

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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Board exams how to ‘govern’ district without ‘managing’ it, while connecting with public

Members of the Battle Ground School District’s Board of Directors are exploring ways to get better at their jobs -- and help the superintendent and employees be better at theirs.

Their focus is on an emerging model of policy governance that shifts more of a board’s attention to the improvement of learning and success of students and away from procedural steps in running the school district.

Here’s an example, as stated in an article for the American School Board Journal by Rick Maloney, a member of the school board in University Place near Tacoma who is working with the Battle Ground Board. Maloney has a background in organization development and board governance:

“Under the traditional format, our Board meetings were dominated by staff reports about staff activity or board approval of superintendent and staff business. Now our meetings focus on monitoring district and superintendent performance against criteria written into policy and revising those policies to ensure the community’s values are clearly stated.”

One way the philosophy has been stated is for the Board to “get its arms around school district business and goals while keeping its fingers out of it.”

Maloney stresses that this refocusing of a school board’s attention is not an abandonment of its responsibility to hold the superintendent and the entire staff accountable. Rather, it is a shift of the Board’s time and energy away from procedural business and agendas. Instead, the Board seeks to concentrate more of its energy on student achievement and the views of the public.

The University Place School District’s Website captures the essence of what Maloney describes and what the Battle Ground Board is examining. It says:

“The primary tasks of the Board are: Linking the school system with the community; setting policy that guides the district; and assuring organizational performance by monitoring the execution of policy. . . . Whenever possible (the Board members) refer

matters to the Superintendent, the principal, or the classroom teacher to ensure they are handled at the level most appropriate for resolution.”

Maloney and a colleague, Bob Hughes of Seattle, retired from the Boeing Co. where he was director of education relations, are veterans at helping school districts make this shift. They spoke to the Battle Ground Board Feb. 26 about policy governance. He was on the Lake Washington School Board for years.

They will return for workshops with the Battle Ground Board on April 30 and May 21. They have guided other school districts toward this model of governance. Among them are Bellingham, Mercer Island, Federal Way, Yakima, Lake Washington and Washougal (www.washougal.k12.wa.us/schoolboard/policygovernance.htm.)

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