

# Community Forum on School Board Leadership



A Report on a Community Discussion Held by  
A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for  
Public Education



February 2007



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A+ Schools  
Community Forum on School Board Leadership  
Report

City of Pittsburgh residents will elect 4 School Board members in 2007 – what do we expect from these leaders? What is their role? How can we demand the best from them? These are just a few of the questions considered by approximately 150 participants at the A+ Schools Community Forum on School Board Leadership.

The goal of the meeting was to answer these questions in a way that would help to influence the school board candidates' platforms and ultimately the performance of the Pittsburgh Public School Board. Key themes that emerged during the meeting included a desire for more school board accountability; a school board focused on its mission; a school board equipped and prepared for its role; and an interest in exploring potential structural changes to the school board.

This was a non-partisan discussion and therefore, no one candidate or groups of candidates has been or will be endorsed. This report summarizes the speakers' remarks as well as the discoveries from 14 small group discussions.

### **The Program**

***“The turnaround of the Pittsburgh Public Schools is the most critical issue facing the region. All of the economic development work downtown and on the North Shore is good, but if we don’t fix the Pittsburgh Public Schools the City will not survive. And if the City doesn’t survive the County won’t survive either. “***

Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato

The Community Forum on School Board Leadership opened with this bold charge from Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato. Chief Executive Onorato offered some further thoughts on School Board Leadership. He stated that the hardest job for School Board members is maintaining a balance between the fiduciary responsibility and holding the Superintendent accountable for his fiduciary responsibility. The next most difficult balance is maintaining a city-wide perspective while still representing your district – a challenge Mr. Onorato faced while serving on City Council. Most importantly school board members need to make sure the school system is effective and also that the system is perceived to be effective.

Mr. Onorato noted his support for Charter Schools. Charter Schools provide choices to parents in the City and those choices are important for the City’s viability. Mr. Onorato noted the natural tension between the District and charter schools over scarce resources. The State must fix this problem and he committed himself to doing so. Mr. Onorato also suggested that the Pittsburgh Public School Board should be appointed by the Mayor. He acknowledged that this is not a popular opinion among some, but he felt it would insure some accountability for the importance of the schools to the success of the region.

Finally Mr. Onorato reiterated his initial charge, “We’ve got to get this right; the viability of the City, County and the Region depend on it.” He urged the audience to support the candidates they like and to help them get elected. Candidates need to hear from the public about the priority issues. He pledged to continue to work closely with the Pittsburgh Public School Board and Superintendent.

## **“May the Force Be With Us”**

Comments by Gregg Behr of the Grable Foundation

School Board elections do not have the flash of a presidential race or the tussling of a heated gubernatorial election yet, in so many ways, it is just as critical if not more so for our community. Mr. Behr acknowledged his task was to set the stage for the discussions among audience members – the discussions specifically about School Board Leadership. He offered two caveats: 1. His remarks should for the most part apply to any for-profit or nonprofit organization as well as any government agency. There may be some thing peculiar about school districts, but good leadership is good leadership. Period. 2. Though he spoke about the school district, nothing he said should be interpreted as endorsing any candidate, board member, executive or staff person.

Great organizations have the following characteristics: 1) Clearly articulated mission: PPS mission is that all children achieve academic success. 2) Clearly articulated policies and procedures: PPS has the State School Code and various District handbooks. 3) Robust systems such as financial, human resources, professional development, etc. PPS is a functioning bureaucracy. There are many such characteristics, but core to any great enterprise is the board (perhaps not for the reasons you might first suspect). Why is the board core to any great enterprise? It is because the board hires and fires the executive leader. Research tells us time and again that it's the executive leader more than anything else that contributes to organizational excellence. Not the board, not finances, not staff, not programs. All of these are necessary to be certain of excellence, but it's the executive leader that matters.

For our purposes, it's the school board that elects that leader (the superintendent). The citizens of Pittsburgh do not elect the superintendent. The board does. The relationship between the school board and superintendent is more akin to a membership organization's board and executive director than to a legislature and executive branch. So a school board and superintendent post is not like citizens electing city council members and the mayor or Congress and President.

What underlies governance of a city or country is a system of checks and balances whereby different branches are separately accountable to constituencies; the friction of which is expected to yield sound and appropriate public policies. Whereas a school district is essentially akin to a membership organization (e.g. the Sierra Club or a neighborhood organization); the superintendent serves at the pleasure of the board. ***Unlike in city or national politics school boards and superintendents should never be in an “Us versus Them” situation in pursuit of differing aspirations. It is ever only us in pursuit of one mission: All children achieve academic excellence.***

The Board has one big job: to hire and fire the executive. If a board decides to hire or retain its executive leadership, then the board bears responsibility to do everything it can to support the executive. We know that the executive leader's performance is the key ingredient without which brilliant organizational success is wholly impossible. The Board should not rubberstamp everything the leader does – far from it. Rather, board members as trustees and as custodians of the mission must be a force supporting the organization. They must be helpful in shouldering the executive's burdens so that the organization as an organization may achieve excellence. Essentially all of this means that a board does best by fulfilling its fiduciary and strategic duties brilliantly. That is what it means to be a force.

A good board attends to its fiduciary responsibilities by having an annual performance review of its executive, an annual financial audit, annual ethics audit, annual budget approval, adherence to by-laws, codes, etc. The difference between a good board and a great board when exercising fiduciary responsibilities is as follows: A good board asks “Is the budget balanced?” A great board asks “Does the budget promote our mission of academic excellence for all children?” A good board asks, “Did we get a

clean audit?” A great board asks, “What can we learn from the audit?” A great board is a diligent “force supporting the organization.”

As a force supporting the organization, a great board attends well to strategic responsibilities on top of its fiduciary duties. Indeed a great board is marked not by bursts of strategic planning but rather continuously asks and addresses matters of strategic management. It sets a clear vision and mission; engages in strategic inquiry; uses data (vs. anecdote, experience, gut); is responsive to constituent input; sets agreed upon metrics (announced versus unannounced goals); identifies appropriate tactics and advocates for the mission. Such strategic thinking is the hallmark of a great board.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools has a Strategic Plan that is publicly available. The Mission of the Pittsburgh Schools reads as follows:

***The Pittsburgh public Schools will be one of America’s premier school districts, student-focused, well-managed, and innovative. We will hold ourselves accountable for preparing all children to achieve academic excellence and strength of character, so they have the opportunity to succeed in all aspects of life.***

The Pittsburgh Public Schools Declaration of Beliefs:

- All children can learn at high levels
- Teachers have a profound impact on student development and should have ample training, support and resources.
- Education begins with a safe and healthy learning environment
- Families are an essential part of the educational process
- A commitment from the entire community is necessary to build a culture that encourages student achievement.
- Improvement in education is guided by consistent and effective leadership
- Central office exists to serve students and schools.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools has identified five goal areas under which all improvement strategies fall:

- 1) Maximum academic achievement of all students
- 2) A safe and orderly environment for all students and employees
- 3) Efficiently and effectively support operations for all students, families, teachers and administrators.
- 4) Efficient and equitable distribution of resources to address the needs of all students, to the maximum extent feasible.
- 5) Improved public confidence and strong parent/community engagement.

This frames how any school board should conduct itself. The fiduciary duties ought to be accomplished easily. The struggles, when they come, should arise during strategic discussions, when board members wrestle with implementing a clearly articulated plan so that it really is true that no child is left behind or so that it might be true that every child can really soar. Great school board members keep a school district and their community focused on the strategic horizons. A great school board keeps its operations and discussions centered upon that agreed-to strategic plan again, and again and again.

Considering these well-established best practices for boards, it is mind-boggling that any school board anywhere would in the absence of unethical or illicit dealings even discuss the hiring of a football coach; contradict a superintendent about the hiring of specific personnel; squabble over minor budgetary matters; or spend too many precious meeting minutes discussing web site contracts, overtime for security guards, snow days or any number of insubstantial and distracting matters. To be sure oversight is appropriate. In the absence of some cause for particular investigation, these are hardly the markers of excellence, let alone

about being a force supporting a district's mission. It is and should always be about the academic success of all students above all else. It should not be about the media, the athletic boosters, prestige, power, or personality, and not about minutia of management. It is about academic excellence and it is in this context and in this context alone that a board's strategic conversations should occur.

Further, respecting the seriousness and the sincerity of the subject matter (children's learning), boorish behavior, cursing and disdain are intolerable. Such disrespect serves only and ultimately to belittle children. Things may get heated. Indeed, given the importance of what's at stake, one might hope that temperatures would rise. Debate, questioning and dissent are wholly appropriate. In fact, exceptional boards pursue their organization's mission vigorously, with open inquiry. A school board should be no exception. A culture of inquiry, even dissent, is found among exceptional boards; yet those boards, in the end, advocate together in pursuit of the mission. That uncommon deference is what distinguishes the exceptional from the adequate.

In the mundane, for everyday purposes, what is described translates as follows for all exceptional boards and the meetings they hold:

- Board members would make meetings matter
- They would prepare, attend, be prompt and adhere to the agenda
- They would respect one another and uphold an authentic partnership between the board and the executive leadership.
- They would fulfill fiduciary duties in a timely but appropriate manner.
- Thereafter they would turn to robust and meaningful decisions: mission, vision, strategy, and tactics. Every item on the agenda would refer back to the strategic plan.
- They would focus on strategic results not default to distractions.
- They would respect the board's collective decisions.
- Most importantly, if after conducting their annual performance review they had decided to retain the executive (the superintendent), they would honor that decision and serve as a backbone for the organization and as a backstop for the executive.

Together they would be a force for the organization and what it's all about.

To reiterate, any board member for any organization whether that organization is US Steel, the United Way or the Pittsburgh Public Schools must regularly and when appropriate ask, "Should we retain or fire our executive?" If the answer is "retain" then the duties of loyalty and obedience to the mission of the organization call for support so that the organization advances in fulfilling its mission brilliantly.

What this means for voters and the upcoming school board elections is 3 simple questions:

1. Is the candidate competent to fulfill his or her fiduciary responsibilities?
2. Is the candidate ethical?
3. Does the candidate support the district's strategic plans for advancing the district's mission to prepare all children to achieve academic excellence?

The answers to questions 1 and 2 should always be yes. Provided that is true, then the outstanding matter is whether or not the candidate supports or opposes the district's strategic plan. That is a subject for debate among the candidates.

A question to pose at a candidate debate could be to articulate an outrageous ambition such as this – "the Pittsburgh Public School District will have to respond to population growth because the board and the staff had been so successful in providing the district's students with exceptional educations that families moved into all neighborhoods across our beloved City." What would that take? What would the school board

have to do to equip the superintendent and his/her staff to reach such success on behalf of the district? Isn't this what we want the candidates and ultimately all school board members to answer for? That is what our children deserve.

These remarks from Greg Behr provided a perfect backdrop for the discussions that the participants undertook in their small groups.

### **Small Group Discussions**

Participants were organized into 14 small discussion groups which were led by experienced, volunteer facilitators. Each group was asked to consider the following questions:

1. Given your experience and what you've heard this evening, what are the 3 most important qualifications and qualities of an outstanding School Board member in your opinion?
2. What should be the distinction between the policy functions of the Board and the operations functions of the Superintendent? See example in packet.
  - a. Are there functions you would add or subtract from either the Board or Superintendent?
3. The public has a right to expect leadership level conduct from its elected officials. Pittsburgh Public School Board Members currently adopt the Code of Conduct (in packet). What are the most important elements in this Code of Conduct?
4. What other specific ideas do you have about changing the role and conduct of the School Board to be more effective?

To assist with their discussions each participant had an informational packet that included substantial background information on school board leadership – including articles about governance issues, the code of conduct adopted by the Pittsburgh Public School Board, and sample governance materials from the Education Policy and Leadership Center.

Small group discussions lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes and then were concluded with a summary report back to the entire group. Flip chart notes were transcribed to capture all of participant discoveries. For detailed notes from each discussion group see the appendix.

### **Findings**

From the small group discussion summary reports as well as the detailed table discussion notes, we highlight some common themes about participant ideas on School Board Leadership. Key discoveries are as follows:

**Participants want Board members who are more accountable for their conduct and for their role as community leaders.** Accountability is a theme that is repeated in each of the discussions in which the participants engaged. Numerous ideas were generated about how to build more accountability into the School Board on an on-going basis and in election years.

**Participants generally agreed that the Board's role is policy making and the Superintendent is responsible for managing and operating the district.** However, there was a sense among some participants that this distinction is difficult in reality and therefore could be the focus of planning and professional development among board members.

**Board members should be well-equipped for the important role they serve.** They should be required to be regularly engaged in professional development activities and should purposefully engage in

planning together to clarify their common purpose and clarify their understanding of their role vis a vis the superintendent.

**The community must become more engaged with school board members** and likewise board members must seek out their input, listen, and regularly inform the public about the issues and initiatives happening in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

**Participants suggested a number of structural changes** to the Pittsburgh Public School Board ranging from an appointed board, a hybrid board, to introducing 2 at-large seats to the Board.

**Integrity, vision and accountability were the most repeated qualities/qualifications** participants cited as being essential for an outstanding school board member.

**School Board members should lead by example.** Participants noted repeatedly the idea that children see School Board members as role models and so their conduct must be exemplary.

**The Code of Conduct for the Board should emphasize harmony and acting as a unit for the betterment of the entire District.**

Many wonderful ideas were generated by participants during these discussions. These thoughts and ideas are captured in the appendices by table and by category.

### **What's Next**

A+ Schools is working with partner organizations to continue the community dialog about the upcoming School Board elections and other public education issues. Ideas such as a city-wide candidate's forum and a voter's guide to the PPS School Board races are among those being undertaken. As always, A+ Schools will incorporate the findings from this meeting into its planning for future initiatives.

A+ Schools is an independent community advocate for improvement in public education. Our vision is a community mobilized to improve public education to produce successive generations of young people who thrive and who build their families and futures in Pittsburgh. Our purpose is to be a community force advancing the highest educational achievement and character development for every public school student.

To find out more about A+ Schools and/or tell us what you think please visit us on the web at [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org).



**School Board Leadership Forum  
Table Discussion Notes**

**Discussion Questions**

1. Given your experience and what you've heard this evening, what are the 3 most important qualifications and qualities of an outstanding School Board member in your opinion?
2. What should be the distinction between the policy functions of the Board and the operations functions of the Superintendent? (See example in packet). Are there functions you would add or subtract from either the Board or Superintendent?
3. The public has a right to expect leadership level conduct from its elected officials. Pittsburgh Public School Board Members currently adopt the Code of Conduct (in packet). What are the most important elements in this Code of Conduct?  
-Probing questions:
  - Are there any that should be removed?
  - Anything that should be added?
  - How could this Code of Conduct be made better?
4. What other specific ideas do you have about changing the role and conduct of the School Board to be more effective?

**Table I (Chloe Velasquez, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Professionalism--respect, role model
- Passionate advocate for mission
- Code of Conduct—Accountability  
    Process for evaluating adherence
- Required to attend professional development
- Enhance image to attract candidates
- Matrix of qualifications

Question #1

- |                        |                                     |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| -Focus on district     | -Job description                    |
| -Honest                | -Don't see how to improve           |
| -Integrity             | -Role Model-aware                   |
| -Proper training?      | -Embrace fiduciary responsibilities |
| -Passion for education | -Concern for equity                 |
| -Commitment            | -Advocate for mission               |
| -Professionalism       |                                     |

- 1) Professionalism
- 2) Passionate advocate for mission
- 3) Concern for equity

Question #2

<b>Superintendent</b>	<b>Board</b>
Hire/Fire staff	Hire/Fire
Implement plan	Work w/Superintendent on strategic plan
Propose budget	Evaluate implementation according to benchmarks
Accountable for benchmarks	Approve/review budget
	Aware of district requirements of NCLB
	Set achievement goals

Question #3

- Hold them accountable
  - Process to evaluate adherence to code?
  - Adopt our own code specific to community
    - Communication
    - Engage entire community
    - Diversity
- 1) Required to attend training-professional development
  - 2) Host a forum before elections
  - 3) Enhance board image to attract more candidates
  - 4) Focus on mission
  - 5) Establish accountability

“Just Do It!”

**Table 2 (Kyra Straussman, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Setting good example for kids
- Equity
- Board members should visit schools throughout district

Question #1

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Objective                                 | 10) Background in education             |
| 2) Genuine concern for all the children      | 11) Ethical                             |
| 3) Empathetic                                | 12) Competent                           |
| 4) Accountability                            | 13) Open minded (to change)             |
| 5) Accessibility/available                   | 14) Focused on big issues               |
| 6) Cultural awareness                        | 15) Moral values                        |
| 7) Leadership--“Walk the Talk”               | 16) Good conduct in your life           |
| 8) Empowering                                | 17) Focused on entire student community |
| 9) Macro manage--supportive enough to others | 18) Compassionate                       |
|  | 19) Fairness/equity                     |

Question #2

<b>Board</b>	<b>Superintendent</b>
Policy	Management

- Superintendent should articulate mission
- Board should share in the mission and how it's carried out
- Board should brainstorm solutions → Hands off implementation of solutions
- Then be accountable to the board
- Board should set the criteria that he should meet and then evaluate his performance
- Board selects the Superintendent; Superintendent presents the plan to execute that vision/mission; Board should oversee and evaluate progress in plan
- Board should have ambition and make sure that all kids are educated to the same level

- Board should be aware (city-wide) and informed of what's going on/present at schools → visit the schools not just your district
- Investigate problems first hand
- Budget should be proposed by Superintendent as part of the plan to meet the mission
- The way the money should be spent should be related to the need
- School board should provide oversight on money matters in amounts that are substantial but not astronomical and closely evaluate Superintendent as he spends the money
- Board should be better and more collectively informed
- Board needs better information

Question #3

- 1) Be kind, respectful
- 2) Set example for kids...in spirit of harmony
- 3) Work as a team
- 4) Insist on ethics and honesty
- 5) School board should provide good information to community
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_ time...Code of Conduct
- 7) School boards must balance...
- 8) Politics should be kept out of school board

Question #4

- 1) Appoint school board
- 2) Discussion--is the city leadership competent to make such appointments?
- 3) Have at-large board members
- 4) Both board and Superintendent should be accountable to parents
- 5) Become more sympathetic to the varying issues facing all students
- 6) School board should be more present in schools and pay attention to parent concerns
- 7) Provide a sincere hearing to parent and community concerns
- 8) Performance and conduct we expect from the kids we should also expect from the school board, Superintendent, teachers and parents
- 9) More Afterschool programs

**Table 3 (April Clisura, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Use Board meetings to lessen micromanagement
- Increase threshold for oversight
- More civic engagement → more voters, more forums

### Question #1

- Honesty/Integrity\*\*
- Judge of character
- Experience with large organizations\*
- Cooperative attitude/respectful
- Diversity/"Representitiveness" of issues and whole picture-socioeconomics\*\*
- Humility
- Firm in belief systems
- Understand issues\*
- Development of strategy
- Attract/retain good leadership
- Intelligence/competence\*
- Openness/listener
- Follow through
- Understand structure of school system\*\*
- Kids 1<sup>st</sup>!\*\*\*

### Question #2

- Not hiring \_\_\_\_\_ principles
- Frequency of oversight  
How many meetings per week?
- Approving contracts  
What amount is threshold?  
Threshold ↑ \$300K

### Question #3

- Spirit of harmony and respect (anger alienates)
- Using personal agendas
- Utilize judgment
- Kids 1<sup>st</sup> issues
- Solidarity--stand by decisions (like Right-Sizing Plan)

### Question #4

- Candidates?
- US!!!
- Institutions (like A+)
- No more "bottom up" communication
- Publicize more (8% vote typically)  
Not perceived as important races
- Would it result in better schools to have more info/ civic engagement on candidates?
- Would engaging parents/students with mentors and such and enhancements at schools make more different?
- Campaigns have small \$\$ financing so the candidates can't really get word out
- Media station controlled by school district/City—PCTV\*
- Get kids involved in conducting the questioning and forums with candidates\*
- Create reputation for district
- What does Board really offer process of operating school system?

### **Table 4 (Sean Fogarty, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- Communication between parents and board
- Have staff members to work with Board members
- Engage; encourage advocacy
- Town Hall sessions in the community

### Question #1

- Communication  
Parents → Board Members → Accountability  
Input → Constituents

- Fully present/engaged representation
- Motivated/Accountable
  - Cooperation
  - “Big picture”
  - Focus on Mission
- Professionalism (staff? Salary?)
  - Resources to arm board members with facts

Question #2

- Personnel decisions
  - Board: setting standards and requirements (qualifications)
  - Superintendent: hiring and personnel management
- Board: oversight and research
  - Diligence
  - Is there sufficient support staff to gather enough information?
  - Cuts in staff
  - Board function
- Establishing the tax rate
- Superintendent:
  - Long-range planning (5 years)
  - Projections
  - Funding considerations

Question #3

- Pretty good as is
- Stronger language
- Fails to have traction

Question #4

- Stronger emphasis on “advocacy”
  - Harrisburg & DC
  - Community engagement
- Evaluations by parents
- Regular and mobile public engagement (town meetings)

**Table 5 (Meredith Benedict, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Role Model--integrity, commitment, passion, knowledgeable and innovative
- Professional development
- Dynamics between board members
- More measurable Code of Conduct

Question #1

- 1) Be a role model with integrity; dedicated, committed and passionate about education
- 2) Be willing/open to being held accountable
- 3) Be knowledgeable and innovative in approach to addressing the needs of the schools

Question #2

<b>Board</b>	<b>Superintendent</b>
Top job of board—higher Superintendent	Should develop and enact programs; provide data for board to assess; set goals for education needed to meet goals set
Board should assess progress of programs	Do all research, due diligence
Should approve major budget decisions	
Board establishes objectives	
Assuming board does research and bring in experts and get input to create	
Board must set communication goals and targets	

Question #3

- Highlight stewardship--not for individuals meeting needs of kids, community
- Biggest priority is educational equity for every child
- Clear, specific language
- Professional trainings and development together/Group training
- Strategic plan as a board
- Attend all regular school board meetings (based on set parameters) and trainings
- All sign and self-evaluate at set intervals
- Changes?  
Take out “should”--“Do” or “Will”!

Question #4

- Truly respect each other
- Agree to disagree and love; speak with one voice when they come out of the room
- Research; be knowledgeable about policies nation/worldwide that work  
Specifically regarding respect and accountability
- Regular and honest review of policies
- Commitment to change what is not working

**Table 6 (Karen Rafalko, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- “Doing it for the kids--they are watching!”
- Lead by example
- Time; integrity
- Boards sets policy → gets out of way
- Split votes are bad; dissenting views can be heard
- Code needs “teeth”

Question #1

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Integrity</li> <li>-Adapt/cater to different learning styles</li> <li>-Understanding/knowledge of educational performance</li> <li>-Diversity-racial, thought, vision, resources, gender, age</li> <li>-Open-minded</li> <li>-Commitment to fairness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ability to understand their role; ability to delegate, enable</li> <li>-Responsibility, accountability</li> <li>-Focus</li> <li>-Teamwork</li> <li>-Board should reflect its represented district</li> <li>-Reformer</li> <li>-Overall vision</li> <li>-Certification</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

- Familiarity
- Know how to break apart the overall vision into action
- Respectful leadership
- Ability to admit mistakes
- Ability to put aside political agendas

- Do your research on issues!
- Highly literate (academic, financial)
- Competent in consensus-building
- Ability and time to get things done
- Time management

### Question #2

- Setting policy vs. implementing it and getting out of the way
- Board needs to earn the trust of the community
- Board should represent constituency, not be political
- Carry out and set policy in the best interest of all kids, not special interest
- Work toward consensus, not split votes
- Amend policy to recommend consensus
- Boards are a regulating body
- Superintendent sets the vision for the leadership of the principles
- School systems need to be updated to reflect today's society/economy

- Boards should not micromanage
- Boards support Superintendent
- Boards should value the integrity and skills of Superintendent they hired
- Boards need to move past their emotions of their interests
- Board should have a dissenting decision (like the Supreme Court)
- Dialogue and discussion between the public and school board
- Decision making discussions need to be made clear to the community

### Question #3

- How does it come alive?
- How operational is it?
- Translating vision into action and results
- There is no "how" to enforce
- Bring the code of conduct to the community so board positions are taken seriously
- Should be used to hold school board members accountable
- Should include the ability to recall board members
- "No patronage" should be enforced
- Needs "teeth"
- Bring Civics back into the classroom
- Bring youth into leadership positions

## **Table 7 (Alida Baker and Darla Cravotta, Facilitator)**

### Summary Report:

- Vision for all; competent, commitment, well informed
- Integrity
- Not clear what is policy vs. operations → Board should sort through
- Self-assessment of code adherence; 3<sup>rd</sup> party review

### Question #1

Someone who doesn't practice nepotism  
No micromanagement

#### 1) Vision

- Greater view system-wide vs. own district
- Not parochial
- Well informed on models, national trends
- Commitment to job, focus on the job
- Strategic

- Advocacy
- 2) Competent
  - Visionary, think beyond status quo
- 3) Integrity
  - Willingness and ability to work well with others

Qualifications?  
 Articulate  
 Don't limit by credentials and degrees, but quality  
 No personal agendas, "axes to grind"

Question #2

<b>Board--Policy</b>	<b>Superintendent--Operational</b>
Policy	Operational
Board adopts policy	Education
Adopts broad budget; holds Superintendent accountable for implementation	Implements
	Staff fiscal responsibility

Point of positive disagreement  
 Board should be more active in our communities; perhaps can contribute and be helpful  
 How can they exhibit interest and passion without micromanagement?

Question #3

- Board members cannot hold themselves out as a legal (and moral) authority outside board meetings
- Have entrusted us...advocacy and stewardship for education
- Primary responsibility of board to adopt policies— by which school administers
- Board--harmony
- Decisions made by board are done for the good of the whole district/students and not be based on parochial agendas/needs

- Audit: Self-audit or "at election day"; A parliamentarian that manages and reviews; Members to be "reviewed" or impeached or censured
- Consequences when the code of conduct is compromised
- More clearly defined roles/responsibilities
- An effort to define policy

Question #4

- At-large positions-two?
- Appointed school boards?
  - Pros-Cons
- De-politicized (Can run as a Democrat or Republican)
- Mixture-appointed and elected, at large, etc.
- \*POLICY!

**Table 8 (Heather Harr, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Experience is a relevant aspect
- Personal qualities → works well with each other; each brings something into mix
- Monitor progress, don't micromanage
- Code → Harmony
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Facilitation/Training



Evaluations/Self-Evaluation

- Reduce number of meetings
- Have staff to help board members
- Revisit Code of Conduct at each meeting

Question #1

-Policy

- Commitment to mission
- Non-school hour programming

-Background

- Experience with kids
- Cultural diversity skills and understand different communities
- Come in knowing about policies and procedures of education system
- Experience in collaborative efforts
- Financial literacy--school boards budget

-Implementation

- Hands off for staff decisions
- Community awareness

-Character

- Mediation skills
- Ability to listen
- Sense of humor
- Willingness to collaborate
- Coalition builder
- Willingness to learn
- Be willing to hear other points of view

-Need mix of strengths

- Some visionaries, some different skills
- What does the prospective member bring to the mix?
- Mix of skills, education, personal background

Question #2

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Operational Decisions</b>
Board adopts policy	Education
Adopts broad budget; holds Superintendent accountable for implementation	Implements
	Staff fiscal responsibility

-What motivated you to run for school board?

Not just to fill up time and advocate for kids--the answer can be quite telling!

-What would you want to know in deciding who to vote for?

- The Superintendent shouldn't have the role of managing the classroom
- There should be a board policy!

Question #3

- Equitable and high quality
- Opportunities for youth
- Agree to disagree
- PA Constitution
- Harmony, respect despite difference of opinion
- Focus on policy overall; "you'd" see less fighting over specifics

- Respect the Superintendent
  - They didn't respect Thompson
  - If the Board doesn't respect the Superintendent, how can the parents and teachers?
- Keep the future welfare in mind--public schools!
- How to achieve harmony
  - Set ground rules and group norms
  - An outside witness
  - Bring in experts in group process
  - Observe and give feedback
  - All feelings are valid
  - The requirements are overwhelming; have some staff to reduce pressure-a resource staff for the Board
- Some of what we are seeing is just overextension and exhaustion
- Paying position?
- Schedule fewer meetings so they have more time; too much work for school staff to prepare
- Do they have to meet that many times?

Question #4

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Self evaluation</li> <li>-Peer evaluation</li> <li>-Revisit the code</li> <li>-Educate public to know how important school boards are</li> <li>-Appoint by a panel, not just the mayor</li> <li>-Mix of appointed and elected</li> <li>-Add business people, ethnic diversity</li> <li>-Rigorous preparation</li> <li>-Professional development for board members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Coach for new board members, mentoring</li> <li>-Training in group dynamics</li> <li>-Team-building</li> <li>-Mandatory county-wide School Board training, mix with other boards</li> <li>-Have technology for board               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members to communicate with each other</li> <li>Board website</li> </ul> </li> <li>-Public has to attend meetings (all of them?), allow some private meetings</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

**Table 9 (Shalonda Scott and Will Thompkins, Facilitators)**

Summary Report:

- Knowledge is power!
- Education Policy knowledge; general discussion of state and national trends
- Accountability for Code of Conduct
- Allegiance document for Code → "I WILL"
- Policy-operation: Start with policy → Operations → Policy
- Constituents are parents/kids

Question #1

Qualities-----Qualifications

- Proactive People skills
- Knowledge of education
  - Govt. policy and research
  - Continuous info sharing

Enlightenment	District Knowledge
Neighborhood history	Rivalries
Power structure	School culture
Politics	"Haves vs. Have Nots"
Financial literacy	

- Their role is not personal!
- Fulfill job description

- Depends if appointed or elected
- Multi-faceted professionalism
- “Knowledge is Power” for Boards too!
- The Board members qualifications and qualities revolve around knowledge of their district, education policy and continuing education. It is professional, not personal.

Question #2

<b>Board</b>	<b>Superintendent</b>
Listen to \$\$	Present case to close schools (Spent \$\$ to research this)
Close Schools via vote	
Day-to-day logistics	

- Respect
- Policy/Union form operation?
- Constituents
  - Only heard at election time
  - Includes students (13%)

This is about history. The “Faison Foundation” clearly defined the roles of Board and Superintendent. She brought integrity, respect and calmness to the situation. It seems like Boards only listen to funders and not to constituents, only at election time. They vote to close schools and are engrossed in the day to day logistics. The Superintendent spends money on research to determine which schools to close and presents the case. Why can’t the policy drive the operation (seems like it) and vice versa? Don’t forget the constituents; they’re the recipient of what happens between policy and operation. Kids come first and what about the teachers? Is the union speaking on their behalf? What’s in the teacher/board contract anyway?

Question #3

<b>New Stuff</b>	<b>Important</b>
Professional	Kids 1 <sup>st</sup>
Clarification of incorporation	Cooperation
Compliance with PA & US law	
#13 of EPLC	
<b>Remove</b>	<b>Other</b>
Efficient (are they?)	Most of our discussion is in the code
	Should they have to sign the code?
	Make the code “I will”

Question #4

- Ideas for Change:
- 1) Create job description
  - 2) Contract between PFT & PPS
  - 3) Specify legal action on how to remove a board member
  - 4) Create Board of Allegiance Sheet
  - 5) More inclusive, democratic system
  - 6) Get away from efficiency model
  - 7) Avoid state takeover

#5 is optimistic and #6 is about being specific and tailored to the needs of the different districts. “Efficiency” is a business model. Schools are not a business. We need to add value.

## **Table 10 (Chris Sweeney, Facilitator)**

### Summary Report:

- Accountability → Intelligent, motivated Electorate
- Balance--“Excellence For All” vs. Special Needs
- Hybrid Board--Elected and Appointed
- Create stakeholders out of other elected officials
- Persistent communication regarding Board
- Barriers → State Code of Conduct motivates micromanagement
- Clear in defining Superintendent vs. Board--even in Committees

### Question #1

- 1) With Excellence; understanding diverse need of student population  
Structural issue--parochial interests
- 2) Acknowledging accountability  
Structural issue—consequences
- 3) Recognize gaps between vision and reality  
(Good info!)
- 4) Openness to communication
- 5) Capacity to understand complexities of fiduciary and analytical details

### Question #2

- A. State education code complicates relationship of Superintendent and Board--not aligned with “Best Practices” model
- B. Clarify essential functions of Chief Executive and role of Board Committees (at detailed level)
- C. Respect role and autonomy of CEO and fellow Board Members
- D. Negotiation of Union Agreements

### Question #3

- A. Unified voice (force) once a decision is made despite differences
- B. Listen
- C. Prepare
  - Voter Education
  - Accountability
  - Public evaluation system?

### Question #4

- A. Continuing voter education--break inertia  
Mass Media focus
- B. Structural changes to board election/appointment
- C. More participants at board meetings
- D. Broader forum for debate of issues

## **Table 11 (Alana Kulesa, Facilitator)**

### Summary Report:

- Passion for kids and Education
- Integrity, honesty
- See “Big Picture”/Vision
- Skills (budget reading)
- Communicating and educating community
- Board → 3000ft view; Superintendent → Ground level
- Liked EPLC Code of Conduct better
- A+ Report Card on Board Performance

Question #1

<b>Personal Qualities</b>	<b>Skills &amp; Qualifications</b>
New, fresh perspectives; outrageous ambition	*Prior experience in education, HS, Child services, on board (no rookies!)
*Passion for children and education	Management experience
Firm convictions, yet open minded and flexible	Familiar with challenges of district (but not jaded)
Not just in it as a stepping stone	*History of previous successes
Genuine, sincere	Children of board members should attend PPS
Able to connect with people	*Ability to communicate with community (especially cross generational, economic, neighborhoods)
*Visionary, sees the "big picture"	Broader vision than just PPS
Holds themselves to a higher standard	Accountable
Integrity, ethical, honest	*Basic skill set to handle fiduciary responsibilities (read budgets, etc.)

Question #2

<b>Policy/Board</b>	<b>Operations/Superintendent</b>
Creating discipline policies for district	Implementing discipline policies and infrastructures; enforcing
*Aerial 30,000ft "forest view"	*On the ground, in the trenches, "tree view"
Hiring Superintendent; supervising/evaluating	Managing staff in district

Question #3

- Position of public service
- Ethics/honesty
- Engaging/connecting to community

Add:

- Professional manner
- More concrete specifics (ex. Attendance requirements)
- EPLC
  - #5: Professional Development
  - #14: Attendance
  - #13: Entire district
  - #17: Ethical and honest
- Make it less vague, add specifics
- Too redundant, eliminate "fluff"
- Include accountability (A+ Board Report Card)
- Way to evaluate Board performance
- Further Board improvements
  - \*Ultimate accountability
  - Community input to Board
  - Measures based on district success
  - Issue communications
    - Discipline, academic progress, HS graduation/drop-outs
  - \*Develop healthy community relationships, partnerships, commitment to community, not just schools

## **Table 12 (Jodi Klebick, Facilitator)**

### Summary Report:

- Visionary
- Professional development around policy vs. operations
- Committed, supportive, accountable relationship between Superintendent & Board
- Decisions based on facts
- Vote and educate each other!
- Competence and character
- Ongoing professional development

### Question #1

- ID and stay on mission
- Educated, global perspective
- Global visionary (beyond their neighborhood but with balance)
- Education sector background and/or commitment to understand the educational environment
- Listener and communicator with all: Board, staff, students, parents, community
- Commitment to board's professional development (know your role and know policy)
- Passionate about mission

### Question #2

- Boards don't understand policy and their roles
  - Default to "easy", i.e. Turf
  - Hard to be strategic
- Regarding school closings
  - Committed, supportive and accountable to each other and the decisions made

### Question #3

- “Striving toward ideal conditions for effective...representative democracy”
- “Personal decisions should be based upon...decision of the board”
- “We should recognize that the primary responsibility...to be administered”
- How to be accountable for these?
  - By voting
  - By education others about the voting process
  - Be present in schools, community
  - Attend/speak at public hearings
  - Be responsible and accountable citizens
  - Student on board
- What else?
  - Board training and orientation

## **Table 13 (Rose Swenson, Facilitator)**

### Summary Report:

- Good decision maker; Use evidence, take risks and prioritize
- Mission-driven and child-focused
- Understand role
- Effective communicator; values and solicits “voices”
- Macro-Board, Micro-Superintendent
- Think as a whole, not as individuals
- Bad behavior goes beyond Board
- Increase value of Education in PGH

Question #1

- Big picture view of healthy kid--mind, body
- Evidence-based
- Intelligence
- Problem-solving
- Consensus-building
- Goal-oriented
- Communication skills
- Being invested in outcome
- Have time and want to do the job
- Creative, innovative
- Energy
- Take responsibility for own actions

- Supportive-through resources, energy, time
- Direction, nurturing
- Importance of diversity
- Connecting with Stakeholders
- Child-focused; care about kids
- Future focus--creating and future citizens
- Ethical, integrity
- Commitment
- Prioritize and get things done
- Know role/responsibilities
- Risk-taker

- Good decision-maker
  - Uses evidence
  - Knows when to take risks
  - Knows how to prioritize
- Mission driven-child focused
  - Know role
  - Kids
  - Future
  - Commitment
- Good communicator
  - Valuing diversity of voices, opinions
- Strategic visionary
  - Cultural competence
- Personal responsibility and ethics

Question #2

<b>Board</b>	<b>Superintendent</b>
Make a general policy	Carry out policy
Fiduciary responsibilities	Integrate diverse perspectives
Represent constituencies	Listen, be responsible
Opinions-bring perspectives to discussion w/Superintendent (pre-survey community regarding discussions)	Make, implement decisions
Give recommendations to the Superintendent; keep him/her accountable	Micro
Key goals and strategies	
Macro	

We go over the line depending on personality/perspective of Superintendent

Question #3

- Child focus--be informed, talk about child-related issues
- Think as an organization, not a person
- Listen to all views--come to the table as equals and treat each other with respect
- Open-minded, listening, civility
- Key factor--what's best for kids?

- Understand purpose of board meetings--not a catch-all or free-form debate
- Being transparent in communications
- Board behavior--city-wide values issue, bad behavior, neighborhood-centric focus (stratification)
- Focus on student achievement\*\*
- Revision of 1940s school code
- Moderator for meetings

- Raise the value of education in communities; Board is representative of our city as a whole!\*\*
- Pull community in to board meeting--get opinions on table before people have bad opinions of board\*\*
- Look at what other school districts and boards have done well (best practices)\*\*

- Board development/professional development
- Staff support to board to gather and refine data--need resources!\*\*
- All throughout the board--not just 1 or 2!

**Table 14 (Rena Geraci, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Preparedness
- Govern rather than manage
- Appointed Board (Mayor, County Exec., Superintendent)
- Citizens evaluation of Board
- Training for Board

Question #1

- Must demonstrate integrity and accountability
  - Preparedness- knowing what the current issues are, and knowledge of how the Board dealt with past issues; Being familiar with issues and potential resolutions before the Board meeting
  - Visibility within the community and accessibility to the community and its issues/needs
  - Holistic view of the district (vs. only serving needs of their community)
  - Appropriate skills and expertise to serve on the school board (e.g., budgeting, executive duties, strategic thinking, prioritize issues and resources, public policy setting, respecting divergent viewpoints and being able to work well with others who may disagree, etc.)
  - Ability to think outside the box; Apply creative problem-solving to difficult and complex issues; -Not handle issues the same way it has been done in the past simply because “that’s how it’s always been done”
  - Govern not manage; Respecting Superintendent’s/Staff’s ability to carry out policy
- Must demonstrate a love of kids

Question #2

- Overall, participants indicated that the PA School Code granted the School Board strong operational oversight. However, they did not feel that this was appropriate, nor did they feel that it supported an effective and efficient structure.
- Rather, the group felt that the PPS district should operate as a large ship, with the Board operating as the rudder (i.e., setting the path), and the Superintendent and staff operating as the Captain and deckhands of the ship (i.e., actually operating the ship, keeping it well-maintained, managing day-to-day operations, etc.)
- The participants felt that the functions should be broken out in the following way:

School Board Role	Superintendent Role
Set the mission	Carry out the mission through School Board and Superintendent-dictated policies
Monitor performance	Develop policies and programs to improve performance
Making sure that the budget supports the overall mission and strategic plan	Develop and oversee budget
Hires, supports or fires Superintendent	Inform and educate Board and staff; Stay true to the mission; Help build consensus among Board



### Question 3

Most Important Elements/What They Liked:

- Future welfare of the community, commonwealth and nation depends upon the quality of education we provide in public schools.
- Maintain free and strong public schools in the US
- Offer equitable and excellent opportunities for all youth
- Active, not passive Board members
- Board members should work together in harmony, respect and cooperation; This is important but not always being done
- Respect of management and its programs
- Framework for supporting community and nation for future generations
- Abide by Code of Conduct
- Individuals have no legal authority outside of the Board....; This creates a conflict of interest
- Recommended Changes to the Code of Conduct
- “Personal decisions” should be changed to “personnel decisions”; Separation of personnel decisions (i.e., Board should not be making personnel decisions); Add a better definition of the School Board’s role in these matters
- School Board members should undergo more stringent background checks
- Should develop an annual School Board contract, which all Board members must sign and abide by
- Should conduct an annual Ethics Audit, which is taken as seriously and given as much weight as annual fiscal or programming audit
- Add “Keep up to date and implement ‘best practices’ based on current education and instruction research”

### Question 4

-Require that Board members attend School Board Skills Training courses and/or receive mentoring to help them do their job well

This could take the form of pre-training for new/potential Board members or ongoing education for existing Board members

Courses would focus on the skills needed to be a good School Board member, including:

- Budgeting
- Executive duties
- Strategic thinking
- Prioritize issues and resources,
- Public policy setting
- Respecting divergent viewpoints and being able to work well with others who may disagree
- Understanding the most current research being done on education and instruction so that they may bring “best practice” solutions to the “decision-making table”

This education would focus on local and state wide issues

Develop a qualifications standard to judge each candidate/School Board member effectively

Develop mentoring opportunities among Board members (e.g., 12-month Mentor Program)

- Change the current structure to an appointed School Board with members appointed by Mayor, County Executive, Superintendent, citizens, etc.
- Develop a Citizen Review Board that provides oversight; To ensure that the School Board is acting on behalf of the region, working cooperatively, prioritizing issues appropriately, etc.  
Perhaps this is established by A+ Schools
- School Board members should undergo more stringent background checks
- Should develop an annual School Board contract, which all Board members must sign and abide by
- Should conduct an annual Ethics Audit, which is taken as seriously and given as much weight as annual fiscal or programming audit

## Appendix-Categorized Statements

Everything listed here was taken directly from the notepads used by A+ Schools' facilitators. Every word or phrase written here was said once. Each "+" sign indicates how many additional times the word or phrase was used. This list was categorized for ease of use and analysis by A+ Schools.

### Given your experience and what you've heard this evening, what are the 3 most important qualifications and qualities of an outstanding School Board member in your opinion?

#### Vision

Overall vision++  
Know how to break apart the overall vision into action  
Global visionary (beyond their neighborhood but with balance)++  
"Big picture"  
Big picture view of healthy kid--mind, body  
Goal-oriented  
Focus on future  
Strategic visionary  
Visionary++++++  
Thinks beyond status quo  
Recognize gaps between vision and reality  
Outrageous ambition  
Strategy  
Educated, global perspective

#### Education/Academic Background

Proper training  
Professionalism  
Job description  
Professionalism  
Background in education++  
Experience with large organizations  
Intelligence/competence++  
Understand structure of school system  
Understanding/knowledge of educational performance  
Ability to understand their role+++  
Certification  
Academically literate  
Education sector background and/or commitment to understand the educational environment  
Commitment to board's professional development  
Someone who doesn't practice nepotism  
Don't limit by credentials and degrees, but quality  
Financially literate++++  
Implementation  
Ability to listen  
Enlightened about power structure and politics  
Fulfill job description (depends on appointed or elected)

Knowledge of education policy and continuing education+  
New, fresh perspectives  
Prior experience in education, HS, Child services, on board (no rookies!)+  
Applies creative problem-solving to difficult and complex issues  
Does not handle issues the same way it has been done in the past simply because "that's how it's always been done"  
Knows their role is not personal

#### Moral Character

Honest++  
Integrity+++++++++++  
Ethical+++  
Moral values  
Good conduct in your life  
Compassionate  
Fairness/equity  
Judge of character  
Humility  
Firm in belief systems  
Responsibility+++  
Character  
Sense of humor  
Firm convictions, yet open minded and flexible  
Genuine, sincere  
Passionate++

#### Team/Consensus Builder

Objective  
Open minded (to change)++  
Cooperative attitude/respectful  
Openness/listener  
Adapt/cater to different learning styles  
Commitment to fairness  
Teamwork  
Competent in consensus-building  
Cooperation  
Problem-solving  
Consensus builder  
Supportive-through resources, energy, time  
Experience in collaborative efforts

Mediation skills  
Willingness to collaborate  
Coalition builder  
Be willing to hear other points of view

### **Community Builder**

Listener and communicator with all: Board, staff, students, parents, community

### **Leadership Skills**

Role Model+  
Accountability+++++++  
Leadership--“Walk the Talk”  
Macro manage--supportive enough to others  
Respectful leadership  
Motivated  
Good decision-maker: Uses evidence  
Not parochial  
Articulate  
“Proactive” people skills  
Not just in it as a stepping stone (for future opportunities)  
Govern not manage  
Management experience

### **Commitment to Public Education**

Commitment+++++  
Advocate for mission++  
Passionate advocate for mission++  
Genuine concern for all the children++  
Empowering  
Focused on entire student community  
Focused on big issues++  
Understand issues  
Kids 1<sup>st</sup>!!  
Do your research on issues!  
Greater view system-wide vs. own district  
Well informed on models, national trends++  
Broader vision than just PPS ++  
Passion for children and education

### **Open to Change/Risks**

Aware  
Being invested in outcome  
Innovative  
Risk-taker  
Knows when to take risks

### **Communication**

Communication between parents and board members  
Communication skills

Good communicator: Valuing diversity of voices, opinions++  
Ability to communicate with community (especially cross generational, economic, neighborhoods)  
Continuous info sharing  
Openness to communication

### **Work Ethic/Experience**

Ability and time to get things done++  
Time management  
Identify and stay on mission  
Direction  
Competent++  
Prioritize  
Knows how to prioritize  
No micromanagement  
Commitment to job, focus on the job  
Willingness and ability to work well with others++  
Willingness to learn  
Multi-faceted professionalism  
Holds themselves to a higher standard  
Ability to think outside the box  
Prioritizes issues and resources  
Strategic thinker  
Hands off for staff decisions  
Respecting Superintendent's/Staff's ability to carry out policy  
Ability to delegate, enable

### **Understands/Cares about PPS**

Focus on district  
Passion for education++  
Concern for equity++  
Board should reflect its represented district  
Familiarity  
Knowledgeable and innovative in approach to addressing the needs of the schools+++  
Children of board members should attend PPS  
District knowledge of rivalries  
Knowledge of school cultures--“Haves vs. Have-Nots”  
Knowledge of how the Board dealt with past issues  
Familiar with challenges of district (but not jaded)  
Knows history of previous successes  
Being familiar with issues and potential resolutions before the Board meeting

### **Compassion and Understanding of Different Cultures/Age Groups/Needs**

Empathetic

Accessibility/available  
Cultural awareness  
Diversity++++  
“Representitiveness” of issues and whole picture  
Ability to admit mistakes  
Nurturing  
Cultural competence  
Understands different communities  
Community awareness  
Enlightened about neighborhood history  
Must demonstrate a love of kids  
Able to connect with people  
Visibility within the community and accessibility to the community and its issues/needs

**Political Savvy**

Attract/retain good leadership  
Ability to put aside political agendas  
Reformer  
Connecting with Stakeholders  
No personal agendas, “axes to grind”

Professionalism  
Resources to arm board members with facts  
Preparedness- knowing what the current issues are

**Financial/Management Success**

Embrace fiduciary responsibilities++  
Capacity to understand complexities of fiduciary and analytical details

**Other**

Don’t see how to improve  
Follow-through  
Evidence-based  
Creative  
Energy  
Non-school hour programming  
Need mix of strengths  
“Knowledge is Power” for Boards too!  
With Excellence  
Structural issue--parochial interests

**What should be the distinction between the policy functions of the Board and the operations functions of the Superintendent? (See example in packet)? Are there functions you would add or subtract from either the Board or Superintendent?**

**Superintendent's Role**

Superintendent should articulate mission  
 Superintendent presents the plan to execute that vision/mission  
 Budget should be proposed by Superintendent as part of the plan to meet the mission  
 Hire and fire staff  
 Implement the plans  
 Propose budget  
 Accountable for benchmarks  
 Superintendent: hiring and personnel management  
 Superintendent: Long-range planning (5 years); Projections and Funding considerations  
 Should develop and enact programs; provide data for board to assess; set goals for education needed to meet goals set  
 Do all research, due diligence  
 Superintendent sets the vision for the leadership of the principles  
 Operational  
 Education  
 Implements  
 Staff fiscal responsibility  
 Present case to close schools (spent \$ to research this)  
 The Superintendent shouldn't have the role of managing the classroom: there should be a board policy!  
 Implementing discipline policies and infrastructures; enforcing  
 \*On the ground, in the trenches, "tree view"  
 Managing staff in district  
 Carry out policy  
 Integrate diverse perspectives  
 Listen, be responsible  
 Make, implement decisions  
 Micro  
 Carry out the mission through School Board and Superintendent-dictated policies  
 Develop policies and programs to improve performance  
 Develop and oversee budget  
 Inform and educate Board and staff; Stay true to the mission; Help build consensus among Board

**Board's Role**

Board should share in the mission and how it's carried out  
 Board should brainstorm solutions → Hands off implementation of solutions

Then be accountable to the board  
 Board should set the criteria that he should meet and then evaluate his performance  
 Board selects the Superintendent; Board should oversee and evaluate progress in plan  
 Board should have ambition and make sure that all kids are educated to the same level  
 Board should be aware (city-wide) and informed of what's going on/present at schools → visit the schools not just your district  
 Investigate problems first hand  
 The way the money should be spent should be related to the need  
 School board should provide oversight on money matters in amounts that are substantial but not astronomical and closely evaluate Superintendent as he spends the money  
 Board should be better and more collectively informed  
 Board needs better information  
 Hire/Fire  
 Work with Superintendent on strategic plan  
 Evaluate implementation according to benchmarks  
 Approve and Review budget  
 Set achievement goals  
 Not hiring principles  
 Frequency of oversight: How many meetings per week?  
 Approving contracts: What amount is threshold?  
 Threshold ↑ \$300K  
 Personnel decisions Board: setting standards and requirements (qualifications)  
 Board: oversight and research; Diligence; Is there sufficient support staff to gather enough information? Cuts in staff; Board function  
 Establishing the tax rate  
 To job of board –hire superintendent  
 Board should assess programs  
 Approve major budget decisions  
 Establish objectives  
 Research and bring in experts and get input to create  
 Set communications goals and targets  
 Setting policy vs. implementing it and getting out of the way  
 Board needs to earn the trust of the community  
 Board should represent constituency, not be political  
 Carry out and set policy in the best interest of all kids, not special interest

Work toward consensus, not split votes  
 Amend policy to recommend consensus  
 Boards are a regulating body  
 School systems need to be updated to reflect today's society/economy  
 Boards should not micromanage  
 Boards support Superintendent  
 Boards should value the integrity and skills of Superintendent they hired  
 Boards need to move past their emotions of their interests  
 Board should have a dissenting decision (like the Supreme Court)  
 Dialogue and discussion between the public and school board  
 Decision making discussions need to be made clear to the community  
 Focus on policy  
 Adopt policy  
 Adopts broad budget; holds superintendent accountable for implementation  
 Point of positive disagreement  
 Board should be more active in our communities; perhaps can contribute and be helpful  
 How can they exhibit interest and passion without micromanagement?  
 What motivated you to run for school board? Not just to fill up time and advocate for kids--the answer can be quite telling!  
 What would you want to know in deciding who to vote for?  
 Listen to \$\$  
 Close schools via vote  
 Day-to-day logistics  
 Respect  
 Policy/Union form operation?  
 Constituents: Only heard at election time; Includes students (13%)  
 Clarify essential functions of Chief Executive and role of Board Committees (at detailed level)  
 Respect role and autonomy of CEO and fellow Board Members  
 Negotiation of Union Agreements  
 Creating discipline policies for district  
 \*Aerial 30,000ft "forest view"  
 Hiring Superintendent; supervising/evaluating  
 Boards don't understand policy and their roles: Default to "easy", i.e. Turf; Hard to be strategic  
 Regarding school closings: committed, supportive and accountable to each other and the decisions made

The group felt that the PPS district should operate as a large ship, with the Board operating as the rudder (i.e., setting the path), and the Superintendent and staff operating as the Captain and deckhands of the ship (i.e., actually operating the ship, keeping it well-maintained, managing day-to-day operations, etc.)  
 Make a general policy  
 Fiduciary responsibilities  
 Opinions-bring perspectives to discussions with superintendent (pre-survey community regarding discussions)  
 Give recommendations to the superintendent; keep him or her accountable  
 Key Goals and Strategies  
 Macro  
 Set the mission  
 Monitor performance  
 Making sure that the budget supports the overall mission and strategic plan  
 Hires, supports or fires superintendent

**Other:**

This is about history. The "Faison Foundation" clearly defined the roles of Board and Superintendent. She brought integrity, respect and calmness to the situation. It seems like Boards only listen to funders and not to constituents, only at election time. They vote to close schools and are engrossed in the day to day logistics. The Superintendent spends money on research to determine which schools to close and presents the case. Why can't the policy drive the operation (seems like it) and vice versa? Don't forget the constituents; they're the recipient of what happens between policy and operation. Kids come first and what about the teachers? Is the union speaking on their behalf? What's in the teacher/board contract anyway?  
 State education code complicates relationship of Superintendent and Board--not aligned with "Best Practices" model  
 The PA School Code granted the School Board strong operational oversight. However, they did not feel that this was appropriate, nor did they feel that it supported an effective and efficient structure

**The public has a right to expect leadership level conduct from its elected officials. Pittsburgh Public School Board Members currently adopt the Code of Conduct (in packet). What are the most important elements in this Code of Conduct?**

### **Mission and Focus**

Future welfare of the community, commonwealth and nation depends upon the quality of education we provide in public schools.  
Maintain free and strong public schools in the US  
Offer equitable and excellent opportunities for all youth  
Child focus--be informed, talk about child-related issues  
Key factor--what's best for kids?  
Focus on student achievement\*\*  
Kids 1<sup>st</sup>  
Opportunities for youth  
Focus on policy overall: "you'd see less fighting over specifics."  
Keep the future welfare in mind – public schools  
Translating vision into action and results  
Highlighting stewardship – not for individuals meeting needs of kids, community  
Biggest priority is educational equity for every child  
Have entrusted us...advocacy and stewardship for education  
Primary responsibility of board to adopt policies—by which school administrators  
Focus on mission  
Just do it  
Kids 1<sup>st</sup> issue  
Framework for supporting community and nation for future generations

### **Accountability for Code**

Abide by Code of Conduct  
Should develop an annual School Board contract, which all Board members must sign and abide by  
Should conduct an annual Ethics Audit, which is taken as seriously and given as much weight as annual fiscal or programming audit  
How to be accountable for these?  
By voting  
By education others about the voting process  
Be present in schools, community  
Attend/speak at public hearings  
Be responsible and accountable citizens

Student on board  
Include accountability (A+ Board Report Card)  
Way to evaluate Board performance  
Should Board have to sign the code?  
Make the code "I will."  
Audit: Self-audit or "at election day"; A parliamentarian that manages and reviews; Members to be "reviewed" or impeached or censured  
Consequences when the code of conduct is compromised  
How does it come alive?  
How operational is it?  
There is no "how" to enforce  
Bring the code of conduct to the community so board positions are taken seriously  
Should be used to hold school board members accountable  
Should include the ability to recall board members  
"No patronage" should be enforced  
Needs "teeth"  
All sign and self-evaluate at set intervals  
Take out "should"--"Do" or "Will"! \*\*  
Hold them accountable  
Process to evaluate adherence to code?  
Establish accountability  
Stronger language  
Fails to have traction  
Voter Education  
Accountability  
Public evaluation system?  
Make it less vague, add specifics  
Too redundant, eliminate "fluff"  
Should they have to sign the code?  
Clear, specific language  
Ultimate accountability: Measures based on district success

### **Harmony**

Board members should work together in harmony, respect and cooperation; This is important but not always being done  
Listen to all views--come to the table as equals and treat each other with respect  
Open-minded, listening, civility  
Cooperation

Harmony, respect despite difference of opinion  
How to achieve harmony  
Set ground rules and group norms  
An outside witness  
Bring in experts in group process  
Observe and give feedback  
All feelings are valid  
The requirements are overwhelming;  
have some staff to reduce pressure-a resource staff for the Board

Board- Harmony  
Set example for kids...in spirit of harmony  
Spirit of harmony and respects (anger alienates)  
Agree to disagree  
Be kind, respectful  
Respect of management and its programs  
Respect the Superintendent; They didn't respect Thompson; If the Board doesn't respect the Superintendent, how can the parents and teachers?

### **Work as a whole/City-wide perspective**

Think as an organization, not a person  
Board behavior--city-wide values issue, bad behavior, neighborhood-centric focus (stratification)  
Raise the value of education in communities;  
Board is representative of our city as a whole!\*\*\*  
"Personal decisions should be based upon...decision of the board"  
From EPLC #13: Entire district  
Unified voice (force) once a decision is made despite differences  
Decisions made by board are done for the good of the whole district/students and not be based on parochial agendas/needs  
Work as a team  
Using personal agendas  
Solidarity – stand by decisions (right sizing plan)

### **Professional Development for Board Members**

Add "Keep up to date and implement 'best practices' based on current education and instruction research"  
Look at what other school districts and boards have done well (best practices)\*\*  
Board development/professional development

Board training and orientation  
Professional manner \*\*  
From EPLC: #15 Professional Development  
Professional trainings and development together/group training  
Strategic plan as a board  
Required to attend training-professional development  
Understand purpose of board meetings--not a catch-all or free-form debate  
More clearly defined roles/responsibilities  
An effort to define policy

### **Community Engagement**

Being transparent in communications  
Pull community in to board meeting--get opinions on table before people have bad opinions of board\*\*\*  
Position of public service  
Engaging/connecting to community  
Develop healthy community relationships, partnerships, commitment to community, not just schools  
Community input to Board  
School board should provide good information to community  
Host a forum before elections  
Politics should be kept out of school board  
Issue communications: Discipline, academic progress, HS graduation/drop-outs

### **Information gathering/Staffing/Resources**

Staff support to board to gather and refine data--need resources!\*\*\*  
Listen & Prepare  
Some of what we are seeing is just overextension and exhaustion  
Paying position?  
Schedule fewer meetings so they have more time; too much work for school staff to prepare  
Do they have to meet that many times?  
Active, not passive Board members  
Attendance \*\*\*

### **Qualities/Qualifications**

Ethics/honesty  
From EPLC #17: Ethical and honest  
Insist on ethics and honesty  
Utilize judgment  
School Board members should undergo more stringent background checks



**Others**

Individuals have no legal authority outside of the Board....; This creates a conflict of interest

“Personal decisions” should be changed to “personnel decisions”; Separation of personnel decisions (i.e., Board should not be making personnel decisions); Add a better definition of the School Board’s role in these matters

Revision of 1940s school code

Moderator for meetings

“Striving toward ideal conditions for effective...representative democracy”

“We should recognize that the primary responsibility...to be administered”

Equitable and high quality

Opportunities for youth

PA Constitution

Board members cannot hold themselves out as a legal (and moral) authority outside board meetings

Bring Civics back into the classroom

Bring youth into leadership positions

Adopt our own code specific to community

Communication

Engage entire community

Diversity

Enhance board image to attract more candidates

Using personal agenda

## **What other specific ideas do you have about changing the role and conduct of the School Board to be more effective?**

### **Community Engagement and Voter Education**

US!!!

Institutions (like A+)

No more “bottom up” communication

Publicize more (8% vote typically) - Not perceived as important races

Would it result in better schools to have more info/ civic engagement on candidates?

Campaigns have small \$\$ financing so the candidates can't really get word out

Media station controlled by school district/City— PCTV\*

Get kids involved in conducting the questioning and forums with candidates\*

Stronger emphasis on “advocacy”: Harrisburg & DC & Community engagement

Regular and mobile public engagement (town meetings)

Educate public to know how important school boards are

Public has to attend meetings (all of them?), allow some private meetings

Continuing voter education--break inertia; Mass Media focus

Broader forum for debate of issues

### **Structural Changes**

What does Board really offer process of operating school system?

Appoint school board

Discussion--is the city leadership competent to make such appointments?

Have at-large board members

At-large positions-two?

Appointed school boards? Consider Pros-Cons

De-politicized (Can run as a Democrat or Republican)

Mixture-appointed and elected, at large, etc

Appoint by a panel, not just the mayor

Mix of appointed and elected

Add business people, ethnic diversity

Structural changes to board election/appointment

Change the current structure to an appointed School

Board with members appointed by Mayor, County

Executive, Superintendent, citizens, etc.

Ideas for Change:

Create job description

Contract between PFT & PPS

Specify legal action on how to remove a board member

Create Board of Allegiance Sheet

More inclusive, democratic system

Get away from efficiency model

Avoid state takeover

#5 is optimistic and #6 is about being specific and tailored to the needs of the different districts.

“Efficiency” is a business model. Schools are not a business. We need to add value.

### **Professional Development**

Rigorous preparation

Professional development for board members

Coach for new board members, mentoring

Training in group dynamics

Team-building

Mandatory county-wide School Board training, mix with other boards

Have technology for board: Members to communicate with each other; Board website

Require that Board members attend School Board Skills

Training courses and/or receive mentoring to help them do their job well. This could take the form of pre-

training for new/potential Board members or ongoing education for existing Board members.

Courses would focus on the skills needed to be a good School Board member, including: Budgeting, Executive duties, Strategic thinking, Prioritize issues and resources, Public policy setting; Respecting divergent viewpoints and being able to work well with others who may disagree

Understanding the most current research being done on education and instruction so that they may bring

“best practice” solutions to the “decision-making table”; focus on local and state wide issues

Develop a qualifications standard to judge each candidate/School Board member effectively

Develop mentoring opportunities among Board members (e.g., 12-month Mentor Program). Perhaps this is established by A+ Schools

School Board members should undergo more stringent background checks

### **Accountability**

Should develop an annual School Board contract, which all Board members must sign and abide by

Should conduct an annual Ethics Audit, which is taken as seriously and given as much weight as annual fiscal or programming audit

Develop a Citizen Review Board that provides oversight; To ensure that the School Board is acting on behalf of the region, working cooperatively, prioritizing issues appropriately, etc

Evaluations by parents

A+ Report Card on Board Performance

Performance and conduct we expect from the kids we should also expect from the school board,

Superintendent, teachers and parents

Both board and Superintendent should be accountable to parents

Self evaluation

Peer evaluation

Revisit the code

### **Communication & Other**

Would engaging parents/students with mentors and such and enhancements at schools make more different?

Create reputation for district

Candidates?

Become more sympathetic to the varying issues facing all students

School board should be more present in schools and pay attention to parent concerns

Provide a sincere hearing to parent and community concerns

More Afterschool programs

Truly respect each other

Agree to disagree and love; speak with one voice when they come out of the room

Research; be knowledgeable about policies nation/worldwide that work; Specifically regarding respect and accountability

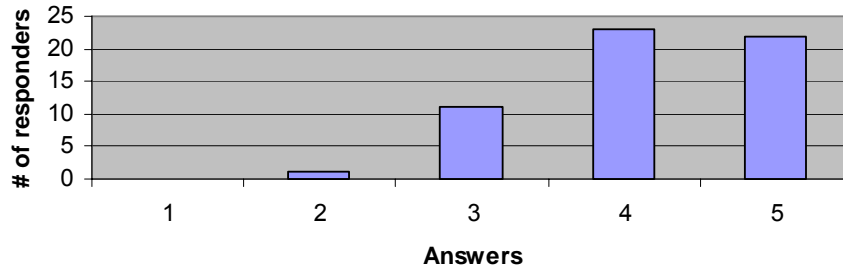
Regular and honest review of policies

Commitment to change what is not working

**A+ Schools  
Community Forum on School Board Leadership  
February 28, 2007**

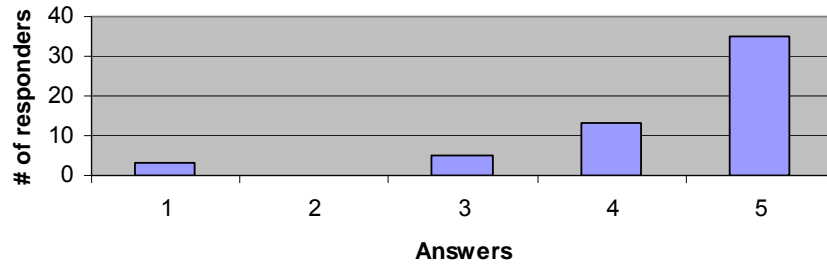
**Event Evaluations**

**Question #1: How satisfied are you with the information presented tonight?**



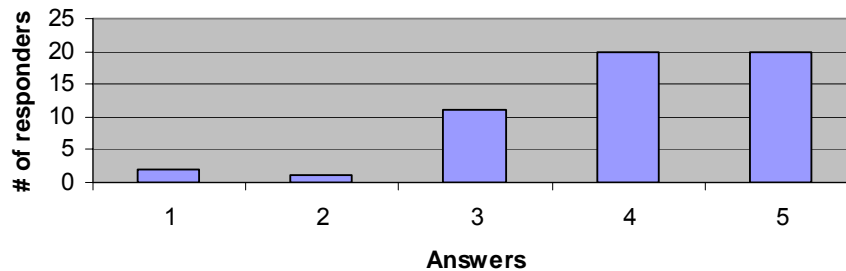
\*3 out of 60 responders did not answer this question

**Question #2: How valuable did you find Gregg Behr's presentation?**



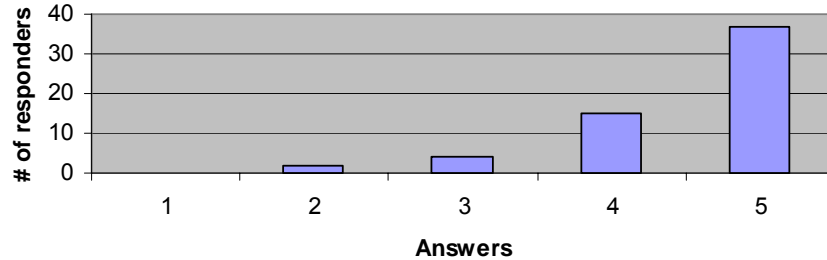
\*4 out of 60 responders did not answer this question

**Question #3: How valuable did you find County Chief Executive Dan Onorato's remarks?**



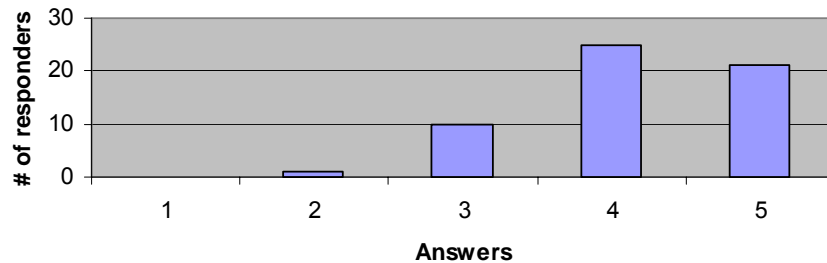
\*6 out of 60 responders did not answer this question

**Question #4: How valuable did you find the facilitated break out groups?**



\*2 out of 60 responders did not answer this question

**Question #5: How valuable did you find the information in your packet?**



\*3 out of 60 responders did not answer this question

**Question #6: What did you find to be the most valuable about tonight's program?**

- “Valuable insights of other community members”
- “The breakout discussions--very well done!”
- “The persons at my table were very informed on policy, procedures and vision of operations toward a goal.”
- “Presentations by the Facilitators of the break-out groups and presentation by Gregg Behr and Dan Onorato”
- “I enjoyed hearing the perspective of others. I was very pleased to see so many people passionate at our children's education.”

**Question #7: What would you change?**

- “More interaction with the rest of the room, other small groups”
- “Having some people with backgrounds in education to keynote. How about teachers, not just power and money.”
- “Adding to name tags who you are, i.e. parent, school rep, etc.”
- “Nothing--keep it up! We had an outstanding facilitator (Heather) Recommend--a summary sent to Mark R. & to the board esp. new ideas--peer evaluation, fewer meetings”
- “Events are sort of talking "about" PPS-it would be nice if somehow this effort (A+ Schools) was not separate from PPS but involved in some collaboration and sharing.”

**Question #8: How did you find out about this meeting?**

- “Email, A+ Schools website, WDUQ coverage, Post Gazette article”
- “The Vice-President of the Sheraden Community Council”
- “Peer to Peer Network Meeting”
- “Kya Humphries of Watson Blvd. in Observatory Hill reminded me over and over and over again. She is School Board President of Allegheny Traditional Academy.”
- “My sister-employee of the county”