



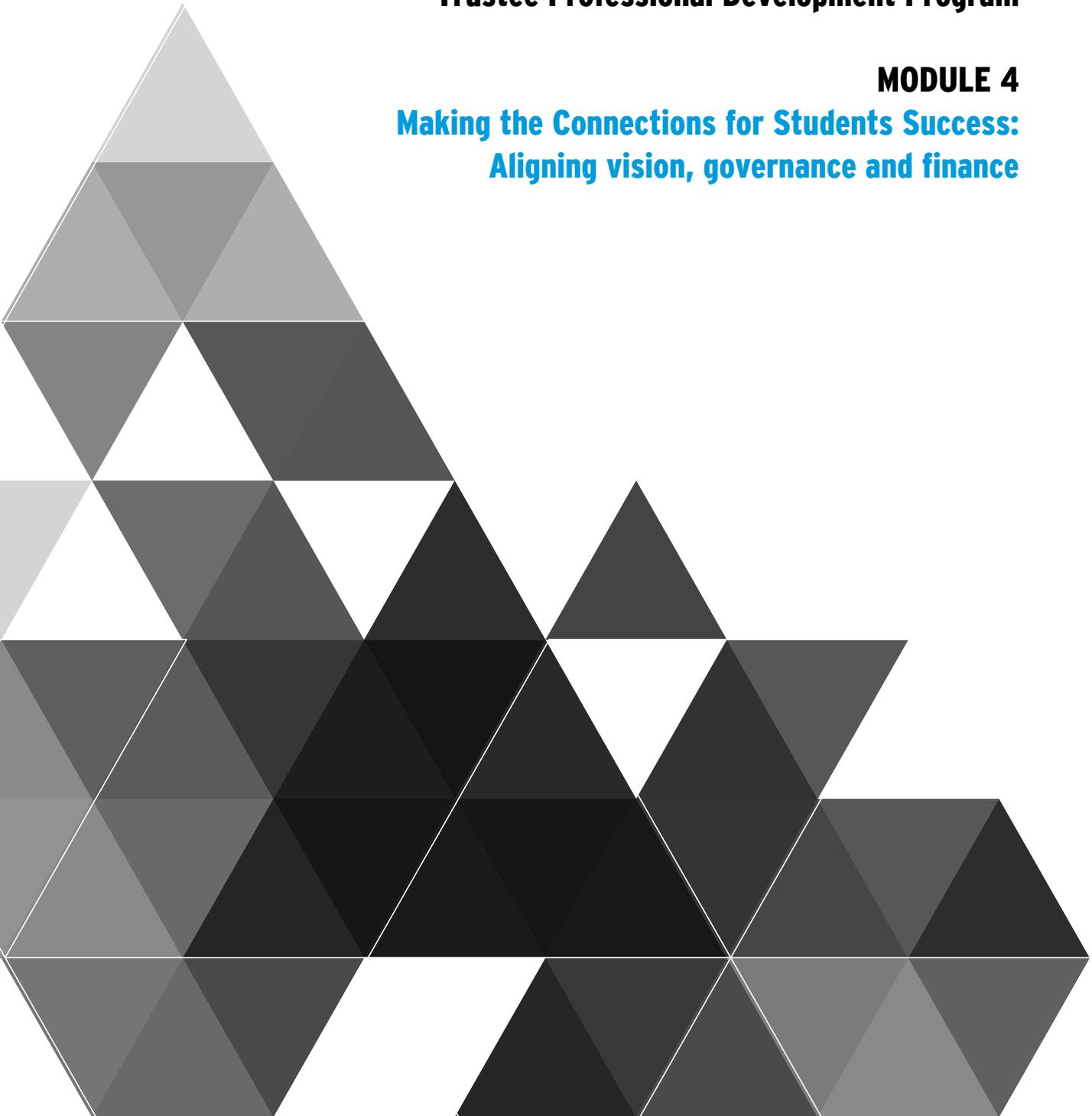
British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Trustee Professional Development Program

MODULE 4

**Making the Connections for Students Success:
Aligning vision, governance and finance**



CONTENTS

MODULE 4

Making the Connections for Students Success: Aligning Vision, Governance, and Finance

WHAT MAKES SERVING ON A BOARD OF EDUCATION UNIQUE?	p. 3
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF “ALIGNMENT”	3
VISIONING CREATES A SENSE OF PURPOSE	3
ALIGNMENT OF GOVERNANCE: STRATEGIC, TACTICAL OR OPERATIONAL	4
FINANCE: THE WINNING DYNAMIC	6
SUMMARY	6
THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION BY DAVID KING	7
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	9

IN THIS MODULE, TRUSTEES WILL EXPLORE:

- The importance of public education
- What makes serving on a board of education unique
- Visioning as a purpose
- Alignment of governance: strategic, tactical or operational
- Finance: the winning dynamic to finance your vision

WHAT MAKES SERVING ON A BOARD OF EDUCATION UNIQUE?

Every board of education is unique. You are a board comprised of a variety of knowledge and expertise. You have an awareness of your community and represent the needs and values of everyone (not just those you serve).

The uniqueness of your district will interplay with student needs, initiatives from the Ministry of Education, community expectations, financial accountability and the importance of building successful partnerships that support student learning and success. You will experience competing demands, being constantly on call, responding to political reforms and mandates, the need to understand the business paradigm and the satisfaction that comes with the knowledge you have made a real difference for children.

Each board of education is responsible to its students and is held accountable to the community it represents, therefore it is important that the unique needs of your community, and research proven pedagogy are woven into strategic planning decisions to support student success. You have a responsibility to be forward thinking, to keep informed as to what trends are having the most impact in education, and to be able to communicate effectively to stakeholders.

Boards must act from missions, visions, and values that align to community expectations. Indeed, you will be charged with the responsibility of establishing goals and priorities to actualize mission, visions, and values and then you must use credible data to monitor the success of your goals and priorities. Throughout this entire process, you will need to balance individual preferences with what is best for all and you will have the onerous task of ensuring your big picture intentions reflect the wants and needs of the district as a whole.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF “ALIGNMENT”

As a board of education, you are responsible for and concerned with results. Results are best achieved when boards of education have a clear understanding of their purpose, and work to aligning vision, governance and finance to make the connections for student success.

The challenge and importance of alignment relates directly to effective governance. You must know what you are about (as a district with unique needs), what direction you intend to advance toward (to best support student learning), and what resources (money, materials, etc.) you have available. Simply put, you must have clarity of intention as you create the necessary policies that will allow your district team to develop practices and processes to foster student learning.

Alignment will provide the ability to govern in a way that creates opportunities for the superintendent, district staff and school personnel to have impact on student learning, within a positive work culture, and create long-term success for students.

VISIONING CREATES A SENSE OF PURPOSE

All districts should have a vision, a sense of purpose, and an identified mission statement and values. A vision statement that is built on community input, and is well understood by all education partners, parents and community, has the ability to provide a sense of purpose that supports strategic planning and a collaborative decision-making cycle.

A district vision is the deepest expression of what you want to create for students within your district. It is a description of the preferred future, not a prediction of what will be. In this sense, your district vision

should describe what you want for students. Instead of a forecast of what you think might be likely in the future, your district vision is a description of the future you dream about.

Effective organizations lead with a clear, well understood vision. Given that you represent your community, it is important that you create opportunities for the community to express their values and beliefs in regard to the district vision. More and more parents are expressing a dissatisfaction with public education, it is important for you to contact the parents and businesses in your community and provide an opportunity for them to share their thinking about how we might change to meet the needs of students.

The BC Education Plan describes education in terms of subjects and competencies. Does your present vision align with the changing context of education in British Columbia? If you have not revisited your vision, mission and values in several years, it would be beneficial for your board to undertake the work of asking your community and education partners the following questions:

- What do you think is important for children to learn to prepare them for a successful future?
- What kind of education do you want for children?

The values and beliefs shared by your constituents and education partners need to be a very real part of the vision you are working to create for your district. If you haven't undertaken the work to collect and collate the values and beliefs of your constituents, you run the risk of believing you are moving in the right direction when in fact your vision may be out of step with your community. If you have not purposefully connected with your community about their vision for education and you continue with just keeping the status quo, you may be driving parents to make an alternate choice as to what form of education they will turn to in order to educate their child. So the important question to consider is, "How do we reconnect our community and education partners to a relevant and pedagogically sound sense of purpose?"

Clarity of intention links the destination (vision) with current reality. Having clear intentions allows boards of education to engage in strategic thinking. Strategic thinking applies to the whole district, and enables opportunities for alignment when boards of education begin to answer the question "How will we reach our vision, given current fiscal realities, government guidelines and the regulatory environment, etc.?" Strategic thinking is narrower than vision, but broad enough to guide district-wide goals, organization structure, and financial allocations.

ALIGNMENT OF GOVERNANCE: STRATEGIC, TACTICAL OR OPERATIONAL

As a board of education, you serve a strategic role. In this role, you provide the "big picture thinking", the broad view that looks into the future and spans the entire organization and represents the entire community. "A school board at its best is a visionary, strategic change agent." (*The School Board Fieldbook*, Van Clay and Soldewell, 2008)

It is important to remember that although you set direction as a board of education, you have the support of the rest of the district to achieve the desired outcomes. The board's role is to be strategic, but the tactical and operational roles are provided as support to the strategic planning of the board.

In their book, *The School Board Fieldbook*, Van Clay and Soldwedel describe a board of education as a strategic change agent that doesn't directly make change happen, but rather sets a strategic charge or target for change that others have to reach. The board considers what the school district needs to make changes in an aligned and efficient way over many years. It keeps administrators focused on those

changes and helps ensure the availability of the resources required to make them, but doesn't manage the more medium-term tactics that will bring them about. Finally, as a strategic change agent, the board takes a positive stance toward change, viewing it as something that makes an organization better.

He goes on to describe school administration as the leaders that assume a tactical role, which isn't quite as broad as the big picture; it is somewhat detailed and narrower perspective that typically looks one to three years into the future and understands the organization in terms of schools, grades, and classes. As a tactical change agent, administration focuses on constituent groups; parents, students, and educational staff. Tactical change agents create and deploy plans to meet the strategic charge of the board.

In addition, Van Clay and Soldwedel state although school administrators want to positively affect children's learning, they can only indirectly do so through developing plans that teachers carry out. Teachers assume an operational role, which is small picture, ground-level view that is highly detailed and focuses on daily, weekly, and occasional monthly instructional units. As operational change agents, teachers take the tactical plan and refine it so it will actually change the way children receive instruction in their classrooms.

If everything is in alignment, teachers' operational adjustments, filtered through the administration's tactical plan, will meet the board's strategic targets.

Effective governance means you as a board of education, overlook the entire organization and focus on representing the community's needs and interests. Your job is to set clear targets for improvement and provide overall structure at a district-goal level. As a board of education, you are just one part of the strategic, tactical, and operational team. These three roles are interdependent, and although you don't engage in the tactical and operational components, your job is to be knowledgeable about the procedures and processes in your district that support your strategic plan.

Most board members come to the board with tactical expertise and experiences but must learn their new role is strategic. This can create problems in working as a team and aligning vision, governance and financial decisions. If you as a board of education move into the tactical or operational role, you become responsible for those that decisions, even though you do not have expertise in those areas. It is important the governing body of an organization is able to provide independent authentic feedback from a strategic perspective.

The difficulty inherent in being a board of education comes in understanding how you provide the effective strategic governance that lets the tactical and operational teams do their work, but also how you to stay connected with all that you are responsible for as a board of education.

As a board of education, you are the district strategists. Your strength comes with your ability to ask competent questions which when answered will help you set strategic plans and organizational directions. You are not beholden to staff relationships and institutional habits so you can focus on asking questions that focus clearly on how the school organization serves students.

Effective governance implies you ask competent questions and are able to knowledgeably interpret answers and responses, which in turn will allow you to align district vision, community interests and financial decision-making into a strategic plan. You then oversee the tactical and operationalization of the strategic plan by reviewing data, asking relevant questions and checking for progress toward the goals as outlined in your strategic priorities. The board's clarity of intention and strategic feedback provide the opportunity for consistent alignment of vision, governance and financial decision-making that will support district initiatives and student success.

FINANCE: THE WINNING DYNAMIC

How will you finance the strategic priorities in the district strategic plan? A difficult question? Finance and accountability go hand-in-hand. When your vision is clear and you govern with a purposeful strategic plan, you need financial accountability to be part of your goals. As the board of education, you provide the strategic focus and count on your district staff to create a financial plan in keeping with the priorities you have identified.

As indicated by Van Clay and Soldwedel, in *The School Board Fieldbook*, it is a responsibility of the board to conceive of and drive a vision of systemic alignment for the entire school organization by charging the administration to determine whether the school organization's resource allocation practices - distribution of people, time, and money - are aligned with the organization's goals and priorities. A clear and present focus will direct the administration to limit initiatives to those that align with the organization's goals and priorities.

Clearly, the financial undertakings of a school district is highly complex. You are leading in a time of limited resources. The money is the money. Simply extending the financial plan into the future without consideration of the strategic plan is only a form of financial planning or budgeting, not strategic planning. This is an example where the collaborative structure and the communicative process are not always automatically aligned.

One of the most important aspects of governance is to connect district goals, strategic planning and economic realities. In the words of Clay and Soldwedel, "A quality budget signifies the priorities a school system holds."

As a board of education, when you review how to structure the budget, you will be challenged to stay focussed on the big picture and try to budget in a way that will advance the entire district and increase achievement for all students. Successful leadership occurs when teams are able to align the vision, governance, and financial decisions to support student achievement.

SUMMARY

If a board of education is to be effective in advancing its strategic plan, it is critical that a number of processes and conditions are achieved along the way. Failure to address any one of the following may either derail or certainly hamper the achievement of the intended goals.

A board must:

1. Ensure it has a clear common vision for the future of the school district as well as the pathway toward achieving that vision.
2. Establish and maintain the 'social license' (i.e. broad-based community and partner support) necessary for change and progress to be initiated and achieved.
3. Endorse a set of operational and financial goals and processes that align with and support the broader vision for student achievement.
4. Establish and follow policy guidelines regarding governance of the school district that support but do not interfere with the operational responsibilities of staff.
5. Set up regular reviews of progress on the strategic plan including examinations of key operational indicators of success.

6. Communicate effectively with both its community and partner groups to ensure there is confidence in the school district and its processes is maintained.
7. Be prepared to make changes, including the imposition of tough decisions, when needed to ensure the ultimate success of the school districts and students.

While most Boards of Education proceed with the best of intentions, failure to undertake all of the above steps often prevents them from achieving their goals. A personal commitment to improving student outcomes, while laudable, will not in itself bring about the changes necessary to bring about real and sustainable change.

Perhaps, the most important role trustees can play is bringing alignment to all facets of their school district. Good governance can be a powerful and positive force toward ensuring all of the visionary, educational, financial, strategic, tactical and operational components and considerations of a school district are operating and cooperating toward achievement of identified goals.

Are you confident that your board has a full and appropriate answer to each of the requirements above? If not, what can be done to move your board and your school district in the right direction?

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION BY DAVID KING

Perhaps the most important aspect of the public school trustee's role is to be an advocate for public school education. Vision and leadership flow from advocacy.

It isn't possible to be an effective advocate for public school education without some clear and powerful ideas about what makes public school education unique, vital, and attractive to the community. These ideas need to go beyond "compulsory education", or "publicly funded", or "in the neighbourhood", none of which offer powerful reasons for your citizens to support public education, stand with you when it is challenged, and demand the best for it.

In order to understand what makes public school education unique, vital, and attractive, we need to remember and hold on to the ideas that inspired its invention.

1. Only public school education exists to be a deliberate model of a civil democratic community. Parochial education (and many private schools) exist to be a deliberate model of a faith community. Other private schools exist to cater to an elite, or to maintain a gated community of one kind or another, or to promote a particular pedagogical approach. Home schooling exists to interpret the larger community through the parents' understanding of the world (the child is sometimes treated as the chattel of the parents).
2. Only public school education builds on the understanding that we live in communities that prefer to be inclusive. By means of public school education we entrust the education of all children to the community as a whole; and the entire community accepts responsibility for the education of all students. (If it takes a whole village to raise a child, then it follows that the whole village is responsible for every child.)
3. Public school education is also unique in being inclusive, as matter of conviction and by design. Practically speaking, this means that public education operates with a preference for inclusion: exclusion is the unhappy alternative on the rare occasions that the public school system cannot realize the preference for inclusion. Parochial schools, private schools and home schooling are exclusive, and are only selectively inclusive after exercising the preference for exclusion.
4. For public school education, inclusivity is not only a right: it is a responsibility. For public school education, the right and responsibility of inclusivity are not only for children (students): they

are also for adults - parents and others. Public school education welcomes every child, without pre-condition of any kind or degree. Public school education also expresses the conviction that everyone in the community has a responsibility for the education of every child (even if the responsibility is discharged simply by voting for school trustees and following their work). Whether as student or as citizen, public school education is for First Nations, immigrants, refugees, and migrants as well as for all others.

5. Public schools are inclusive, not to achieve homeogeneity, but to acknowledge diversity, and make the most of it in the life of the community. This is a realization that public school supporters -- and democrats -- have only come to recently. Public school education has a history that includes episodes of assimilation, sometimes sustained assimilation. (While residential schools were not part of the public school system they mirrored the prevalent thinking that schooling was the best way to make for conformity and a mono-culture.)

Yet now we understand the importance of diversity as a source of strength for our community. Public schools need to be wrestling constantly with this challenge, on behalf of a First Nations student population that is increasingly moving from band schools to public schools, on behalf of immigrants who choose Canada and arrive ready to experience a new country and diverse culture, and on behalf of refugees who arrive somewhat against their will and shell-shocked.

One of the important implications of all this is that public school education, unlike any of kind of institutional education, is based on what we might call a 'covenantal relationship'. Public school education is an enduring part of the community and our respective obligations are inclusive. For example public school boards wrestle with the issues of providing nutrition for students who need it, or support for families, and many other issues that are marginal to education per se, but important when the mandate is covenantal. (Other forms of education are based on a contractual relationship, for a fixed period of time and for specified respective obligations. For such schools, what is not part of the contract is not part of the undertaking.)

Because public school education exists to be a deliberate model of a civil democratic community, its vital work is more than the program of studies and the curriculum. Public schools must have a mandate - and the resources -- that will allow them to know all the circumstances of the student and family that are pertinent to education success. The mandate and resources must allow the public school to serve as the focal point for an effective community response to the needs of the student.

Public schools must be committed to a pedagogy that encourages thoughtful inquiry, critical thinking, thoughtful reflection, creative communication and action, and numerous, diverse, strong and healthy relationships with people, ideas, knowledge, and time. They must be committed to methods that recognize the different conditions and circumstances of students, and the different learning paths and tools available to different students.

Since the 1890's our public schools have welcomed waves of immigrants arriving from places other than the British Isles or France. We have included our many different immigrants and drawn them into an understanding of, and commitment to, the nature of our country. At the same time, we have absorbed valuable lessons and adopted elements of culture brought by newcomers, and we are constantly changing as a result. In some respects, we do this less well today than we did 100 years ago, principally because education decision-making is much more centralized than it was 100 years ago,

Advocacy may be the most important role for public school trustees. Advocacy depends upon trustees (and Boards) being attentive, creative, agile, resilient, and supportive.

The challenge at the beginning of the 21st century is to rethink the frame for public school education, recover the locally-based decision-making process, and ensure an equitable distribution of resources, so that public schools can be, not only inclusive but also, aware, responsive, and nurturing - student-

growing, citizen-initiating, community-renewing. At the same time, trustees must look past the public school system itself, and beyond the borders of their own community.

What might public school trustees, and their administration and classroom teachers imagine and do in 2016 that would prepare students for life as engaged citizens of B.C. (or elsewhere) in 2025? What will life be like in B.C. in 10 or 20 years? What will change, and what will be unchanging? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes will be important for personal, family, and community well-being? What decisions will we face? What will we need in order to respond well? What are the likely consequences if we don't respond well? Are there any low-cost and low-risk ways that we can explore what is emerging, and our options?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does advocacy mean to you? What are you advocating? On whose behalf are you advocating? To whom are you advocating?
2. Regardless of what anyone else says, what do you believe is the single most important unique, vital and attractive feature of public education?
3. How does advocacy relate to listening and engagement?
4. How does identifying the unique, vital and attractive element(s) of public education in your jurisdiction help develop your vision and your work plan?
5. The argument is made that public education should celebrate diversity, but successful communities of learners also need to share some common features. What would you say are some essential common feature of successful learning communities?
6. Reflecting on the residential school experience of the federal government and various churches, how can public school trustees balance the responsibility to draw students into the community while at the same time honouring each student and cultural differences?

BCSTA would like to thank the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) for sharing their Trustee Professional Development materials and for allowing us to adapt the materials to the context of British Columbia.

