

November 23, 2021

To: Superintendent Hurst and WCCUSD Board Members  
From: Leadership Associates (Sandy Thorstenson, Juan Garza and Jim Brown)  
Subject: Findings and Recommendations from Governance Audit

At the request of the WCCUSD Board and Superintendent Chris Hurst, our team spoke individually with each Board Member and the Superintendent to determine the factors that might be leading to conflict among and between Board Members. In each interview our team asked the following questions:

1. What do you perceive as 1-3 strengths of the current Board?
2. What are 1-3 issues that are preventing your Board from functioning as an effective governance team.
3. We think your Board meetings have been generally inefficient and ineffective especially with regard to handling difficult and potentially divisive issues? Would you agree? If so, why? If not, why not? Is there anything that should be done to improve your Board meetings?
4. Given that it is the Board's responsibility to resolve conflicts between Board Members and not the superintendent's, how should the Board resolve these conflicts?
5. When a Board Member does not follow agreed upon protocols, how should the Board deal with that?
6. What can you do to make the Board governance team function more effectively?
7. Your governance handbook needs to be updated. What do you think ought to be included in that handbook?

We very much appreciated the honesty and sincerity which each of you exhibited in answering these questions. As we have come to know each of you through the superintendent search process, observations of your meetings, and several governance workshops, we know how committed each of you are to addressing the needs of all WCCUSD students with a strong equity lens, helping all staff do their best work, and addressing some very difficult financial issues. We think the leadership of the District is in good hands and that all of you want to do what is right to help the governance team (Board and Superintendent) do its best work. That you have asked us to look critically at your work and suggest ways that you might improve speaks well for the future. Please accept our findings and recommendations with these thoughts in mind.

As a result of our interviews, we prepared some initial thoughts to share with each of you individually. Our findings and recommendations were received well even though some were indeed critical of current practices and procedures. These conversations helped us refine our thoughts further. The results are as follows.

#### Major Finding One:

Despite some significant accomplishments such as the reopening of schools and the transition to a new superintendent, the work of the present Board is adversely impacted by conflicts between Board Members which spill over in a public arena, failure to follow established governance procedures, lack of understanding of and adherence to Board bylaws, failure to respect the different roles of the Board and the Superintendent, and insufficient attention to the mission critical work of the District.

#### Examples:

1. The Board seems not to agree on the role of the Board Chair or understand the parliamentary procedures which allow for an orderly conduct of meetings.
2. The process for developing Board agendas is not understood along with the ways in which an individual Board Member may have a topic placed on the agenda for discussion or action.
3. Despite efforts to get Board Members to ask important questions on agenda items in advance of the meeting, this does not seem to be happening with any degree of regularity or consistency.
4. Board agendas often appear to be too dense with mission critical work not receiving the attention it deserves.
5. There is lack of agreement about an organized way for the Board to conduct in person and/or virtual meetings. The two are not mutually exclusive.

#### Major Finding Two:

The process for gathering input from students, staff, and community lacks both clarity and consistency. At times it appears to us that time allocated to “community input” at Board meetings and “listening tours” detracts from the ability of the Board to discuss among itself the items which are placed on the agenda and the Superintendent to do his job.

#### Examples:

1. The role of Board Members in gathering input from students, staff, and community is not clearly defined and the ways in which different Board Members operate often creates confusion about who’s doing what and sends mixed messages as to who is responsible for leading and managing the District.
2. There is continued disagreement about ways to respect the value of stakeholder input at Board meetings vs. attending to the fiduciary and policy responsibilities of the Board.

### Major Finding Three:

There is not a clear process in place for dealing with and resolving conflicts among Board Members or resolving disagreements at Board meetings. The Board also lacks agreed upon protocols which define the roles of all Board Members including student Board Members.

### Example:

1. Individual Board Members and Board meetings themselves do not always model how the Board expects others in the District to act.
2. The Board lacks knowledge of and respect for the parliamentary procedures which should guide the conduct of Board meetings.

### Major Finding Four:

1. The District lacks two key documents to guide the work of the Board and staff: a Strategic Plan and an agreed upon process for handling staff and stakeholder concerns.
2. Far too much staff time is being consumed by requests from Board Members for information or action on a wide variety of items.
3. The lack of a Strategic Plan and a stakeholder engagement plan sometimes leads the Board to be too reactive to particular staff, stakeholder, and individual Board Members' concerns.

### Recommendations:

1. Update the Governance Handbook to include updated Board bylaws, protocols to guide Board Member conduct, parliamentary procedures, and Board meeting procedures. We recommend this be done by a committee of the Board with the Superintendent and assistance from one of us. The full Board should provide clear direction to the committee and review its results before approving the final document. The Board should buy-in to the changes and monitor adherence to the principles, protocols, and practices contained in the Governance Handbook. This needs to be done ASAP. The handbook should be clear about the consequences for failure to follow agreed upon protocols, Board bylaws, parliamentary procedures, etc.
2. The process for putting items on the agenda should be reviewed and updated with particular attention to the development of the Strategic Plan and a 12-month Board agenda calendar. Board agendas should be based on the Strategic Plan and a 12-month agenda calendar.

Both documents should be prepared by the Superintendent and then reviewed by the full Board and modified as needed. Individual Board Members may suggest items but the full

Board needs to approve. The final calendar should ensure that Board agendas are aligned to the Strategic Plan and respect the staff time and resources individual items may require. It is critical the work on the Strategic Plan be completed ASAP.

3. The agenda for Board meetings should be much more reflective of the District's Strategic Plan, LCAP goals and metrics. Items should be clearly designated as Action, Discussion, and Information. Board and Superintendent Reports should be brief and to the point – only dealing with individual activities and not major agenda items. No meeting should go past 10:30 PM and will be possible with a more effective Board agenda planning process and adherence to board meeting protocols.
4. The Board is strongly advised to have someone serve in the role as parliamentarian who would be present at the Board meetings to help guide the Board and rule on pertinent parliamentary issues. An example would be the role of the Chair. This will be a third party person who has no alignment to any Board Member. The position is not intended to be permanent.
5. The Superintendent should be asked to develop a plan to be approved by the Board for securing staff and public input on important District issues. Individual "listening tours" should not be part of that plan. It is important the full Board and the Superintendent be involved if "listening tours" are part of the public input process. There are multiple other ways to secure meaningful input, such as occasional town hall meetings by the full Board and Superintendent.
6. Now that the new Superintendent is on board and given the turnover in key leadership and staff positions, it is time for a management audit which would build on the work completed by the Equity Audit Team. This audit should focus on the District's organizational structures including reports to the superintendent; interactions among the Board, superintendent and administrative staff; and roles and responsibilities of administrative staff. There are several groups well qualified to conduct this audit one of which is the CCEE.
7. We believe that the Board and Superintendent might benefit – as would all of us – from having an individual coach/mentor for a period of time to be determined.
8. We strongly encourage the Board to emphasize the importance of meeting as a group to deal with the challenging issues facing the District.

#### Concluding Comments:

In conclusion, we see it very important that the full Board needs to discuss and vote on the agreed upon protocols and consequences and that these agreements be noted in writing in the Board Bylaws and Governance Handbook. These policy agreements need to include development of

board agendas, length of agendas, number of questions each Board Member can ask, what will determine if Board meetings will be held via Zoom or in person and at what location if in person, that all Board Members will be treated equally, the role of the Board president needs to be clearly delineated, listening tours and visitation of campuses need to be addressed, roles and

responsibilities need to be clearly detailed including emphasizing the amount of Superintendent and staff time taken up by Board Members that adversely effects the ability to improve the system, and any other specific details that have caused division among the Board.

In addition, it is most important that a Strategic Plan be developed and used to guide the work of the Board, Superintendent, and the District. We also believe a close examination of how the District systems and structures are organized should be completed within the near future especially since there are several critical leadership positions that need to be filled.