

# BOARD GUIDEBOOK

*Best Practices in Public Charter School Board Governance*



## Doing Hard Work

*By Jenn Thompson, PCSC Program Manager*

This issue is about building the confidence to do the hard work of board governance. School board governance is certainly not the easiest volunteer project you could have picked (shhh. don't tell the newbies), but your hard work is necessary. And it is appreciated.

This issue includes some great resources and tips for getting at those difficult issues with grace.

Solve the "wicked" problem that *everyone* is passionate about. Have that tough conversation you've been putting off. Address the controversial topic of student safety. Seek to understand why you and so-and-so are just never going to see eye-to-eye. If you're feeling really confident, revise your dress code. On second thought . . . your dress code is fine. Don't touch it.

But for everything else, take a deep breath.  
You can do this.

### THIS MONTH

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**STAY MOTIVATED:  
"GOT A WICKED PROBLEM?  
FIRST, TELL ME HOW YOU  
MAKE TOAST"**

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**ARTICLE:  
IS THAT A CONFLICT OF  
INTEREST?**

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**BOARD EXERCISE:  
STUDENT SAFETY: THE VIEW  
FROM GOVERNANCE**

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**SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT:  
LIBERTY'S LETTERS TO  
PARKLAND**

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| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday |
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## Don't Forget!

Spring is a great time of year to review school policies. Gather stakeholder feedback through a survey. Was a policy confusing? Difficult to implement? Look at the number of discipline issues or grievances filed. Is there a need for clearer guidance in any area? Then spend time reviewing and revising. No need to fix what isn't broken. Give a nod to what's working well, and revise what isn't. Your team will appreciate your efforts!

## Stay Motivated

[Got a wicked problem? First, tell me how you make toast.](#)

Ted Talk by Tom Wujec.

This Ted Talk presents a visual and engaging approach to collaborative problem solving. Every organization faces multi-faceted issues, what Wujec calls "wicked problems".

Whether you are embarking on strategic planning with your board, hoping to get authentic buy-in on professional development, or volunteering to help develop next year's recruitment plan, start with toast.

Simple, but entirely brilliant! Worth the 10 minutes!

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## Need a Good Book?

[\*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High\*, By Grenny Patterson.](#)

Patterson defines a crucial conversation as one in which stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions are strong. The outcomes of crucial conversations have long-term effects on people and organizations, and as a board member, you likely encounter these kinds of conversations often. Whether we handle them well or poorly is often related to whether or not we recognize that a conversation has turned “crucial”.

For example, when we feel threatened, we act to protect ourselves. In the context of a crucial

conversation, this means we might strive to “win” and become unnecessarily aggressive or we might try to save face by downplaying what we want to say. In both cases, we risk being misunderstood. However, when we can acknowledge how we react under stress and we learn to recognize the emotional and physical traits of stress in others, we can start to recognize the moments when conversations turn “crucial”.

This book offers strategies for how to diffuse a heated discussion as well as how to keep a crucial conversation focused on meaningful goals. When the goals are clear, and emotion is acknowledged, we can begin to build a shared pool of knowledge, and thereby more effectively and efficiently solve our problems. This is a great read for all board members!

# Governance Exercise

## Student Safety: The View from Governance

A quality student safety plan considers emergency and non-emergency incidents as well as day-to-day safe practices. Whether it is a broken swing or a visiting mountain lion, student safety is a daily consideration for educators. There are many resources to help your school administrator develop the details of this plan. In addition, your school receives "Safe and Drug Free" funds to support your efforts. The [SDE](#) has a high-quality collection of resources (accessible online) that can help you with a wide range of safety considerations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Federal Department of Education (Ed.gov) have some great resources as well.

### Crisis Management

A quality crisis management plan considers four key aspects: preparedness for a crisis, action during a crisis, recovery from a crisis, and communication throughout the process.

FEMA guidelines recommend that all schools have a standing "incident command team" in place. This is just a fancy name for formally assigning roles and responsibilities, so that if a crisis happens, your school can snap into action in a coordinated way.

This team provides training to teachers, coordinates drills for students, and is responsible for communication about the plan with other stakeholders (board members, first responders, parents, etc.).

Most stakeholders don't need a detailed understanding of procedures in an emergency, but they do need to feel confident that your school's plan is thorough.

As a board member, here's what you should know:

Know **that** there are procedures in place for key types of events (such as a fire, an armed intruder, or a vehicle accident nearby).

Know **who** will serve as the primary source of accurate information in an emergency and who talks to media.

Know **how** to use your school's primary communication system (i.e. text, email, phone tree, etc.).

Know **where** families will be reunited with their children (especially in off-site evacuation situations). Parents will ask you.

Know **when** the board will meet with your incident management team to finalize the recovery plan.

**Note:** Remember that your primary administrators will be in the thick of any emergency that might happen. It is considered best practice to name other team members (assistant principal or office manager) to take the lead on communications.

**Best Practice:** Make a quick reference card to put in your wallet. Include the "that, who, how, where, and when" of your plan. These cards make great handouts for parents as well.

You don't want to communicate all the details of your safety plan to the public. But you do want stakeholders to feel confident that in an emergency a carefully thought-out safety plan will activate.

### Non-Crisis Safety Considerations

Safety goes well beyond crisis management. Talk with your board and your administration about other safety procedures and practices your school has in place.

**Word of caution:** Don't forget that the role of the board is to ensure *that* policies are in place. The role of the administrator is to manage *how* procedures are executed. We are all passionate about student safety, and it can be difficult to engage in this discussion without overstepping the governance role. However, this is one of those "crucial conversations" you need to have. After all, student safety is both the job of the administration and the responsibility of the board.

### Topics for your safety discussion:

Drop-off and Dismissal  
Allergies and Medications  
Playground Safe Play Practices  
Facility/Equipment Maintenance  
Anti-Bullying  
Social-Emotional Health and Wellness  
Safe Routes for Walking/Biking  
School Culture/Character Education  
School Weather Closure  
Head Injuries

All Idaho students deserve to learn in a safe and supportive environment. Know the scope of school safety, and take the time to fill any gaps.

# Weekly Notes

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## April 2018

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## Fact and Fiction

**Fiction:** Traditional public schools are more transparent than charter schools when it comes to how public funds are spent.

**Fact:** All public schools in Idaho are required to hold a public hearing of their annual budget, conduct an independent audit each year, and maintain financial statements, accurate within 45 days, on their websites.

**Further:** I.C. 33-5206(7) and [33-357\(3\)\(a\)](#)

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## Is that a Conflict of Interest?

Board members must disclose any real or potential conflict of interest that may affect their role on the board. Understanding statute, rule, and best practices will help your board navigate complicated situations with confidence.

The PCSC has developed a [conflict of interest tool](#) that we hope is useful for new and existing board members alike. You can use it to guide individual reflection, to spark a board discussion as a training topic, or as a tool to help you evaluate and on-board new members to your team. It includes links to applicable statute and rule as well as summaries and best practices. Take a look!

## Governance Impacts Academics

[Charter School Governance: An Exploration of Autonomy and Board Effectiveness](#). This Georgia Southern University Dissertation by June Erskine explores the impact of high quality governance on academic outcomes.

Charter school boards have the autonomy to choose inputs (like curriculum and instructional practices) while authorizers have the responsibility to monitor outcomes (like academic performance and financial stability). We know that the quality of the outcomes is directly influenced by the inputs, but very little research considers governance as an input. Erskine's seeks to identify common governance practices among schools with high academic outcomes.

Her conclusion: How you do the work of governance definitely matters.



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April / 2018

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## April 2018

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## Check it Out

Governing boards work best when individual members bring a variety of personal and professional skills to the table. However, that can be the exact factor that creates tension on a board. A strengths finder quiz is a fun way to help your board recognize the value in diversity. It can also give you a vocabulary for navigating tense conversations later. For example, you might be strong in "executing" but someone else might be strong in "relationships".

There are some great free options, but for \$20/person you can complete the [Clifton Strengths Finder](#) online. This quiz will highlight your top five strengths, and with a little analysis, you just might find some useful insights. On the flip side? You'll also see some gaps, and that might inform how you recruit members.

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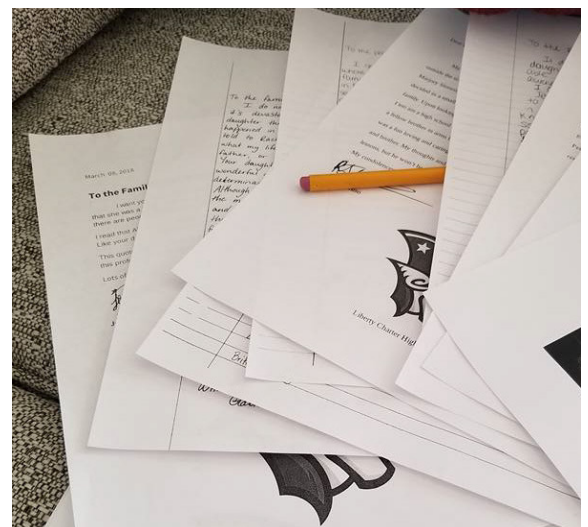
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## School Highlight

Knowing how to reach out to families after a crisis is difficult for all of us. Often, when we aren't sure what to say, we just don't say anything at all. Hundreds of Idaho students participated in a walk-out and 17 minutes of silence in March to show their support of safety at school.

The students at Liberty Charter School took a unique approach. Seeking to honor the victims of the Parkland shooting, students spent a week learning about the lives of the victims, and then wrote letters to their families and their community.

"I do hope this letter shows that there are still good people in the world, and we are here to help you through your loss," read one letter.



A big thank you to these students and to the whole Liberty team for engaging with uncomfortable truths and for making it a priority to say *something*. Kind words always matter.



