school district and the performance of its students. The Superintendent regularly provides Board members with information via the pre-meeting Board packet and presentations at Board meetings. Board members who seek additional information are expected to route such requests through the Superintendent. If the information sought by individual Board members is not readily available without an amount of staff effort that the Superintendent deems significant, Board members will be asked to obtain the approval of the Board majority so that information requests do not result in unnecessarily high cost or unnecessarily distract staff from their primary responsibilities.
- h. Student Information.** Except for statutorily mandated exceptions, such as disciplinary hearings, Board members do not get involved with individual student matters. Individual student information is confidential and Board members only have access to such information when it is necessary for performing a function in their official capacity.
- i. Visits to Schools.** Board members are encouraged to become informed about North Thurston Public Schools, and quarterly visits to schools are part of that process. Although informal and unannounced travel on campus is sometimes unavoidable, any Board member related visits should be coordinated through the Office of the Superintendent. While visiting schools, Board members keep in mind that they are inevitably seen as Board members even when their intended involvement is as a parent (e.g., back-to-school nights) or as a community member (e.g. at athletic events). They should also remember that they do not serve in an administrative capacity and should not attempt to direct, criticize, or otherwise interfere with staff members performing their duties.
- j. Indemnification of Board Members.** Washington law provides that the school district must indemnify and hold school employees, volunteers, and Board members harmless from any claim, demand, or judgment from negligence in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. This protection includes legal fees, expenses, and other costs.
- k. Discipline of Board Members.** Board members are independently elected by the public. They may disagree with other members regarding actions of the Board or directions taken by the district. Vigorous and full debate of issues is a hallmark of good Board member participation, so independence of thought will not be suppressed by the Board majority.

But in cases where a member violates board policies, interferes with the orderly and efficient operation of the district, or acts in ways contrary to the best interests of the district, those actions may be subject to informal or formal response by the full Board. Such action will be used rarely, if at all.

In most cases, informal action calls for a fellow member or the Board Chair to speak privately with the Board member about the infraction, reminding him/her of their mutually agreed upon governing commitments. If informal conversation is not successful or in more serious circumstances, the principle of progressive response applies.

The Board has the option, for example, of speaking out publicly or taking a vote of censure. Censure is an expression of Board disapproval concerning the actions of an individual member. Service as a Board officer is a privilege and not a right, so (although this would be a highly unusual action) Board officers can be removed from their officer position by a majority vote of the Board. The Board of Directors cannot remove individuals from the Board itself except in cases of excessive absenteeism.

V. Board Structure and Functions

- a. Board Officers.** The Board of Directors has three officers: president, vice president, and legislative representative. The Board elects officers at its Annual Meeting, usually in December. Officers are elected by roll call vote.

The Board president chairs all meetings and ensures that the Board follows Roberts Rules for conducting meetings. The Board president and vice president, working closely with the Superintendent, plan meeting agendas. Special meetings may be recommended by the Superintendent to conduct the Board's business. The president also serves as the Board spokesperson. The president is responsible for reviewing Board member assignments to committees and signing documents on behalf of the Board.

The vice president presides over meetings when the president is absent, assists the president in planning meeting agendas, and is responsible for board self-monitoring, including keeping time during public comment.

The legislative representative represents the Board at state association legislative assemblies/conferences and the annual delegate assembly, assists in the development of the annual legislative agenda and keeps the Board informed of legislative issues throughout the year.

Each of these positions acts as a representative of the board, not as an individual. No process or initiative should be acted upon without a full representation of board views.

- b. Board member participation on community-based committees.** The Board approves the assignment of a Board member to a community-based committee when the Board has been requested to have standing representation on a

committee. An example would be the Thurston County Regional Planning Council.

- c. **District Advisory Committees.** The district may convene advisory committees for the purpose of helping the Superintendent prepare recommendations for Board action. Examples include the statutorily mandated Instructional Materials Committee that advises on curriculum and textbook selection, and facilities advisory committees that prepare recommendations for maintenance and upgrade of facilities that may result in a levy or bond proposal.

District committees are normally considered advisory to the Superintendent and are therefore considered to be within the Superintendent's delegated authority.

- d. **Board Work-Study Sessions (special board meetings).** The Board may schedule work-study sessions to investigate issues in greater depth than can be done at a regular board meeting. Notice will be given just as if a regularly scheduled Board meeting is to be held, and the meetings are open to the public. In these meetings, the Board's work is similar to that of an advisory committee, preparing actions to be brought to the Board in a regular meeting. No action is taken.
- e. **Board Policymaking.** One of the three major work products of the Board is policy that serves as guidance for the effective and efficient operation of the school district. Board policies are developed in accordance with Washington laws and regulations, and in alignment with the Board's other policies. It is important that Board policies be regularly reviewed and updated, which in addition to the adoption of new policies, is the sole responsibility of the Board.
- f. **Board Hearings.** One of the responsibilities of the Board of Directors is to conduct hearings. For many of these, such as student disciplinary hearings and employee personnel hearings, the Board serves as an impartial hearing panel. In these instances, Board members must make their decision based only on evidence and information presented at the hearing. Regardless of whether the Board is serving as an impartial panel, or in a grievance hearing, Board members have an obligation to treat those coming before them respectfully and fairly, adhering to the highest standards of professional conduct.
- g. **Budget Process.** The Board is responsible for the adoption of a budget for the school district. The Superintendent presents a proposed budget to the Board on an annual basis, usually in August. Prior to budget adoption, the Board holds a series of public hearings in which it will consider presentations from school district administrators, and public comments.
- h. **Hiring the Superintendent.** The selection of a Superintendent is one of the most important decisions that a Board of Directors can make. Accordingly, this process should follow Board policy.
- i. **Hiring Staff.** In accordance with state law, the Board reserves to itself official confirmation of the Superintendent's hiring decisions. Nevertheless, except when hiring the Superintendent, the Board does not exercise a primary role in

the hiring process. The Board delegates authority over the selection process to the Superintendent, who will identify the best qualified personnel for hiring without direct involvement on the part of Board members.

- j. Assignment of Responsibility to the Superintendent.** Under state law the Superintendent is the board secretary and chief executive of the district. He/she is responsible for leading and managing the school district, hiring and supervising personnel, developing and administering the budget, and advising the Board on educational trends and research, board policies and applicable laws. The Superintendent regularly communicates to the Board the district's progress in achieving desired results for students.
- k. Delegation of Authority to the Superintendent.** The Board delegates to the Superintendent sufficient authority to administer district operations, accomplishing desired results while complying with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
- l. Superintendent Accountability.** The Superintendent is the only school district employee directly supervised by the Board of Directors. The Board evaluates the Superintendent's performance, makes decisions concerning employment contract, including job expectations, compensation, and contract length (up to the statutory limit of 3 years).
- m. Board Accountability.** The Board holds itself accountable through a self-evaluation process for its policy governance implementation. The Board will periodically review its conduct, its adherence to policy, its treatment of the public, staff and one another, its focus on student achievement, and its maintenance of the Board-Superintendent relationship.

VI. Board Meetings

- a. The Board Does its Work in Meetings.** The Board is a collective body and by statute can only act when a quorum is assembled in a legally constituted meeting. Between meetings individual Board members or two members working together can do pre-board work, preparing work to be brought to the Board for action, but cannot substitute their own actions for action taken at an open public Board meeting.
- b. General Meeting Structure.** Regular Board meetings are structured to efficiently conduct the Board's business with the first part consisting of opening activities such as the pledge of allegiance, reading of the land acknowledgement, and consideration of the consent agenda and required approvals, and hearing public comments. The next section of the meeting is dedicated to the Superintendent's report, and the last section is the Board members' report.
- c. Annual Meeting.** The first Board meeting following final certification of Board member elections (normally in December), is when the Board holds its Annual

Meeting. At this meeting, newly elected Board members are sworn in and seated with the Board for the first time, and the Board elects its officers.

- d. **Meeting Schedule.** In accordance with Policy 1400 Meeting Conduct, Order of Business and Quorum: Regular meetings are held at 6:00 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month in the district office board room, or at other times and places determined by the presiding officer or a majority vote of the Board.
- e. **Notice of Meetings.** Except in emergency circumstances, all Board meetings must be posted at least twenty-four hours in advance. Board members receive meeting agendas and relevant documents and materials prior to meetings, normally on the weekend prior to a meeting.
- f. **Public Records Requests.** All public records requests are handled by the public records officer of NTPS. If a Board member receives a request, direct the patron to the appropriate office.
- g. **Regular Meetings.** Regular meetings of the Board are those meetings listed on the calendar which is adopted annually by the Board. Board meetings are generally held at 6:00 pm at the designated location (Board room or School site) published on the annual schedule.
- h. **Special Meetings.** In accordance with Policy 1400 Meeting Conduct, Order of Business and Quorum: Special meetings may be called by the President of the Board or at the request of a majority of the Board Members. Special meetings can be called for a specific purpose and may consist of a single agenda item.
- i. **Board Quorum.** Three members of the Board constitute a quorum. Unless otherwise specified by law or board policy, a majority of board members present and voting on a particular item is sufficient for approval.
- j. **Public Comment at Meetings.** The Board provides an agenda item at the beginning of each meeting for public comment, enabling any individual to address the Board on any subject that is not specifically listed on the agenda. Three minutes is typically allotted to each speaker, but the time limit may be modified by the Board president. Per Board policy 5015 Civility, no inappropriate or disrespectful conduct is allowed. Persistence in such conduct will be grounds for termination by the president of that individual's privilege to speak and, if disruptive behavior continues, removal from the meeting.

The Board recognizes the value of public comment on educational issues and the importance of involving members of the public in its meetings. In order to permit fair and orderly expression of public comment, with the exception of emergency situations, the Board will provide a period at or before every regular meeting at which final action is to take place for public comment. During public comment period, visitors may address the Board on any topic within the scope of the Board's responsibility. Public comment may occur orally or through written

comments submitted before the meeting. Written comments must adhere to the standards of civility discussed below and must be received at least 24 hours before the board meeting. All written public comments timely submitted will be distributed to each board member. The Board may structure the oral public comment period, including determining the total time allotted for public comment and equally apportioning the minutes for each speaker. The Board is not obligated to provide additional public comment time to accommodate everyone in attendance who wishes to speak.

- k. Meeting Agendas.** The Superintendent, guided by the Board’s adopted annual schedule of presentations, prepares a meeting agenda for each Board meeting. The President and Vice President typically review and approves it on behalf of the Board. Meeting agendas, along with necessary supporting documents and materials, are distributed to Board members on the Friday before the meeting. Board agendas are designed to ensure focused, informed discussion on student learning and related educational issues that the Board will be addressing. Board agendas do not include matters that are unnecessary, trivial, or are best addressed at the staff level. At each Board meeting, items may be added to the agenda with the approval of the Board.
- l. Consent Agenda.** Agenda items that require a Board vote but do not require discussion are placed on the consent agenda.
- m. Required Approvals.** Items that require Board approval are added to the agenda item Required Approvals. All items on the list have been prepared by District staff in alignment with District policy and state law. District staff are usually available to answer questions about these items and appreciate receiving questions in advance of the meeting in order to provide a thorough response and explanation for a Board Director.
- n. Preparation for Meetings.** Board members are expected to prepare for meetings by reading all materials provided in advance and communicate with the president. Board members with specific questions about the materials are asked to email the superintendent’s office so that district staff can prepare to answer questions during the open public meeting.
- o. Board Member Attendance.** Because service as a School Director is a public trust undertaken on behalf of our community, board members are expected to attend all scheduled meetings. If a personal or professional conflict prevents attendance, a member may request to be excused, but this should be a rare occurrence. Repeated, unexcused absences constitute the only statutory reason available to the Board to declare a position vacant.

Members are expected to arrive on time. Those who cannot arrive on time should give timely notification to the Board President, but out of respect to attendees’ meetings should proceed as scheduled if a quorum is present.

- p. **Meeting Norms.** The Board of Directors commits itself to be a professional body whose meetings are models of appropriate behavior for the school district. Board members are expected to dress appropriately for all public meetings.

In order to ensure that meetings are as effective and useful as possible, members will avoid surprises by directing their questions or specific concerns, in advance, to the Superintendent or the Board President. The Board believes that informed, respectful and thorough discussion, and even rigorous debate is the best means of arriving at good decisions for the school district. Accordingly, during discussion Board members will listen attentively, consider all points of view, support their positions with evidence, be prepared to answer questions from other Board members, focus on the issue at hand, avoid negative and personal comments, and be prepared to compromise, understanding that the goal of debate among Board members is not to prevail but to arrive at the best possible decision.

- q. **Robert's Rules.** The Board conducts its meetings using *Robert's Rules of Order*. The Board President serves as parliamentarian, but the President's rulings can be overturned by majority vote of the Board.
- r. **Voting.** The Board is a collective body and, as such, only acts via a vote of its members. Votes are taken in public at a properly posted meeting of the Board, and are recorded in writing. Motions are made by one board member and seconded by another before they are considered for action. Members may vote for or against a motion, or abstain from voting. Members may explain their intended vote during Board discussion, but they are not required to do so.
- s. **Executive or Closed Sessions.** Although as a public body the Board must meet and conduct its business in public, under certain narrowly-defined exceptions the Board may need to exclude the public from a portion of its meeting by calling an executive session. Permissible reasons for holding an executive session are limited by law. They include discussion of district positions in collective bargaining, evaluation of an employee, reviewing candidates for appointment to the Board, pending claims and litigation, and student disciplinary matters. Although the law allows for discussion while in executive session, any subsequent action to be taken by the Board must occur when the Board is reconvened in open session.
- t. **Meeting Minutes.** In order to appropriately inform the public of the Board's work, Board minutes contain the time of the meeting; members in attendance; Board action/decisions; and a description of executive sessions held.
- u. **Board Retreat.** The Board recognizes that it will be necessary to meet occasionally (usually on an annual basis) in a less formal setting to allow for professional learning. Retreats are generally held at times and locations that are different from regularly scheduled meetings.

In addition to the attendance of all Board members and the Superintendent's Cabinet, members of the public may attend as observers.

- v. **Board Communication Tree.** The Board has established a communication tree to be followed when responding to patrons by email (Appendix A).

APPENDIX A

