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Monday, February 19, 2007

Good afternoon.

Madame Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Ruth Johnson and I serve as the President of the Clark County School District Board of Trustees. With me today are Vice President Terri Janison and Clerk, MaryBeth Scow. We serve as the officers of the board.

We are delighted to be here today to speak with you about governance. We would like to provide the committee with information and then answer any questions the committee may have.

As an introduction, The Clark County School District Board of Trustees adopted Policy Governance as a framework for creating goals, writing policies and establishing accountability that leads to success for all students. In addition to being a Policy Governance Board, our board office is also ISO certified, which is a nationally recognized business model for effective management. In the recently conducted legislative audit performed by MGT of America, the executive summary reported the following:

“The Clark County School District Board of School Trustees is commended for adopting and applying a governance system that clearly focuses on providing leadership in promoting high student achievement and supporting administration, teaching, and learning in a manner consistent with this purpose. (Chapter 7).”

With that said, Trustee Scow will present a historical overview of the adoption of Policy Governance as a model framework for leadership and Trustee Janison will address our community outreach program.

MARY BETH SCOW

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I am Mary Beth Scow; I've served as a school board member for 10 years; I am currently the clerk.

About seven years ago the Clark County School District Board was searching for a new superintendent. We had some issues with the search and some divisiveness on the Board. The search consultant was giving us training on Board/Superintendent relations and mentioned some districts that were performing admirably. We followed up on one of these districts, Orange County, FL, and found that they used the Policy Governance model. Their business community, after the Board was in a similar situation as ours, sponsored Dr. Carver to train the Board in the model. We studied the model for several months and adopted it with a firm majority of the Board.

Dr. Carver had much experience as both a CEO and Board Member of several businesses. In the Carver model, the board sets the vision for the district, with expected results and parameters, and the superintendent carries out the day-to-day operation. The board monitors performance through data, and holds the superintendent accountable.

Policy Governance has attracted positive attention at national groups, such as the Council of the Great City Schools, ERIC Clearinghouse (Educational Resource Information Center), National School Boards Association, American Association of School Administrators, and the Broad Foundation.

The importance of good governance is a national discussion. The average tenure of superintendents in urban districts around the country has hovered between two and three years. This is often the result of infighting or board intervention into operations. Sustained increased achievement requires stability from good governance and teamwork between the board and superintendent.

An ECS document emphasizes the importance of board governance. It says, "school board policies provide guidance and direction to the

district and create a framework within which the superintendent and other district employees work.

Policy Governance has been adopted by boards nationwide, with diverse sizes and circumstances. Among them are: Austin, TX; Orange County, FL; Newark, NJ; Calgary, Canada; Edmonton, Canada; Nashville, Tn; Chino, CA; Jefferson, CO; Columbus and DefForest WI; to name a few, as well as the State School Board Associations of Minnesota, Colorado and Iowa endorsing the model.

I found the following quotes on these respective websites:

“Adoption of Policy Governance in Cobb County, Georgia, has enabled the school board to set a clear agenda for administrators without getting bogged down in minutiae,” said Kathie Johnstone, the board chairwoman

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“In a nutshell, policy governance makes the School Board the Board of Directors of a \$130 million organization, with 18,000 "customers" – the students – and 140,000 stakeholders – the residents of Beaufort County, SC”

But very significantly, this was found on the ERIC website: “The Broad Foundation supports the Clark County (Las Vegas, Nevada) School Board's efforts to deepen existing governance training for board members and key staff. Since 2000, Clark County's school board has worked diligently to implement a promising board governance model called "Policy Governance." Policy Governance is a framework for defining the board's roles and responsibilities. It has the power to encourage effective oversight and foster a valuable accountability system. The Broad Foundation supports the boards as it further develops the Policy Governance work and engages the community in school reform.” The foundation, which is nationally renowned for its work with educational governance, put its money where its mouth is and furnished our board with a \$200,000 grant for development of the model.

TERRI JANISON
COMMUNITY LINKAGE

Madame Chair and members of the committee, for the record, I am Terri Janison. The traditional model of Board Governance is reactionary. Citizens come to meetings and voice complaints or make requests for the board to handle day to day operations, and the board works with the staff and the community to resolve issues. However, in a district as large as Clark County, that system does not work. In fact, it hurts the district, and ultimately our students, because the board tends to have a "knee-jerk" reaction to issues that may only be favored by literally a handful of people who attend the meeting.

Our board chooses to follow a broader system for representing the values of the community. Not only do we listen to and appreciate those who attend our meetings on a regular basis, we actively put together discussion groups on specific topics, so that we can make decisions based on a wider consensus.

In the past, we have engaged the public in a number of meetings we refer to as "community linkage." These meetings have been fairly successful. In the last two years, we have met with parents and community members on school safety, curriculum, teacher quality, parental involvement, and education funding. We met with a nationally known futurist to discuss what schools should look like ten years from now. We engaged the community at large on issues such as deconsolidation, school start times, and the superintendent search process. We have met with elected officials. We have also met with union leaders on planning our career technical programs, we have presented iNVEST to the community and we conducted interactive television show with the public in January through Channel 10, Vegas PBS.

Our community linkage schedule for 2007 includes five televised presentations that engage the community in real time on real issues, as well as another five face-to-face conversations. Our next discussions will be with the faith based organizations in our valley, followed by a debriefing of former CCSD students.

In addition to these discussions that are authored and facilitated by our board, we work with a bond oversight committee and a student council advisory board. We have also established a parent advisory committee for each board member. In the last year we have started overlapping many of the parent advisory committees in order to allow for discussion across communities and political boundaries. Community Education Advisory Boards are also organized in many areas across the county such as Boulder City and Moapa Valley. These function like smaller school boards or education town councils. Policy Governance is hard work, and our board works hard at doing our job well.

RUTH JOHNSON:

Thank you, Mrs. Janison and Mrs. Scow.

Our increased communication with our constituents is only one of the benefits of this model of governance. We set clear goals, establish strict parameters, and monitor throughout the year to check progress. We monitor progress through internal and external means, and while we have an annual schedule for the regular monitoring reports, we reserve the right to monitor any aspect of the district at any time. We talk about our goals in almost every meeting we conduct. We would like to share with you some additional benefits of using Policy Governance.

MARY BETH SCOW

I would now like to outline what I see are the accomplishments of our board as a result of Policy governance.

- 1) The strong Community Linkage that Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Janison explained, gives the board the ability to see what results the cross section of the community wants to see in K-12 education. The board has perspective to look for the overall good, not just for political good or the good of one vocal group.
- 2) The board speaks with one voice. There is diversity of thought and often public disagreement, but decisions are a result of deliberation and vote of the entire board and then become the official position.

- 3) The superintendent is enabled to take initiative. Examples of this are the division of the district into regions, empowerment schools, Career and Technical Academies, and a potential open enrollment pilot. The development of iNVEST was a result of the board backing off from mandating what should be on the legislative program—we would end up working on everyone's pet projects rather than an overall, data-researched program.
- 4) The board is more proactive and visionary. I remember a 30-minute discussion of what flooring should be laid in elementary school foyers when I was first on the board. We are now working toward more discussion on what students should learn and what future students will need to be productive adults.
- 5) Monitoring of the superintendent requires data (as does the reporting for NCLB). This initiated the implementation of a data management system which allows superintendents, principals, teachers and parents to look at data which tells where individual students, classes, schools, or regions are strong or weak, and it shows exactly where in the curriculum the needs are.
- 6) And speaking of monitoring the superintendent, carrying out his evaluation has become objective and data driven. The first few years I was on the Board, we held a subjective conversation about the superintendent's merits. The difference between now and then is very dramatic. The superintendent knows exactly what the expectations are—it is in policy. The board then monitors the policies throughout the year requiring data to prove compliance.
- 7) The district is ISO 9001 2000 certified—the largest district in the county to achieve that honor. ISO is an international business certification which is based on process and system approach. An independent authority assesses and approves management systems against a standard. As a result, Clark County School District has saved almost \$175 million from cost and avoidance savings.
- 8) The board sets the desired results for student achievement and the system aligns to that. There has been an increased

attention to student achievement at all levels. We have seen in the last seven years an alignment of curriculum, testing, and professional development.

- 9) Test scores in the last two years have risen slightly—all but two schools had an increase. The pass rate on the HSPE has risen, and the dropout rate is slowly decreasing. Though we are not where we want to be, progress is being made.

In summary, before Policy Governance was adopted by our Board, we were constantly told that we should run like a business. Now we do. I have explained the model to several business and rotary groups; it has been well-received. Some constituents, generally candidates during school board elections, have complained that the Board is giving away power, is shutting the community out of decisions, or is not requiring proscribed data from the superintendent.

We firmly feel that the Board is in a position of more authority by reacting instead of reacting. We are stating what results should be met for students instead of having staff make those plans. We are going to the community for their input and using our time in Board meetings to talk about those values and not taking time to talk about the flooring in foyers, which enables us to have perspective and look for the good of all students. We are asking for data that directly shows whether the superintendent is compliant with the policies.

RUTH JOHNSON

Thank you, Mrs. Scow.

HOW POLICY GOVERNANCE ENSURES SUCCESS

Madame Chair and members of the committee, as a state legislature we know that you represent a diverse constituency. We would like to be clear that even though Policy Governance has been successful for our district, we do not recommend this model for everyone. We have functioned under this framework for almost seven years. During that time, while we have had a few complaints from individuals, no one has ever suggested an alternative. There are some who think we should go back to the old way of trying to keep everyone happy

regardless of its impact on student achievement, a time when superintendent evaluations were based on personal relationships rather than the accomplishment of goals that benefit children.

As you well aware, the typical tenure of an urban superintendent is about three years and their salary is very competitive. We want to be a board that the best and brightest superintendents want to work with. We want to be trusted to play by the rules. We are the only elected board in the state of Nevada to conduct self-evaluations in public and we critique many of our meetings in order to continually improve how we work. Since the inception of this governing model, every member of this board has been re-elected by wide margins. Many of our board members have been invited to present at national conferences including the National School Boards Association, the Council of Great City Schools and the Council of Urban Boards of Education. We know our district has room to improve but we also know that we are making a conscientious effort to keep moving towards our goals.

We don't take the effectiveness of Policy Governance for granted, however. In fact, tomorrow we are posted for a meeting where we will discuss the merits of Policy Governance as a model and start a review process. We are always open to new ideas because we know that this model of governance is like our current model of democracy- it isn't perfect but better than any other way we have found that works better.

We thank you for your time and for the opportunity to explain our governance process, and how it helps us to improve student achievement. We would be delighted to answer any questions you may have.