

Board Chairs: Leadership and Learning – FGM 2014 Challenges

- 1. A board member has a 12-year-old nephew in another province who commits suicide in response to persistent bullying. The incident precipitates countrywide attention. The board member insists the district should require every student in grades K-8 to participate in an anti-bullying curriculum for 30 minutes a week. He contends student safety is the one priority that trumps academic achievement. At a public meeting, he says the board would be “ethically remiss” for not tackling this problem — even if it means cutting out time from academics. How would you guide this discussion?*
- 2. The board has had discussions about social media. It has a policy in place that states the board chair is the “media” spokesman. There is one trustee who continues to tweet out his personal views on all decisions and activities of the board and superintendent. What can a board chair do?*
- 3. Previous boards defaulted to the superintendent on most things, including talking to the press, developing the strategic priorities and budgeting assumptions. The school division is operating at a high level. The current board has pressure from their communities to engage, and wishes to meet their responsibilities under the new Education Act. How does the board take back some of their roles without offending the superintendent, who acts like there’s a lack of trust in his/her work?*
- 4. First teams and teamwork are mentioned at every conference I go to but what if the board has trustee(s) who think it’s a badge of honour to be oppositional to the board’s work or will only vote in a way that is in the best interest of themselves and their ward?*
- 5. Our board says they want to engage our communities but it has trustees who work and trustees who are retired and travel for weeks at a time. They tend to only attend official board meetings, the minimum number of meetings, or events where the press is attending. How do others attract trustees with a range of backgrounds, get everyone involved, meet their fiduciary responsibilities yet balance trustees’ other lives?*

6. *Holly Terror is always criticizing one K-5 school, gossiping about teachers and other parents. She has argued with parents on the school grounds and directly approached children and told them off. Holly disagrees with the education of her child, insisting her ADHD coded son have his own full time aide. The local trustee has walked her through the school division's policy for complaints but she says the school and superintendent refuse to listen. She makes a formal complaint to the board and copies her letter to the press. The press picks it up because she also loudly advocates for percentage graded report cards versus current researched assessment practices. What would you do?*

7. *An administrator was moved from a school principal position to a less critical administrative role in central office after several years of poor performance on the job. A new superintendent, as part of an administrative reorganization, transfers him to a department led by an individual with high expectations of all staff. The transferred person, seeing what is likely to happen, retires but then runs for the school board. Once elected, he makes it clear he intends to press for nonrenewal of the superintendent's contract and the resignation of the supervising administrator. The superintendent assumes the other board members are unaware of the circumstances surrounding their colleague's underperformance. With his/her contract up for renewal, what should the superintendent do?*

8. *Under board policy, the vice-chair of the board is responsible for reviewing and signing off trustee expense forms, after staff declared it was awkward to question expenses before issuing cheques. The vice chair now understands the dilemma because one trustee is not putting in original bills, is late with his remittances and pushes the limit on every expense. "Nice" talks with the trustee have not resulted in changed behaviour and now the trustee has taken his anger with the vice chair into the board room with comments and derogatory behaviour. What could be the next steps for the vice chair?*

9. *We are a smaller school division who just had a senior executive member take a job elsewhere. Our superintendent has been upfront with the board and told us he is interested other imminent Alberta positions. We seem to be a training ground for senior people and any move in Alberta has a domino effect. We haven't lost our superintendent yet but should/can we prepare for the loss of key people?*

(All topics, while current, are fictional in Alberta or have been modified from *The Ethical Educator* (<http://www.aasconnect.com/The-Ethical-Educator>) or the New Zealand Ministry of Education Educational Leaders (<http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz>)