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# **What's up with School Board Governance?**

**OCSTA Catholic Trustees Conference  
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**Marion Thomson Howell**

# Why is today important?



# Why else?

As an elected trustee you have a legal (and moral) obligation to do your job well and to fulfill your role as a fiduciary

**Legislation**

'Amateur hour behaviour': School trustee selection

process needs review **Censured school-board trustee speaks out against board's alleged lack of transparency**

Inside the nasty, bizarre, contemptible, gawdawed-up school board squabbling by Waterloo Region District School Board trustees cost taxpayers \$67,000

**School board trustee says should be abolished**

**Do We Still Need The Catholic School System in Brampton and Ontario?**

**Ontario study recommends merging Catholic and public school systems**

School Trustee Misbehaviour: What's the Source of the Dysfunction?



# Who are we?

## trust·ee

/trə'stē/ 

noun LAW

an individual person or member of a board given control or powers of administration of property in trust with a legal obligation to administer it solely for the purposes specified.

*synonyms:* [administrator](#), [agent](#); [More](#)

School board trustees are the members of the district school board. They are locally-elected representatives of the public, and they are the community's advocate for public education. They are required to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under the *Education Act*.



Ontario Catholic School  
Trustees' Association



# What are the complicating issues?

Trustees are elected

They see themselves as  
representing a  
constituency

Politicizes everything

Gaps in skills matrix

# True North: Governance is best when ...

Know who they are

Know and accept their role

Work together for the system as a whole

Engage in on-going development & self-evaluation



## Know who they are

Fiduciary: someone who holds a position of trust.

- **Duty of care:** when directors act, they exercise care, diligence and skill in reaching decisions that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in similar circumstances



# A typical decision you might have to make could be ...



*One of your committees brings forward a recommendation to the board. You are not a member of the committee but know that extensive work was done to justify the committee's recommendation. You also trust and respect the trustees who are on the committee. They have your confidence.*

**Do you support the motion?**



# Would it provide greater confidence if you knew ...

Why is this issue important?

How does the issue tie to / align with our strategic priorities?

What research / consultation was conducted?

What options were considered?

What resources will need to be committed? Have they been accounted for / are they available?

Who is impacted by the decision, and how?

What are the key benefits of the recommendation?



## Know who they are

Fiduciary: someone who holds a position of trust.

Relates to your:

- Duty of care
- **Duty of loyalty**
- **Duty of obedience**



## Know and accept their role

· Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2 ¶

This dramatically shifted with Bill 177. Focus shifted to student achievement and school board governance

1. Set direction
2. Ensure resources are in place
3. Monitor performance and hold the DOE accountable
4. Bring forward concerns of constituents

**Everything else is the responsibility of the DOE**



**Work together for  
the welfare of the  
system as a whole**

Trustees have no individual authority

Bring concerns of stakeholders to the attention of  
the board

Distinguish between owner/stakeholder and client  
voices

Uphold the decisions made by the board



## **Engage in on-going development and self-evaluation**

Boards should expect the same level of excellence from themselves as they do of the system



# If this is who we are what do we do?

Provide direction

Monitor and evaluate

Operate as a high functioning board



# What are the complicating issues?

Time spent on issues that are not tied to strategy or student achievement

Direct staff to deal with individual issues of concern

*A lot of 'I don't care. I want this dealt with'*

We don't really monitor. We accept reports that are informational, not progress or outcomes

Operational reports lead to operational discussions

Code of conduct is used as a weapon



# True North: Governance is best when ...

Boards operate at 10,000 feet

Monitoring is board driven

Staff only act on direction from the board as a whole

Roles and responsibilities are defined by policy and are honored



# The final word

## AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD:

- knows why it exists, what difference it aims to make in the community and develops a plan for this purpose;
- maintains a focus on student achievement and well-being;
- functions as a team;
- serves as a role model for the education system and the community;
- makes informed decisions;
- strives for excellent communications with its partners and constituents;
- has a clear sense of the difference between its role and that of senior management;
- understands the distinction between policy development and implementation;
- is accountable for its performance;
- holds the director of education accountable for effectively implementing the policies of the board;
- monitors the effectiveness of policies and implementation plans; and
- ensures that local provincial and federal politicians understand local issues and needs, and encourages them to make education a high priority.

