



Essential School Leadership with Keith Nix

Lesson 7: Working with Your School Board (Part 1)

Outline:

Agree on what a board is and how it works.

- Look into Independent School Management's (ISM) work on boards and school boards.
- Four responsibilities of the board:
 - Guarding the mission of the school.
 - Securing the financial future of the school.
 - Hiring and managing the CEO, head of school.
 - Replacing itself, the board is in charge of the future board.
- The biggest mistake the board can make is not replacing itself well.

Who is on the board?

- It is helpful for board members to think about their roles.
 - They should play the role of an ambassador for the school.
 - They are a consultant of sorts.
 - They should be wise, humble, and willing to serve for the school's best interest.
 - They should be the first to give their time, talent, and treasure.

Three modes of board activity

- **Generative modes:** These are the people who are thinking about growth.
- **Strategic modes:** Strategic people say, "How do we get there?"
- **Fiduciary modes:** This is a protective conservative (avoiding risks).
- Have a board of people who have a mixture of these strengths.

Follow a structure or a plan.

- Get a hold of ISM, and follow/listen to proven best practices.
- Committee structure
 - Have very few standing committees: committee on directors, committee on head support and evaluation, finance committee.
 - Beyond these committees, any committee can be an ad hoc committee.

Have someone on the board who is committed to executing and holding to the things that are agreed upon to maintain consistency.

- Head of school and board have to develop a good relationship with each other.
- Be clear on division of labor.



- The board's lanes are: Bylaws, Setting tuition, Long-term financial planning, Replacing itself, Constitutional documents, Mission Statement, School colors, Statement of faith
- The head's world is: Personnel, Curriculum, Programming, Operational Programming
- There is a middle category of shared items (finances, policies).
- It is imperative that the head of school only speaks positively about the board publicly.
- No board member can be giving anything but public support for the head.

Have a head support and evaluation committee

- This is a smaller subset of the board that helps annually to take the strategic plan and make an annual agenda for the year.
- The annual agenda is 3-4 strategic things and 5-10 operational things for the years.
- The head is held accountable and supported for these things at regular intervals.
- Frequently there will be an outside person who is head of school at a different school.
- The board looks at the strategic plan and chooses 2-3 things to accomplish for the year, and how they will be accountable for that.
- This keeps everybody busy and focused. At board meetings you talk about strategic things rather than operational.

Have an active committee on directors (committee on trustees).

- This is a committee that is in charge of developing a pipeline of future board members.
- The most important job of the board is the next board member they hire.
- This committee also trains a new board member.
- They also discipline a board member when a board member when they behave badly.
- As a head of school you need to push things in front of them that they can be equipped with about classical Christian school or functioning as a board.

Help work with the board to have a good strong financial model.

- Set the right tuition level.
- Have a tuition model that is responsible in terms of operating your school.
- Have a sophisticated development plan (fundraising).
- Have an appropriate amount of debt.
- Doing a good job of planning and forecasting (5-7 year plan for tuition is recommended).



What does the head of school at a small school do when you have competent professional and mature Christians who do not think they need to study what it means to serve on a school board?

- We go in thinking that school needs what a non-profit needs.
- A lot of the experiences do translate, but there are differences that need to be recognized.
- No matter the board leadership past experiences, we need to be humble and learn because there are some proven best practices particularly to schools that would not be intuitive.
- Non-profits frequently want the board to be in operations. Board members in a young school will be asked to do some things by the head that are operational things.
- When the board is both governing and working, work hard at asking if what is being discussed is governing or operational.

What have you been able to do that has motivated competent professionals to learn to be a master of the school business?

- Board members at Veritas sign a “dos and don’ts” of being a board member.
- Help the board agree bring in a consultant every 2-3 years.
- Get good resources in front of the board for them to read or discuss.
- Attend an event.