

**Official Minutes of the Oak Park Board of Education
Elementary District 97, Cook County, Illinois**

CLOSED MEETING MINUTES – JANUARY 31, 2018 TIME: 6:55 PM

The Board convened in closed session at 6:55 PM. Answering present and attending in person were President Spurlock (until 8:22 PM), Members Spatz, Broy, and Liebl. Member Datta arrived at 7:24 PM, and Vice President O’Connor participated by phone until 8:05 PM. Member Breymaier was absent.

Also Present: Superintendent, Dr. Carol Kelley, Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) Field Service Director Perry Hill, and Board Secretary Sheryl Marinier.

Summary of Board discussion on all matters:

1) Board Self-Evaluation, Practices and Procedures

Perry Hill, Illinois Association of School Boards Field Service Director, led off the discussion by reviewing the agenda and objectives for the evening:

- Review/apply the IASB Foundational Principals of Effective Governance
- Consider factors to enhance team functionality
- Identify next steps for further Board development efforts

He described the Board’s role is as trustee and delegate, and the importance of accepting this role to create a functional governance team and district, and to support goals and superintendent-oriented Board management.

Hill talked about the need to minimize micromanagement in order to foster trust and staff empowerment, promote productive working styles, and enable the Board to focus on key concerns such as student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

The Foundation for Board Governance was reviewed and referred to during the next section of the meeting. Hill asked Board members to consider what is at stake if they do not work together as a team. Districts with negative relationships, poor communication, and a lack of trust among the Board members and superintendents also have lower student achievement outcomes. Hill shared the following quote.

“Boards that ignore a dysfunctional culture, abide the status quo, and focus on artifacts rather than assumptions will pay a steep price: mediocre governance at best and abysmal performance at worst.”

- The power of board culture: asset or Barrier

Hill led the Board in a discussion about ways to achieve constructive communication. The Board agreed that the following tools are necessary for good communication.

- Seek progress/resolution
- Seek to understand
- Look beyond the cause
- Look for similarities, not differences
- Be a good listener

- Take responsibility for one's own feelings
- Make a commitment
- Use positive language

Hill introduced the next section of the meeting and suggested that they use the following questions to frame the discussion.

- 1) Describe the issue - what is occurring relative to your team?
- 2) How is this currently impacting you?
- 3) If nothing changes, what are the implications?
- 4) How have you helped create this situation?
- 5) What is the ideal outcome?
- 6) What is the most potent step you can take to begin to resolve this issue?

President Spurlock explained that she has reached out to other Board members with a concern. She shared that comments made by Board members on social media regarding the District are not appropriate. She explained that she felt uncomfortable sharing this concern with a Board member and did not want to be put in that position, but felt that it was necessary to say something. She suggested that the ideal outcome from this discussion would be to come to an agreement on when Board members can comment on social media.

Member Datta arrived at 7:24 PM.

Hill shared a slide explaining why Board members should not use social media to discuss school business, information also discussed at their last retreat. He noted the IASB reminder that Board members must recognize that a Board member has no legal authority as an individual. Board members acknowledged their understanding that three or more Board members discussing school business constitutes a "meeting" within the meaning of the Open Meetings Act. Hill observed that a Board member using social media to discuss District matters may not know who else is a member of the recipient group, such that if a Board member posts his/her opinions, other Board members "attending" that social media posting would be precluding from responding in order to avoid violating the Act. Hill reminded the Board that a gathering does not necessarily have to be in person. It can be by any means that allows for contemporaneous interactive communication; including audio or video conferencing, telephone, email and instant messaging.

One Board member expressed concern that Board members function from a position of fear, questioning whether there is a way for each of them to have opinions and be human beings and expressing concern that serving as Board members requires them to shut down other parts of their lives.

Another Board member responded that she has fundamentally changed the way she behaves in the community, explaining that she filters what she says, because people might perceive that what she is saying might have more weight than it really does.

A third Board member suggested creating norms or guidelines, and suggested that it comes down to trust.

Hill recommended that the Board review item two of the Code of Conduct. The conversation continued and the following plan was established.

Dr. Kelley left the meeting at 7:59 PM.

When communicating information (including such delivery as direct-interpersonal and social media communications), each school Board member should use the following standards:

- Compliance with the Open Meetings Act.
- Compliance with the *Code of Conduct for Members of School Boards*, which is board policy.
- Awareness that any information a Board member communicates will, even if accompanied by a statement that he or she is delivering that information in another role (such as a taxpayer or community member) still be perceived by the public as the Board member speaking for the Board.
- Understanding that each Board member should refrain from – or at the very least limit – detailed dialogue with the public on topics related to “public business” of the District that may be addressed at a Board meeting;
 - Each Board member should encourage a citizen voicing a concern to communicate via the established chain of command (for a “customer concern”), or attend a Board meeting so as to share the concern in a forum (that is, a legally-convened meeting) in which full the Board can initiate steps toward a resolution of that concern.
- Opting to communicate one’s opinion to a citizen or the public while coupling/balancing the delivery of his/her opinion with action taken by the Board (i.e., the will of the majority).
- Delivering comments to the public or a citizen that demonstrate and express respect for the Board and the processes of the Board to address an issue or concern (i.e., promoting the Board as an agent for change).
- Avoiding or displaying vigilance in interacting/responding to concerns about District matters expressed on social media, given that a Board member’s response that draws in participation of two other Board members may violate the Open Meetings Act.
- Furthering/ affirming Board/District goals in communication with the citizen and/or the public.

Vice President O’Connor arrived at 8:05 PM and President Spurlock left the meeting at 8:22 PM.

Hill continued the session by asking what a Board member would do if they have a problem with another Board member. One Board member reported that the Board Protocols identify the Board President as the “go to” person, and suggested that if the problem is with the Board President, the Board member could seek support from the Vice President.

Hill suggested the following communication strategies;

WAYS TO ACHIEVE CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Seek progress/resolution
- Seek to understand
- Look beyond the cause
- Look for similarities, not differences
- Be a good listener
- Take responsibilities for one’s own feelings
- Make a commitment
- Use positive language

The Board agreed upon protocols for addressing a matter or concern involving another Board member.

The Board President is charged with initiating a process to address a concern or concerns pertaining to a Board member's conduct. Upon being alerted to a potential violation of the *Code of Conduct for Members of the School Boards* or any other Board policy,

STEP 1

- The Board President will initiate contact with the Board member in question to set a date and time to confer about the concern(s).
- The President will communicate the concern(s) to that Board member and explain how the concern(s) relates to a potential conflict with Board policy.
- The Board member in question will share his or her/her insights and perspective regarding the concern(s).
- That Board member and the President will brainstorm ways to overcome the concern or related situation, in the future, based on Board policy and best practice.
- The Board member in question and the President will both strive to reach resolution to the concern(s), understanding that once the matter is addressed, the Board will move forward;
 - Points of resolution will avoid revisiting past actions of the member in question that are not related to his/her current Board member role and the specific situation at hand.
- The Board President will document the agreed resolution to the concern (via email or a medium that will enable delivery/retrieval of a hard copy of the document) to the Board member in question and/or to the full Board.

STEP 2

- If an impasse occurs at Step 1, the Board President will designate a Board member with whom Board member in question has a positive relationship to contact that Board member, with the understanding that the designated Board member will apprise the President of the outcome of his or her interaction with the Board member in question.
- The designated Board member will contact with the Board member in question to set a date and time to confer about the concern(s).
- The designated Board member will communicate the concern(s) to the Board member in question and explain how the concern(s) relates to a potential conflict with Board policy.
- The Board member in question will share his/her insights and perspective regarding the concern(s).
- That Board member and the designated Board member will brainstorm ways to overcome the concern or related situation, in the future, based on Board policy and best practice.
- The Board member in question and the identified Board member will both strive to reach resolution to the concern(s) understanding that once the matter is addressed, the Board will move forward;
 - Points of resolution will avoid revisiting past actions of the member in question that are not related to his/her current Board member role and the specific situation at hand.
- The designated Board member will document the agreed resolution to the concern (via email or a medium that will enable delivery/retrieval of a hard copy of the document) to the Board member in question.
- The designated Board member will timely communicate to the Board President information about his or her dialogue with the Board member in question, including the outcome of that dialogue.

STEP 3

- If an impasse occurs at Step 2, the Board President will contact the Illinois Association of School Boards to schedule a self-evaluation with the full Board.

- At the Board self-evaluation, the President, the designated Board member involved in the Step 2 interactions, and the Board member in question will share the concern/situation;
 - The Board President and/or the designated Board member involved in the Step 2 interactions will proceed first in presenting the reason for calling the meeting.
 - The Board member in question will then explain his/her insights and perspective.
- The full Board will work to identify a resolution that addresses the concern(s) involving the Board member in question.

Member Datta left the meeting at 8:52 PM.

Hill asked the Board members how they are doing at staying in their own lanes.

One member said that the Board could do better at focusing on high level needs. She praised the work of the administration, describing Dr. Kelley as gracious, and skillfully leading the community listening tours. She suggested that the Board gets deeper than it should on some issues and tries to control things that cannot be controlled.

Another member said that the Board is facing conflicting issues here. He suggested that this Board is better than some Boards that he has served on, and not better than some others. He suggested that the Board is struggling with issues from last year. He noted that the public is much more engaged this year, and reminded the Board of their role to help administration deal with the public. He suggested that the Board cannot be effective if they have to sit through two hours of public comments because they did not do enough questioning on a topic before they approved it. He reminded the Board that there have been times that they reversed administration’s decisions based on public comment. He suggested that there may be times when the Board requires more time to understand a request before they take action on it.

Hill suggested that the Board review the Foundational Principles, and especially the bullets under the first topic, to help them find their way to the proper “ends”.

NEXT STEPS

(Foundational Principle #1) – The Board Clarifies the District Purpose) The Board should consider engaging greater focus on higher-level “Ends-work” with an additional focus on “owner concerns” rather than “customer concerns.”

(Foundational principle #3 – The Board employs a Superintendent) Each Board member should make every effort to minimize requests, suggesting, and inquiries that delve into the duties of daily operational management (i.e., the work of the Superintendent and staff).

(Foundational Principle #6 – The Board Takes Responsibility for Itself) Application of each additional norm/Board Agreement that was crafted.

CONCLUSION OF CLOSED MEETING

Spatz moved, seconded by Broy that the Board of Education move into open session at 9:06 PM. All members of the Board agreed. The Board concluded the closed meeting and reconvened in open session at that time.

Board President