

10 COMMANDMENTS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS AND BOARDS

Mark Miller Ed.D., Superintendent
Brian Holst, President, Board of Education

Juneau School District



THE SUPERINTENDENT' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#1 - Treat all board members equally.

Regardless of personal feelings, all board members should receive the same information and be afforded the respect their positions deserve. Work at making board members feel important.



THE SUPERINTENDENT' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

2 - Provide all board members with enough information to act on your recommendation.

This should be done in a timely fashion and must preclude any surprises for the board.

Provide the information in an easy to understand format.

THE SUPERINTENDENT' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#3 - Carry out with enthusiasm any action or policy of the board, even if the action or policy is in conflict with your recommendation.

After you have attempted to persuade the board about the wisdom of your position and have not been successful, do not attempt to obstruct the board' s decision. (*Don't beat a dead horse!*)

THE SUPERINTENDENT' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#4 - Avoid expecting the board to act as a rubber stamp for all your recommendations.

You should try to persuade, but not by manipulating information or obfuscating facts.



THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#5 - Inform the board of all the highlights, good or bad, of the school system on a regular basis and, in particular, between board meetings.

Board members should know the issues before being asked by the public.



THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#6 - Provide the board with options on any recommendation that has the potential for controversy, with the pros and cons of any action, and the rationale for your choice.

Do not paint yourself or the board into a corner with a “this is the only way to go” recommendation.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#7 - Maintain a sense of humor regardless of the stress of events.

The climate of decision-making needs to be relaxed. Your disposition can set the tone.



THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#8 - Make all recommendations and decisions based on the answer to one question:

“What is best for children?”

Be visible both in the schools and the classrooms as well as in the community.



Mark rode the bus with the kids on the first day of school

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#9 - Let people know who the superintendent is and what he or she believes is right for public education.

Define your core values.



THE SUPERINTENDENT'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

10 - Continue to grow professionally.

Read, attend conferences
and training sessions with
your board.

Mentor your board.



THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#1- *Communications goes two ways;*

- the superintendent provides written communications to the board and
- board members reciprocate, keeping the superintendent informed of citizen' s concerns. (Eyes and Ears!)

In Juneau I ask that Board members cc me if they are asking questions of staff.

Brian suggested I shorten my Superintendent's report by not reading it in it's entirety. I gladly complied.

THE BOARD'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#2 - Avoid Surprises

Don't surprise one another with add-ons to the agenda. Ask questions ahead of time so that staff can be prepared.

In Juneau I meet with every board member to go over the meeting agenda and answer questions.



THE BOARD'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#3 - Don't Micromanage

“When one becomes involved in matters below ones level of responsibility”

Examples:

- **Staff appointments / hiring**
- **Evaluations of staff**
- **Promotions/Dismissals**
- Field trips, School fund-raising
- Discipline
- Staff travel
- Parent complaints



In Juneau at least 3 board members must make a request before staff time is devoted to that task.

THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#4 - Function when possible as a committee of the whole

Sub-committees of the board tend to become entities with a life of their own, can be a distraction and lead to micro-management.

Ad hoc committees of the board can still be appointed as need.

Juneau has facility and program evaluation as the only standing committees that board members sit on.

THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#5 - Voice your opinion AND support the decision of the board when it is made.

Don' t assume that when another board member or the superintendent disagrees with you that he/she doesn't like you.

Always be able to defend your position.

Assume positive intent.

You have a role as an advocate AND a team player.

THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#6 - Obsess about the ends/Maintain Focus

- *Always* focus on Vision, Mission & Goals
- Allow the administration to be accountable for outcomes—not process.
- *Ask the right questions.*
- Establish a strategic plan with measurable goals
- Review vision and goals at least annually
- Construct board agendas that reflect progress in meeting goals

THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#7 Come to meetings prepared

- Read the agenda ahead of time
- Ask clarifying questions of staff before the meeting
- Read back-up material/packet
- Talk to constituents who have a stake in the issue
Know how to get items on the agenda
- Focus on Vision, Mission & Goals

In Juneau three board members must request an item be placed on an agenda.

THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#8 - Deal with conflict productively

- Conflict in any relationship is inevitable, and not all conflict is bad.
- Conflict can be constructive when it helps the Leadership Team clarify important issues and find solutions to problems.
- Conflict is destructive when it is not handled well.
- Admit mistakes and move on.



THE BOARD' S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#9 - Regularly check how your team is doing

The evaluation should be an *annual evaluation of the board and superintendent* and include a candid discussion on how the board and superintendent function as partners.

In Juneau we do an interim evaluation in January and final in June;
Goal setting is done in August.

In Juneau we do quarterly retreats.

THE BOARD'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

#10 - Always ask, “Is it best for kids?”

- What do we want our students to learn?
- How do we know whether or students are learning the prescribed curriculum?
- How do we hold people accountable?
- Do we have yearly goals and standards?
- How do we know if we are accomplishing / have accomplished our goals?

VICTORY!

- We must develop good relationships with each other.
- A good working relationship is a victory—not a gift!



SCENARIO

A parent tells a board member that you (superintendent) have mishandled a discipline situation involving her son and that you have denied her request to be placed on the Board's agenda to discuss the issue with the board (which is true) even though she has followed the district's chain of command. The Board member is concerned — what do you do?

Providing Board Members With Information

Scenario: You have a board member who goes immediately to the community after each board meeting and discusses everything with his “constituency,” shares his board packet material and lets them know which issues he opposed at the meeting and why—including criticizing the actions of other board members and the superintendent.

What do you (superintendent) do?

THANK YOU

- To professional colleagues in Mississippi for sharing portions of this presentation.
- Information used in this presentation was taken in part from “*Ten Things principals Can Do.*” Luann Fulbright & Richard H. Goodman. ERS Spectrum. Fall 1999.