



**Fraser Cascade School District**

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# **TRUSTEE HANDBOOK**



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**Draft**

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## GOVERNANCE BEGINS WITH TRUSTEES

The seven trustees of the Fraser Cascade Board of Education work together to form a governance team that is capable of leading the school district to high levels of achievement. The trustees demonstrate a deep commitment to students, collaboration, integrity, trust and service to the community. They understand the importance of working together to raise student achievement for all children in the District.

The Board also demonstrates an understanding that effective governance is challenging work. Creating and sustaining an effective governance structure for the District requires a high level of commitment to teamwork, concentration, focus and patience.

The Board governs the District, and trustees serve together as a unified team. Effective Boards are composed of effective trustees; individuals who govern with trust, integrity and a commitment to leadership on behalf of all the students in the District.

### **Governance Culture:**

*“Team work makes the dream work.”*

*- John C. Maxwell*

Effective Boards operate with formally adopted protocols that provide an operational framework for how Board members will work together. Protocols are simply descriptions of the “way we do things here” and are very important as guides for what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Protocols exist whether they are identified or not. When they are not overtly stated, they become the habits by which groups perpetuate behaviours, some of which can become toxic and very detrimental to the effective operation of the Board.

An excellent governance culture for a district is characterized by a Board that operates in an environment of trust, respect and professional demeanor at all times. The Board sets the tone for the entire district in how it carries out its governance responsibilities.

Dr. David Walker of Queen’s University, in his writing on Canadian Leadership explains:

*“The Canadian leadership brand as encompassing five key things:*

*Integrity – we value ethical, honest and fair practices.*

*Quality – we focus on producing high-quality work and taking accountability for our actions.*

*Resourcefulness – we are very resourceful and display a can-do attitude and hopefulness for the future.*

*Inclusiveness – we seek, respect and integrate different perspectives into one through collaboration.*

*Harmony – we are very strong at collaboration, problem-solving and conflict resolution which is why we’re respected for our peace keeping abilities around the world!”*

## **FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TRUSTEES**

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The fundamental characteristics are:

### **Mindfulness:**

The single most important characteristic of effective trustees is the development of a governance mindset. Knowing how to think about governance, and always applying that knowledge and understanding during Board operations, are the essential characteristics of trustee leaders. Governance mindfulness is understanding the role and responsibilities of the governing Board and how individual trustee leadership can enhance the positive, value added impact.

### **Focus:**

Mindful trustee leaders always maintain a strategic focus in their Board work. They understand that they are not on the Board to administer the District, but rather to govern it. They understand that governance requires a broad, systemic view of the District, and approach all their Board responsibilities with a clear sense of focus on achieving the strategic outcomes they have set.

### **Manner:**

Mindful trustee leaders are always respectful of other Trustees' opinions. They understand that how they govern is often more important than what they say or do. Working toward a common goal with other independently elected individuals in a collaborative setting, requires patience, understanding, respect and most importantly, common courtesy. They model the civic behavior that they expect the students in the district to exhibit when they are adults.

### **Preparation:**

Mindful trustee leaders are always prepared. They do their preparation work. They are committed to doing the hard work of being a trustee and leading on behalf of the community they serve. They are committed to making decisions based on quality information, evidence and data.

*“The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model by Kouzes and Posner outline five core practices of effective leaders:*

- *Model the Way*
- *Inspire a Shared Vision*
- *Challenge the Process (Status Quo)*
- *Enable Others to Act*
- *Encourage the Heart*

*These practices align as well with the framework described by Freeman and Stewart in Developing Ethical Leadership.*

*There are some specific ways that these two frameworks reveal themselves in the world of Boards of Education.*

## ***Model The Way***

*Each individual trustee brings with them their personal values, beliefs, strengths and limitations. How they express their views and the actions they take at the Board table and in their daily interactions demonstrate consistency with their values and beliefs. In the words of Freeman and Stewart, they “tell a compelling and morally rich story but also embody and live the story.” This evident consistency, this matching of hand and heart, inspires trust in their colleagues. Individual credibility is built. Through a “living conversation about ethics, values and the creation of value for stakeholders,” each member of the Board demonstrates who they are and “where they are coming from.” It then becomes possible to build a collective Board where there is strong mutual understanding and shared values.*

## ***Inspire a Shared Vision***

*Everyone who runs for office as a school trustee does so for a reason beyond themselves. The initial impetus can be as broad as a passion for improving public education or as specific, initially, as a conviction about how special education services should be delivered. The common factor is that they have a vision of something better. As a leader their challenge is to articulate the vision, describe how it will bring improvements and, through sincere dialogue, inspire their colleagues, Board of Education staff and the community to share the vision. As Freeman and Stewart point out: “Ethical leaders are ordinary people who are living their lives as examples of making the world a better place. Ethical leaders speak to us about our identity, what we are and what we can become, how we live and how we could live better.”*

## ***Challenge the Process***

*This leadership skill involves being open to innovation, to exploring different approaches, to turning an inquiring mind to alternative solutions and to questioning any response that says: “that’s the way it’s always been done.” In asking “What’s new? What’s next? What’s better?” they can forge new paths. This also creates risks and the possibilities of mistakes, but it is done in a climate of trust and openness to learning. It is important to make room for mechanisms of dissent, to avoid a process that leaves people feeling thwarted and unable to express diverging views.*

## ***Enable Others to Act***

*Ethical leaders are not driven by personal ego. They step outside themselves and focus on success for the organization or community. They invest in fostering relationships, building teams and empowering others to take action. “Leaders work to make people feel strong, capable and committed. They enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away. Exemplary leaders strengthen everyone’s capacity to deliver on the promises they make. When people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they’re more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results.”*

## ***Encourage the Heart***

*Working as a team, Trustees come to know and, to a great extent, share the values and beliefs of their colleagues. Even where they do not totally see eye to eye with their colleagues, they learn how best to work together. They come to know what developments will inspire and what developments will dishearten them. An ethical leader acknowledges the impact of events on their colleagues, demonstrates appreciation, celebrates victories small and large, and expresses empathy in tough times. This leads to the creation of collective capacity and the conditions for collaboration.*

*Doing this work leads to levels of awareness of self and others that can only positively reinforce the capacity of the elected Board to effectively fulfill the roles of authentic governance and raise the bar in what can be accomplished.”*

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMING BOARD**

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High performing Boards have four essential characteristics that are the building blocks of effective governance:

High performing Boards operate as a unified Board, with a unity of purpose, working together toward common goals.

High performing Boards understand, agree and work within the defined role and responsibilities of the Board.

High performing Boards create and sustain over time, a positive governance culture.

High performing Boards establish and work within Board protocols and policies that create a structure for the Board’s work.

### **I. UNITY OF PURPOSE**

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#### **Definition of Unity of Purpose:**

Finding common ground from which to govern is at the heart of Board of Education leadership. This is the single most important characteristic of effective governance. An organization or system simply cannot be governed effectively with a consistently divided Board. Divided Boards are characterized by rigid, locked-in positions that degrade into fixed voting patterns. However, being unified does not mean not having disagreements and spirited discussions. On the contrary, highly effective Boards are often characterized by having thoughtful and spirited discussions and dialogue about policy alternatives prior to decisions being made. A unified or united Board does not require unanimous votes. It is not a “rubber stamp” Board.

Highly effective Boards manage their disagreements; they do not let disagreements manage them. They are defined by their effectiveness as a team and the results in the District, not by who wins their arguments or succeeds in having their individual agendas implemented. The test of a unified Board is not how they vote, but what they do after the vote.

Why is it important for a Board to govern in a unified manner?

Three realities:

1. Trustees campaign as an individual but serve as a member of a team.
2. Trustees do not have the authority to affect the education system individually.
3. A Trustee's success as a Board member is inextricably tied to the success of the Board.

The beliefs the Board shares about students, schools, and the community are reflected in the District's mission statements, vision, values and strategic goals, and represent the glue that bonds the Board together.

The Fraser Cascade School District has adopted documents that reflect this vision, mission, and beliefs statements. They are:

**Mission:**

*BC Ministry of Education:* The purpose of the British Columbia School System is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic, and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

*School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade):* In cooperation with the community, promotes an educational environment that fosters a love of learning, personal integrity, a strong self-concept and respect for the dignity of others, encouraging each student to reach his or her potential.

**Vision:**

Everyone pulling together to improve the achievement of all Learners.

All Learners crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.

All Learners leaving our setting more curious than when they arrive.

All Learners gaining an understanding of and a respect for indigenous ways of knowing.

(Halbert and Kaser, 2013)

**Beliefs:**

The Board of Education for School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade) believes that core values are useful in delineating the culture of an organization and serve to animate practice. The board believes that:

All students can develop social, emotional, physical, and intellectual capacity when supported by caring, capable adults who work collaboratively to sustain student learning;

Inclusive teaching that consistently provides engaging, relevant learning opportunities is an effective way to improve learning for all students;

Age, race, culture, special needs, individual talents, and gender are positive assets that provide the learning context in a diverse learning culture;

A safe and caring learning environment treats all people respectfully as individuals with understood expectations, roles and responsibilities;

The school district is a learning community that both shapes and remains responsive to changing student characteristics and learning needs;

Community involvement in quality of education decisions and school governance supports student learning through the responsible analysis of data for the purposes of setting goals for continuous improvement, and celebrating successes; and,

Learning is a lifelong activity to be fostered at all levels of education from the classroom to the boardroom.

**Student Achievement:**

The Board is committed to student achievement which is reflected by the [District's Strategic Plan and District Achievement and Enhancement Agreement](#).



# Vision Statement

Everyone pulling together to improve the achievement of all Learners.

All Learners crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options.

All Learners leaving our setting more curious than when they arrive.

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(Halbert and Kaser, 2013)



## **Characteristics of Effective Boards:**

The Board identified the following seven characteristics as the standards appropriate for the Fraser Cascade Board of Education which reflected its core beliefs.

Standards of Board effectiveness:

1. Stay focused on student achievement and student wellness.
2. Govern together – as a team with a common focus and purpose.
3. Govern in a transparent, open and accessible manner.
4. Govern in collaboration with the superintendent and staff.
5. Maintain a high standard of integrity.
6. Make high quality policy decisions based upon evidence and data.
7. Undertake continuous learning as individuals and as a Board.

## **II. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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### **Definition of Role:**

One of the most important characteristics of effective Boards is their understanding and agreement of the roles and responsibilities of the Board. The Fraser Cascade School District has a definition of the role of the Board in [Policy 1080](#) “Trustee Code of Ethics”:

*“I will devote time, thought and study to the duties and responsibilities of a trustee so that I may render effective and creditable service”.*

While the line between policy and administration can sometimes be blurred at the Board level, the individual Board member’s role is well defined. Individual Board members have no authority as individuals to take action or direct policy beyond their work as collective members of the Board as a whole.

### **Responsibilities:**

In addition to the role of the Board as belief-based and strategic or policy based in nature, there are clearly defined responsibilities that are common to most, if not all, Boards as governing organizations. They are:

1. Set Direction for the District
  - Assess District needs / utilize baseline data.
  - Generate, review or revise initiatives that set direction (beliefs, vision, priorities, strategic goals, success indicators).
2. Establish an Effective and Efficient Structure for the School District
  - Employ the superintendent and set policy for hiring of other personnel.
  - Oversee the development and adoption of policies.

### 3. Provide Support

- Recognize exemplary performance by students and staff.
- Make consistent decisions and provide resources that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals.
- Be prepared to explain and defend Board decisions as a unified group.
- Participate in school and District events.
- Be informed and knowledgeable about District efforts to explain them to the public.
- Use every opportunity to speak positively about the District's programs and activities.

### 4. Ensure Accountability to the Public

- Evaluate the superintendent.
- Monitor, review and revise policies.

### 5. Provide Community Leadership

- Advocate for children, District programs and public education to the general public, community, and Provincial leaders.
- Ensure that trustees have awareness and understanding of the Natural Justice [Policy # 6750](#).

### 6. Board Meetings

- Board meeting dates: [Bylaw #2 – Regular Board Meetings](#)
  - [Motion Submission Form](#)
- Attendance at meetings: [Bylaw #8 – Trustee Remuneration & Expense Allowance](#): *It is expected that all Trustees participate in all required functions of the Board to the extent possible.*
  - [Professional Learning Travel Expenses \(Pre-Registration\) Form](#)

## **III. GOVERNANCE POLICY**

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Governance Policy, operating with similar principles, will govern at the highest level of effectiveness and excellence. The Board of Education's [Policy #1080](#) outlines a Trustee Code of Ethics that describes current protocols. They are:

*I will endeavour to provide the best quality of education possible for our students and will strive for public schools that can meet the individual needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, sex, creed, social standing or unique conditions. I will earnestly attempt to understand the needs and aspirations of the entire school*

*system and do my best to support effective educational programmes for the students.*

*I will represent the entire district rather than individual electors, patrons or groups. I will bear in mind, under all circumstances, that the primary function of the Board is to establish the policies by which the schools are to be administered, but that the administration of school business shall be left to the Superintendent of Schools, the Secretary-Treasurer and respective staff.*

*I will endeavour to work with my fellow trustees in a spirit of harmony and cooperation, in spite of differences of opinion that may arise during debate. I will avoid rancour and bitterness; observe proper decorum and behaviour; encourage full and open discussions in all matters with my fellow members of the Board; treat them with respect and consideration; and I will not withhold or conceal from them any information or matter with which they could be concerned.*

## **1. ROLE OF THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON**

- Every year the Board of Education will elect a Board Chairperson.
- The Board Chairperson is the spokesperson for the Board and sets the tone and shape of the public's perception of the School Board.
- Each Board member must have the opportunity to express his or her viewpoint during Board deliberation.
- [Bylaw #5](#) – Chairperson and Presiding Officers

*“The role of the Board chair is critical both in ensuring effective meeting processes and in setting the tone of the Board.*

*Trustees elect the Board Chair. Sometimes the Chair remains in office throughout the Board's term while in other cases Boards elect a new Chair annually.*

*The Chair presides over the Board's deliberations, enforces appropriate procedures and parliamentary processes, and often acts as the spokesperson for the Board. The Board Chair is an equal, with no more power or authority than any other trustee. However, the Chair does have an additional function and responsibility to speak for and represent the positions and decisions of the Board. Thus the Board Chair may represent the Board at events, hearings and meetings with representatives from other governing bodies and organizations. Here again, the Chair's role is limited to speaking only for what the Board has already decided, to receive input and to bring matters back to the Board for consideration.”*

*BCSTA Good Governance for Boards of Education Module 2*

## **Protocol:**

The Board Chairperson:

- Serves as the primary spokesperson for the Board.
- Presides at all meetings in accordance with Board policy and, in the absence of policy, with *Robert's Rules of Order*.
- Is an ex-officio member of all standing and ad hoc committees.
- Provides, on behalf of the Board, appropriate public comment on Board actions when requested to do so (or when, in the Chairperson's judgment, such comment will improve public understanding of Board action).
- Works with the Superintendent, following the Board meeting, to ensure that there is appropriate follow up and clarification of possible options for the Board.
- Calls Special Meetings.

Role of the Vice-Chairperson:

[Fraser-Cascade Bylaw 5; 5.10, 5.11](#)

*5.10 The Vice-Chairperson shall have the powers and duties of the Chairperson in the Chairperson's absence, and such other powers and duties as the Board may determine from time to time.*

*5.11 In the event that neither the Chairperson nor the Vice-Chairperson is able or willing to take the Chair, the presiding officer shall be such person as the Board may elect for that meeting.*

## **2. ROLE OF THE BOARD COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**

### **Rationale:**

- The Board Committee Chairperson is the spokesperson for the Committee and sets the tone and shape of the public's perception of each Committee.
- Each Committee member must have the opportunity to express his or her viewpoint during Committee deliberation.
- Fraser-Cascade [Bylaw 5](#) – Chairperson and Presiding Officers:
  - 5.1 The Board shall elect a Chairperson in September of each year.*
- [Bylaw #15](#) – Board Committees

### **Protocol:**

The Board Committee Chairperson:

- Serves as the primary spokesperson for the Committee.
- Works with the senior staff representative to draft the Committee Meeting Agenda.

- Presides at all meetings in accordance with Board policy and, in the absence of policy, with *Robert's Rules of Order*.
- Provides, on behalf of the Committee, appropriate public comment on Committee actions when requested to do so (or when, in the Chairperson's judgment, such comment will improve public understanding of Committee action).
- Works with the senior staff representative, following the Committee meeting, to ensure that there is appropriate follow up and clarification of possible options for the Committee and the Board. The main responsibility of the senior staff member assigned to the committee is to provide information and support to the Chairperson of the committee.
- Ensures that all policies directly pertaining to the Committee function are reviewed and evaluated at least once every three years.
- Introduces Committee recommended motions at the Board Meeting.

### **3. QUESTIONS ANSWERED BEFORE THE BOARD MEETING**

***(What is the appropriate protocol for wanting more information before a Board meeting regarding an agenda item?)***

#### **Rationale:**

- Board members need to be fully informed before making a decision.

#### **Protocol:**

- Correspond with the staff member/Trustee responsible for the item/issue to forewarn them that you will be asking for more information at the Board Meeting (this allows information to be gathered for the meeting).
- Upon receiving such a request from a Trustee, the individual will ensure that the Trustee is advised if providing an answer to the question will require an extensive amount of time.
- If it is a minor item, with no consequence to the rest of the Board, and requires minimal time, correspond with the appropriate individual for the answer without a follow up at the Board Meeting.

### **4. BOARD GOVERNANCE/SELF-EVALUATION**

#### **Rationale:**

- Conducting a governance self-evaluation demonstrates accountability to the community and the willingness of the governance team to strengthen and improve governance practices.

### **Protocol:**

The Board supports continuous improvement through ongoing evaluation of governance effectiveness.

- The self-evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect, evaluate, prioritize and focus on strengthening the governance team.

## **5. TRUSTEE COMMUNICATION**

### **Rationale:**

- Board members should be fully focused on the business at hand at the Board table.

### **Protocol:**

- Electronic devices should only be used for effective meeting operation.
- Technology and/or hard copy should be available to support individual choice, in order to enable Trustees to perform their duties as effectively as possible.
- Ensure that electronic communication is sent out in a format that is pertinent to all respondents and clearly indicates that the information should be read and replied to.
- The School District e-mail should be used for business purposes only.
- The corporate Board makes decisions based on information sent to all trustees that is pertinent to corporate Board business.
- [Bylaw #2](#) – *Regular Board Meetings*