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SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE
PERFORMANCE

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This action research project examined the link between school board governance and effective school district operation. In particular, the link between superintendent leadership, board of education professional development, and community support was studied. The three-year project focused on positive board-superintendent relations and effective board governance. The goals of the project were to establish roles, responsibilities, and procedures for board relations, improve the public image of the school district, improve evaluation systems of school programs, and develop and communicate a district mission and vision. The project documented improvement in community support in multiple areas.

SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE
PERFORMANCE

by

Ronald Drzewicki

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DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT

White Pigeon Community Schools is a rural school district in southwest Michigan bordering on the Michigan/Indiana state line. There were 820 students enrolled in 2009-10 and 71% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch under the Income Eligibility Guidelines of the National School Lunch Program. According to CLRSearch (2010), 60% of the employed individuals living in White Pigeon work in manufacturing and the median, average, and per capita household income is below the state and national average. The district consists of two buildings. Central Elementary houses 376 students in grades kindergarten to fifth grade. The high school/middle school building has 444 students enrolled in grades 6-12 and also houses a small alternative high school. The district encompasses 60 square miles and 67% of all students ride a bus to school. The district received a $7,316 per pupil foundation allowance for 2010-11.

The mission of the White Pigeon Community School District includes the statement "working hard to get better every day!" The district strives to give students a strong academic background as well as the resources to become life-long learners and contributors to the global society. A key ingredient to that success is a strong, collaborative, and educated school governance team.

Problem Statement

At the beginning of this project, the White Pigeon governance team lacked leadership and direction towards the important roles of school governance. The work of the board of education was more focused on day to day operations and management of personnel and resources. When I first arrived in the district in 2008, the board president at the time was in the habit of meeting with the superintendent on a weekly basis. During these meetings, the superintendent would "consult" with the board president on issues of importance. The superintendent made decisions based on these discussions. As a result, there was little separation between operation and policy making. Board members were constantly meddling in operations especially in the areas of building and grounds and maintenance. In addition, board members "informally" evaluated personnel and "encouraged" the school administration to fire the basketball coach or the band teacher if they felt that expectations were not met.

In response to this problem, I researched the areas of board-superintendent relations and effective board governance. This included journal articles, books, reference guides, and available research studies pertinent to the topic. I used the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) and the National Association of School Boards (NASB) and colleagues in the field as resources. The National School Board Association (NASB) suggests that the four major thrusts of school leadership include vision, structure, accountability, and advocacy. This project was designed to get the Board focused on the four areas mentioned in the previous sentence and less involved in school operation. The approach was to educate, inform, lead, nurture, and communicate to the

board with fidelity the important role of school governance and the leadership components that are critical to a district's success.

Background of the Problem

The Village of White Pigeon and the surrounding area have been challenged by the recession and the struggling state economy for many years. The community has been hard hit economically by a slowing and shrinking recreational vehicle (RV) industry in northern Indiana and the closure of a paper mill and other smaller industries in the immediate area. Once considered an average blue-collar area, the unemployment and poverty rates have been on a steady rise. Many families are at or below the poverty line as evidenced by the high percentage of students qualifying for free lunch (slightly over 70% in 2010). Local downtown businesses have struggled to survive and have been forced to close due to a lack of revenue.

The school district has experienced the same economic challenges faced by the community. White Pigeon Community Schools has been hit hard by enrollment decline and the resulting loss of state aid. Over the past eleven years, the school district has lost 30% of its student population. In 2000, the student enrollment was at 1,124 and in 2011 it dwindled to 786 students, for a total loss of 338 students over that eleven year period. Some of the enrollment decline can be attributed to the state economy. According to the Michigan Policy Network (2011), "almost 61% of public school districts in Michigan experienced a decline in enrollment" (p.1). The Network also states that, "the state's crumbling economy is primarily to blame for the drop in enrollment" (p.1). Graph 1illustrates the total student enrollment for the eleven year period from 2000-2010. A

closer look at a breakdown of the enrollment decline for that period, however, shows that a majority of that enrollment loss can be attributed to a consistent loss of students to schools of choice (See Graph 2).

White Pigeon Enrollment Trend
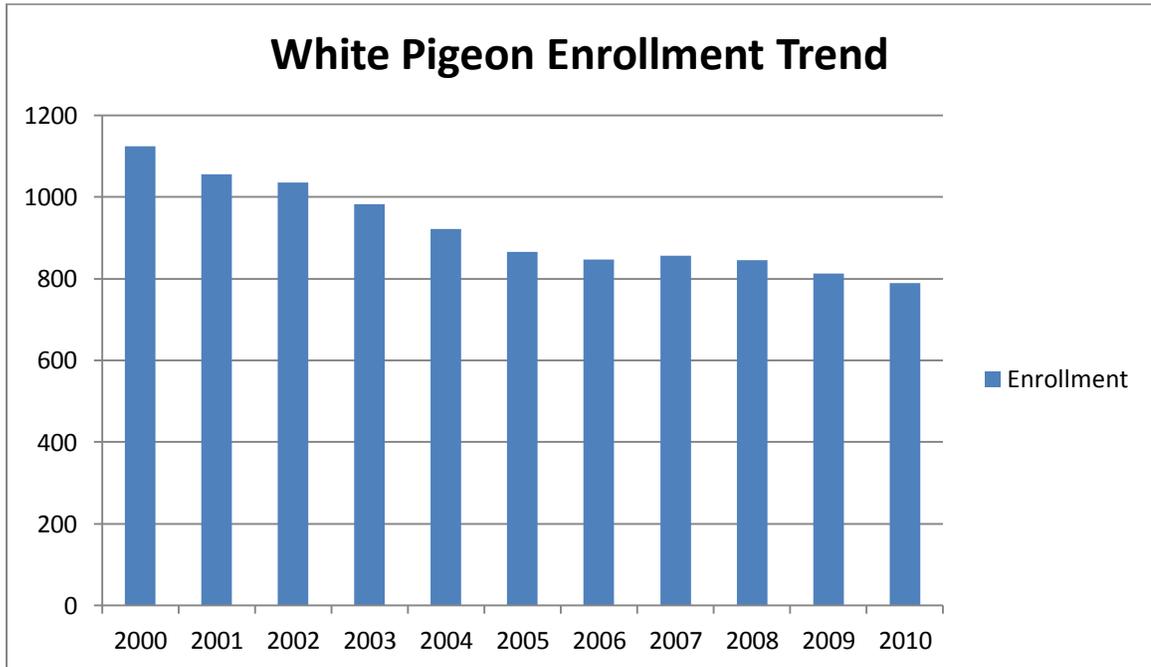
Figure 1. Bar Graph Showing the Student Enrollment of White Pigeon Community Schools from 2000-2010.

The reasons students have been leaving the district are many and varied. In my discussions with the administrative team, district staff, and community members, I consistently heard three main reasons students were leaving; poor and aging school facilities, the closing of two outlying elementary schools, and ineffective school governance. From 2000 to 2010, the school district lost a net total of 362 students to schools of choice, 263 of them to the neighboring district Constantine Public Schools. Over that same period, the district did attract students from neighboring districts and

outside the immediate area but the total loss of students (338 total loss from 2000) to schools of choice is significant. The estimated total annual financial cost to the district is close to 2.3 million dollars of State Aid revenue based on having 338 less students at $6,900 per pupil per year. When enrollment loss, due to parents choosing another district over their home district of White Pigeon, is broken down between students who started their education in the district and those who never attended the district, the data shows that most of the district students lost through schools of choice to other districts did not pack up and leave the district; they simply never enrolled in the district to begin with. For example, for the fall semester of 2010, 36 of the district's students went elsewhere but only 11 of those attended White Pigeon prior to their departure. This is a stark illustration that White Pigeon is losing kids who never attended the district for any part of their educational career. Parents are picking Constantine or other choices without giving the District a chance.

The appearance and function of the schools were a factor. The school infrastructure was in a state of disrepair and the district was unable to raise tax dollars for improvements and repairs. In contrast, Constantine Public Schools passed a bond initiative which funded the construction of a new high school that opened in 2004 and the renovation of all the District's school buildings. Constantine was growing and their facilities were new and attractive to families looking for options.

White Pigeon Community Schools made a difficult decision during the 2001-02 school year that increased the number of disgruntled families in the western communities of Mottville and Union and resulted in a greater loss of schools of choice students. Due to budget constraints and a shrinking student population, the school district closed two

small elementary schools, one in Mottville and one in Union. The following school year, the district lost 55 students to schools of choice. That was almost double the number of students the district lost in the prior year. Most of those students left the Mottville and Union areas and went to Constantine because the district closed their neighborhood school. This trend continues. Families living in that area continue to select Constantine as their school of choice and do not give serious consideration to White Pigeon Community Schools.

The location of Constantine High School and convenient school transportation made the decision easier for families to the west of the village of White Pigeon. The Constantine High School and White Pigeon High School are only four miles apart. For the western half of the school district, Constantine High School is closer and a shorter drive for most families. In the early 2000s, Constantine further exacerbated the problem, by adjusting their bus runs to start picking up White Pigeon schools of choice students within the district boundary lines of White Pigeon. To illustrate the impact of this decision by the Constantine Schools, in the 2009-10 school year, Constantine transported 82 White Pigeon students residing in White Pigeon's district who attend Constantine Public Schools. This practice was not well received by White Pigeon Community School officials but Constantine did not stop the practice after much discussion and disagreement at the local and county level. Graph 2 below illustrates both the annual and cumulative effect of enrollment loss due to schools of choice.

Net Loss of Students to Schools of Choice
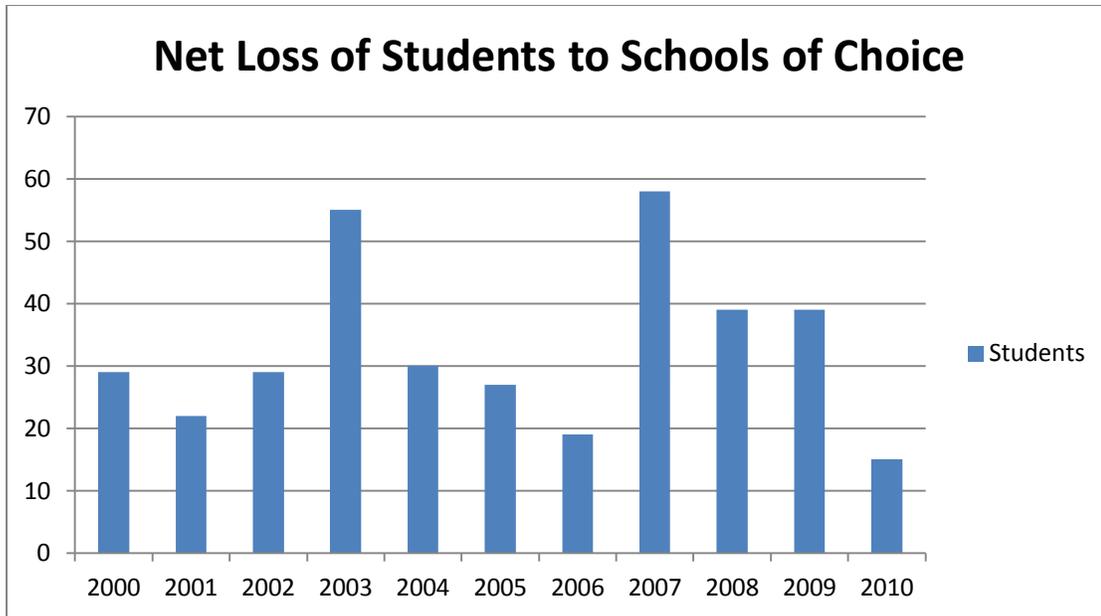
Figure 2. Bar Graph Showing the Net Loss of Students to Schools of Choice from 2000-2010.

The White Pigeon community has a history of not supporting the district via bond proposals and other millage requests. This lack of support is the reason for the current state of the school district's facilities and infrastructure. The last millage collected by the district was in 1993 for maintenance and repair. The district has been "debt free" since 1993. From 1994 to 2006, the voters rejected 12 different ballot requests. The reasons for the lack of support at the ballot box have not been documented. However, in my conversations with community members in my first few years as superintendent, the comments I heard was that the district was not a good steward of the money they were receiving from the state. The buildings were left to decay and school employees were influencing the school political process for their own gain. It was perceived that the White Pigeon Education Association was able to influence decisions at the board of education level and had board members who were sympathetic to their cause. The

district lacked leadership and vision and seemed to be constantly floundering. The school was always "asking for money" but they did not leave the impression that they were taking care of the schools for the long term with the money they were already receiving from the state. Table 1, below, illustrates a 13 year history of failed attempts by the White Pigeon School District to gain tax payer approval for ballot issues to address facility, technology, and basic instructional needs. Though the ballot proposals were put forth under three different state provisions for local millages (Sinking Fund, School Construction Bonds, and Enhancement Millage), none of the funding requests under any of those mechanisms gained tax payer support until, finally, in 2007 the District passed a 5 year sinking fund millage to address the accumulation of facility needs resulting in the lack of investment in infrastructure for such a long period of time.

Table 1

Results of Past Ballot Proposals from 1994-2007

DATE	BALLOT ISSUE	RESULT	VOTE
6/13/94	1 mill maintenance and repair for 3 years	Failed	201-287
6/12/95	3 mills for computers for 2 years	Failed	313-521
9/25/95 #1	1 mill for books and materials for 2 years	Failed	381-472
9/25/95 #2	2 mills for computers for 2 years	Failed	298-547
9/25/01	Bond issue – 5.82 mills for 30 years	Failed	606-788
3/22/04	Bond issue – 4.45 mills for 25 years	Failed	464-876
5/3/05 #1	Remodel and refurbish	Failed	637-892
5/3/05 #2	Bond issue – 3.5 mills for 30 years	Failed	519-991
5/3/05 #3	Bond issue – 1.01 mills for 30 years	Failed	623-890
8/2/05 #1	Remodel and refurbish	Failed	637-892
8/2/05 #2	Bond issue – 3.5 mills for 30 years	Failed	519-991
8/25/05 #3	Bond issue – 1.01 mills for 30 years	Failed	623-890
11/7/06	Bond Issue – 3.7 mills for 30 years	Failed	1059-1259
11/6/07	Sinking fund – 3 mills for 5 years	Passed	743-705

Before the passage of the first sinking fund in 2007, the district infrastructure was in crisis. The elementary school lacked proper air ventilation and sickness was prevalent. The building envelope at both buildings was original and lacked proper energy efficiency. The roofs were leaking and it was not uncommon to have twenty or more buckets in the hallways and classrooms catching water during a rain storm. The boilers, HVAC system, and plumbing were original and had frequent breakdowns that required time and financial resources to repair. The schools looked aged and in decay from the outside and lacked positive curb appeal when prospective families would drive by and visit.

Based on feedback from staff and community members, the aged facilities played a role in the loss of students to Constantine Public Schools. As more students left, the problems grew. Without community support, the district would be unable to provide a quality education. Families who send their children to Constantine or other schools of choice options have no reason to support school bond or sinking fund elections in White Pigeon. They benefit from the higher millage rate and newer facilities in Constantine and do not pay Constantine school taxes. In addition, they enjoy the benefits of the low or nonexistent millage rate in White Pigeon and can vote no on any proposal that makes the ballot. In effect, local district parents can protect their own children from the impact of the local community's failure to provide their schools with financial support to maintain school infrastructure by simply choosing to place their children in another neighboring school district where the community does support these investments. Meanwhile, those same parents can perpetuate the decline of their home school district, by showing up at the polls and voting no on any ballot proposal that would cost them more in property tax

levy. This feature of the Michigan Schools of Choice system is well documented in analyses conducted by the Citizens' Research Council (2005).

The future of White Pigeon Community Schools was impacted by a growing number of complex factors that required a multifaceted response to the growing problems that were facing the district. Effective leadership from the governance team was critical and needed to happen for the district to continue to survive. Unfortunately, the governance team was not up to the task. The district administration was stifled by a culture of micromanagement. Bold and forward thinking initiatives were criticized and struck down because of the fear of change. The governance team's inability to listen to the community resulted in many failed bond attempts. The community did not feel there was proper oversight of the district's finances and that there were too many special interests making decisions for their own gain. The district lacked the leadership necessary to gain the confidence of the community and get their support for infrastructure and program improvements.

Contributing Factors

The factors contributing to the decline of the school district are many and varied. My research focus was on the lack of governance team leadership to effectively manage and operate the district. For the purposes of this study, the governance team is defined as the seven members of the board of education and the superintendent. Also, for the purposes of this study, I will address the problems of leadership and governance using several research supported constructs and frames including the six district leadership factors isolated by Waters and Marzano in the (2006) paper (and subsequent 2009 book),

District Leadership that Works. In applying these constructs and frames (which are discussed in the literature review) through the lens of the District superintendent (the role I assumed in 2008), the following factors contributing to the issues of dysfunctional leadership and governance emerged:

- Lack of strategic and long-term planning.

- Board micromanagement.

- Lack of vision.

- Lack of accountability at all levels of the organization.

- Poor or inconsistent leadership b the governance team.

- Failure to listen to the community and communicate.

- Failure to use district resources appropriately.

- Poor district image and public relations.

- Failure to generate voter confidence and support.

The review of the literature to follow examines research supported factors that contribute to or are associated with the stability and effectiveness of a school district governance or leadership team. At the conclusion of the literature review, the above factors identified by the superintendent as critical concerns for the status of the White Pigeon School District are revisited through the lens of the research findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of school district leadership and the impact on student achievement has been well studied and documented (Waters & Marzano, 2006 & 2009). Effective district leadership is the cornerstone of a successful school district. Leadership

occurs at all levels of an organization but none is more important than the leadership from the board of education and district superintendent. According to Waters and Marzano (2006), "when district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts" (p. 8). A board of education that is focused on district goals and an effective superintendent capable of focusing the organization on student achievement can have a positive impact on the teaching and learning process.

Successful school districts typically have highly effective boards of education. According to Anderson and Togneri (2003), in successful school districts, "boards held the superintendent and his or her colleagues accountable for progress but did not engage in the daily administration of schools. In addition, the boards took their policy roles seriously and promulgated policies to support instructional reform" (p. 33). Effective boards allow the school administration to run and operate the district and focus on cultivating solid board governance that establishes the roles and responsibilities of team members. Anderson and Togneri (2003) added that effective boards, "were policy and accountability driven" (p. 33).

An important function of a board of education is to generate public trust. Banach and Banach (2009) write that, "Boards that generate confidence project an image of professionalism, fairness, and efficiency. Board members understand their role and their responsibilities. And their agenda is always in the best interests of the entire community" (p. 4). Respected boards do not debate issues best left to the superintendent and do not mettle in operational decisions. An effective board conveys confidence in its direction and its' CEO. It is customer driven. Banach and Banach (2009) go on to say that,

"school districts have to focus on creating and keeping customers. This means providing quality programs and services in such a way that people want to do business with our schools. These are things that you can't do if your school board is dysfunctional" (p. 4).

How a school board communicates and works with its superintendent sets a tone of reason and send a clear message that we are a highly functioning team. Harrison (2002) states that effective boards, "Work as a team to identify appropriate ways for the board to address community concerns without bypassing the superintendent's authority. The process of collaboratively developing procedures will be valuable in building the board-superintendent relationship" (p. 37). Procedures and protocols are important for highly functioning governance teams. Procedures establish boundaries and define roles and responsibilities. They are the building block for effective leadership and allow everything to work in its designed way.

Governance team procedures and ground rules help minimize board of education micromanagement. Micromanagement can have a significantly negative effect on the operations a school district. According to Martinelli (2012), "the board must avoid the temptation to micromanage or meddle in lesser matters or in areas that are more appropriately handled by the professional staff" (p.2). Board micromanagement is so serious that the Georgia General Assembly overwhelmingly passed Senate Bill 84 in 2010 prohibiting micromanagement. Here is an excerpt from the law:

> The fundamental role of a local school superintendent shall be to implement the
> policy established by the local board. It shall not be the role of the local board of
> education or individual members of such board to micromanage the
> superintendent in executing his or her duties.

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According to an article written by Shea (2012), the Commission for School Board Excellence, a partnership between the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Metro Atlanta Chamber, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and AdvancED, commended the Georgia General Assembly on the final passage of Senate Bill 84. Micromanagement is not only poor board governance; it is against the law in Georgia.

Establishing accountability at all levels of the school district begins at the board of education and governance team level. According to a report by The Center for Public Education (2011), "effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals towards that vision" (p.2). In highly functioning organization, goals are established, targets are set, and the tasks are clearly defined. According to the Commission for School Board Excellence (2008), "the board and superintendent must therefore be held accountable for district performance. The requirement of accountability is essential to ensuring consistency of school system performance and to maintain a focus on improvement"(p. 27). Accountability is a basic function of the board of education. However, it is frequently an overlooked aspect of their work. In White Pigeon, the board spent too much time micromanaging and they failed to establish an effective accountability system.

The board of education is responsible to evaluate the superintendent on an annual basis. Under Public Act 336 of 2010, annual educator evaluations, including superintendent evaluations, are a requirement in the state of Michigan and evaluations must factor in student academic performance. In White Pigeon, the board did not have a formal evaluation process in place. The process was not defined, lacked goals and outcomes, and provided little value to the superintendent. According to DiPaola (2007),

"(superintendents) receive vague judgments on their performance based on subjective impressions of board members. These superintendents argue that such an evaluation does not help them grow professionally" (p. 1). Evaluations based on subjective observations provide little direction and encourage superintendents to spend more time and fidelity dealing with the soft issues in hopes of not creating ill-will or dissatisfied employees who complain. However, a thorough superintendent performance evaluation process can empower board members and create trust with the superintendent. DiPaola (2007) states that an effective evaluation, "adheres to legal and ethical standards, serves the best interests of the schools and students, is informative and useful, provides constructive feedback, is practical and produces valid, reliable data, free from bias" (p.2). Many superintendents welcome such an evaluation process because it addresses growth and encompasses by-in and support from the governance team.

According to Hyatt (2011), "the practice of inspiring a shared vision has a profound impact on employees and organizational performance" (p. 164). The National Association of School Boards (NASB) identified vision development as a core function of a board of education. As a result, effective governance teams spend time discussing the district's vision and communicating the vision whenever they can. Creating a shared vision takes perseverance, patience, and unrelenting communication. It is worth the effort. It brings people together around a common outcome. According to Hyatt (2011), "this shared vision creates "we" the organization instead of an "us" versus "them" and the organization will benefit" (p. 164). Developing and communicating a shared vision connects employees to the organization which can lead to feelings of perceived support at work (Hyatt, 2011, p. 164). Support and a common purpose need to be present

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at the governance team level for a shared vision to work. Board members need to understand the importance and support the superintendent in his or her work in this area. Hyatt (2011) also states that, "when the values, goals, mission, and vision of the organization are aligned with those of the employee, there is increased commitment and satisfaction with the organization" (p. 164).

The Center for Public Education (2011), states that "effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision" (p. 2). Goals are typically long-term and are monitored frequently for success. An effective governance team will see the district goals and vision to their completion making modifications as needed along the way. Waters and Marzano (2006) report that, "publically adopting broad five-year goals for achievement and instruction and consistently supporting these goals, both publically and privately, are examples of board-level actions that we found to be positively correlated with student achievement" (p. 12). This type of oversight comes from boards of education that are well trained and experienced in governance.

According to Waters and Marzano (2006), "Effective superintendents focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts" (p. 3). Goal setting can have positive effects on the entire school district. Goals provide a reason to stay focused and give your best effort. According to Anthony (2012), "Organizational goals give employees something to strive for in their daily tasks. If goals are tied to other external awards, such as group recognition or rewards, it can further improve the motivation level" (p. 1). Goal setting should be collaborative. Waters and Marzano (2006) state that, "effective superintendents include all relevant stakeholders, including central office staff, building-

level administrators, and board members in establishing non-negotiable goals for their districts" (p. 11). Goal development and attainment can have a positive impact on an organization. Goals can improve group cohesion and collaboration when employees realize the goals will only be reached when teamwork is present (Anthony, 2012). Goal setting is healthy when done right and can provide the focus and direction for daily activity. Working towards a common purpose elevates performance and investment.

Board member effectiveness does not happen by accident. A well-informed and well-trained board is absolutely essential (Martinelli, 2012). Effective board members also make a long-term commitment to be informed and well-educated in school governance. A component of board effectiveness is training and orientation provided in a timely manner (Martinelli, 2012). A structured induction program is critical so prospective board members are familiar with the vision, mission, goals and procedures of the organization. When new members are elected, they need immediate training and support and they need to be welcomed to the team. According to Tallman (1992), "relationships among members of the group and shared values or beliefs help a group function effectively" (p. 9.4). Outside resources can be of value. The Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) and the local St. Joseph County School Board Association are valuable training resources for the District involved in this study. Effective board members are not created by accident or overnight. The process of defining roles and what is important takes constant communication and reminders.

Advocacy for the district and school programs is a core function of the governance team. Board members and the superintendent need to be the positive connection between the school and community. Advocacy is essential for retaining the

progress that's been made in the past, and for building a foundation and network for the future (Dowd, 2010). I describe it as being "unrelenting, positive public relations people for the school district". A school board that focuses on advocacy can have a positive impact at all levels of the organization. According to Richardson (2005), "the ability of the superintendent to communicate with and leverage the support of the community through good public relations was viewed as a critical component in the decision making process" (p. 12). Advocacy shows confidence in the district staff and the work that they do. Issues, concerns, and program overhauls can be addressed in such a way that they are viewed as positive initiatives meant to improve an already quality program. To advocate and fail is disappointing; to fail to advocate at all is irresponsible (Dowd, 2010).

Positive public relations from the governance team is an important ingredient for a successful school district. Dr. Richardson (2005) states, "the quality of superintendent-school board relationships has a direct impact on the success of any school system through the power of good public relations" (p. 2). Positive or negative public relations happen in every conversation and in how individual members discuss school issues with others. These conversations reflect positively or negatively on the decisions or direction of the governance team. Positive public relations take a commitment from every individual on the governance team to make it a reality. The superintendent needs the public support of the school board to effectively lead the district. According to Dr. Richardson (2005), "when the superintendent and the school board invest maximum energy and effort into building and sustaining strong public relations important school improvement initiatives will move forward" (p. 19).

According to Richardson (2005), "the superintendent-board relationship is a public relationship that is observed by staff, parents, community members, and others and is subject to their perceptions and motives" (p. 9). If the relationship between the board and superintendent and others school leaders is perceived positively, it can generate public support. If not, it can undermine public confidence. It can impact the leadership of the superintendent. Richardson (2005) writes that, "strong leadership at the top can exist only when the superintendent and the board are able to work openly, candidly, and collaboratively as a team" (p. 10). The public relationship of a board-superintendent can play a major role in the success or failure of district initiatives or improvement plans. Richardson (2005) states, "there must be a strong commitment to making the superintendent-board relationship a top priority" (p. 7).

In contrast, school board conflict can have a negative impact on school district performance. School board members overstepping their roles or micromanaging the superintendent can disrupt the governance team. If board members do not know their role, this can be done unknowingly. According to Grissom (2010), "conflict may inhibit the board's ability to share, discuss, and evaluate information, harming the board's ability to consistently make good policy decisions" (p. 2). Conflict creates division amongst board members and they become more critical of each other. Grissom (2010) continues, "conflict among board members, then, negatively affects the relationship that boards have with their superintendents and makes productive collaboration more difficult" (p.2). Trust is lacking and board members and the superintendent are unsure of their position and afraid of surprises or being a target of attack. It is difficult to make tough and/or unpopular decisions knowing that support may be lacking. The governance team's

ability to lead is compromised and distant parts of the organization may be influenced by this lack of trust.

A cornerstone of effective leadership is the longevity of a superintendent's tenure in the district. Waters and Marzano (2006) writes that, "length of superintendent tenure in a district positively correlates to students achievement. These positive effects appear to manifest themselves as early as two years into a superintendent's tenure" (p. 4). Consistent leadership at the top has a positive effect on the culture and climate of the district. Leadership that is focused on long-term goals and committed to an effective improvement plan can make a difference at all levels of the organization. Waters and Marzano (2006) state that, "(school board members) need to support district- and school-level leadership in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, stability" (p. 21). School districts that have constant changeover at the top and are frequently altering or changing their direction, lack the laser-like focus necessary to create growth and improvement.

Board member leadership and length of service has a positive impact on school governance by supporting longevity at the superintendent level. According to Chance (1992), "long-term superintendents had much more stable boards than did those who experienced a rapid turnover rate. The typical long-term superintendent had board members with an average tenure of 19.4 years" (p. 5). Long-serving board members are more focused on the district goals and are not caught up in the management of the district. They are experienced in working with and supporting a superintendent and in their roles as board members. They know the right questions to ask and how to create the consistency of leadership necessary for a highly functional school system.

The average tenure of a board member is slightly over six years and a typical board member term is four years. According to Hess (2002), "The mean length of (school) board service among respondents is 6.7 years. A significant number of board members serve long enough (6 years or more) to become familiar with the issues and lend continuity to the board" (p. 5). This data is similar to what all nonprofit governance boards experience. According to the BoardSource Nonprofit Governance Index of 2010, on average, maximum tenure of a board member is 7.2 years. The average term of board service for nonprofit and school boards is also very similar. According to Hess (2002), "nearly two thirds of (school board members) serve a four year term" (p. 5). Three years is the most common term length for nonprofit board members according to the same BoardSource Governance survey.

Board member turnover should be kept to a minimum to ensure continuity. For example, the Fairfax (VA) County School District voted to seek permission from the General Assembly to stagger elected terms. In the 2004 election, the district saw six out of the twelve seats turn over (Hobbs, 2011, para. 9). This turnover caused the administration to spend a considerable amount of time supporting and training new board members. Another danger of high board turnover is single issue candidates. It is not uncommon to hear of candidates running for the board of education who are upset about a school closure or unpopular contract negotiations.

It is important to have a balanced board of education that can effectively work together. Tallman (1992) writes, "When a group (or a significant number of its members) is new, it will be uncertain of its role and function. Individuals within the group will depend heavily upon the group leaders, the sponsoring organization, and the

staff for guidance and direction" (p. 2). A new group is unsure of its purpose and what it is supposed to do. Board training becomes critical and the administrative team must spend time defining roles and explaining protocol. Time must be dedicated to the development of the governance team and learning the nuances of each member.

An effective board of education is balanced in its approach and has the right type of people in the right positions. Tenure alone is not the best measure. Canavan, Jones, and Potter (2004) address board service, "this means balancing tenure and skills so that the distribution of length of tenure across board members represents a reasonable mix of "old" and "new" thinking, and skill sets are appropriately diverse" (p. 42). A highly functioning team brings a variety of skills and experience to the table. With that in mind, a governance team should discuss a rotation plan and prepare for colleagues exiting the team. According to Martinelli (2012), boards should plan for an orderly rotation of members, "if the same people serve year after year, there is no way for new blood and new ideas to come into the board" (p. 2). With the recent change in legislation to every other year elections (PA 232 and 233 of 2011), the planning of an orderly board member rotation becomes more critical.

Table 2 below lists the six key findings from the Waters and Marzano (2006) paper and compares those findings to the factors examined in the literature review. The table also lists the major factors listed as concerns for White Pigeon Community Schools.

Table 2

Comparison of Waters and Marzano (2006) Findings to Concerns in White Pigeon

Waters & Marzano Findings	Major Factors Examined in the Literature Review	Major Factors Identified for this Study as Concerns for the District of White Pigeon
Collaborative goal setting	1. Effective superintendents include all stakeholders 2. Effective governance teams communicate vision and mission	1. No district-wide goal setting process 2. No district strategic plan
Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction	1. Effective governance teams define clear goals	1. No goal setting process in place 2. No district strategic plan
Board alignment and support of district goals	1. Effective boards publicly adopt five-year goals 2. Effective governance teams communicate vision and mission 3. Effective leadership can have profound impact on achievement 4. Superintendent tenure positively correlated to achievement	1. Lack of governance procedures and protocols 2. Poor board of education role definition 3. Micromanagement 4. Poor public relations 5. Lack of advocacy for school programs
Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction	1. Effective boards were policy and accountability driven 2. Boards and superintendent were accountable for performance 3. Goals include benchmarks and action plans	1. Poor accountability measures at all levels 2. Micromanagement 3. No goals or goal setting process in place
Use of resources to support achievement and instructional goals	1. Board procedures and standards of practice needed to minimize micromanagement	1. Lack of community support for millage issues draining general fund 2. Poor leadership 3. Micromanagement
Providing defined autonomy to principal	1. Not examined in literature review.	1. Structure not in place for defined autonomy for principal 2. Micromanagement

PROJECT INITIATIVE

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this initiative was to develop a dynamic White Pigeon Community Schools governance team that has the capacity to effectively lead the school district to increase the academic performance of the students and generate and cultivate public trust and support. The following goals were developed at the start of the project to guide the research and plan of action.

Goal #1. The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will establish the roles, responsibilities and procedures necessary to create an effective board-superintendent relationship that maximizes district leadership.

Goal #2. The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will project an image of professionalism, fairness, and efficiency to generate and maintain public trust.

Goal #3. The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will establish effective evaluation procedures and instruments at all levels of the organization to increase efficiency and accountability.

Goal #4. The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will develop and communicate a district vision and mission statement capable of providing direction to all internal and external district stakeholders.

ACTION PLAN

Below is a list of strategies and activities that were utilized to address the specific goal and outcome. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and most of the strategies overlap and serve multiple purposes.

Action Plan for GOAL #1: The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will establish the proper roles, responsibilities and procedures necessary to create an effective board-superintendent relationship that maximizes district leadership. Table 3 below lists the strategies, tasks, timeline, and responsibilities for the implementation of the action plan for Goal #1.

- The board of education and superintendent discussed and approved established standards of practice and protocols for board superintendent communication annually for the past three years. The board used the annual "retreat" in August of each year to discuss the protocols and procedures in detail. Periodically, as needed, the Board discussed proper meeting decorum and rules of order. Going forward, the plan is to continue this effort on an annual or as needed basis.

- The superintendent and board consulted with the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) for resources and information related to board governance and the recommended separation of board - superintendent roles. MASB was brought to the district in January of 2011 and board members have been encouraged to take Certified Boardmember Award (CBA) classes.

- We have increased the amount and frequency of board member training at the local and state level by offering the opportunity to attend or take online CBA

classes and encouraging participation in the county-wide school board
association.

- Communication of proper board governance via the monthly publication titled
"Board and Administrator".

Table 3

Breakdown of Action Plan with Timelines for Goal #1

Strategies	Tasks	Timelines	Responsibilities
Establish communication protocols	• Formal discussion • Board action to adopt document • Ongoing review • Individual and/or group discussions as needed	• Annually in August during board retreat • As needed to reinforce proper protocols • Review if communication is lacking	• Superintendent • Board members • Board president
Establish standards of practice	• Formal discussion • Board action to adopt document • Ongoing review • Individual and/or group discussions as needed	• Annually in August during board retreat • As needed to reinforce proper protocols	• Superintendent • Board members • Board president
Meeting decorum and rules of order	• Review annually • Discuss and refine current practice	• Annually in August during Board retreat • As needed when issues arise	• Superintendent • Board members
MASB training	• Encourage members to attend training • Bring MASB to White Pigeon	• MASB to White Pigeon in January of 2011 • Ongoing reminders	• Superintendent • Board members

Table 3—Continued

County-wide school board association	• Encourage members to attend biannual meetings • Participation of district representative on board	• October and January meetings • Summer and winter association board meetings	• Superintendent • Board members • District school board association representative
Board and Administrator publication	• Forward document to all members • Review and discuss as needed	• Monthly	• Superintendent • Board members

Action Plan for GOAL #2: The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will project an image of professionalism, fairness, and efficiency to generate and maintain the public trust. Table 4 below lists the strategies, tasks, timeline, and responsibilities for the implementation of the action plan for Goal #2.

- The board held an annual retreat in August of each year and conducted periodic discussions at meetings and work sessions to establish and define standards of practice, protocols, and decorum for board governance. In addition, the superintendent/board president held small group and individual discussions as needed.

- The district increased the amount and frequency of board member training at the local and state level.

- We stressed the importance of the board speaking with one voice and advocating for school programs in board protocols and procedures. The board needed constant reminders of the "one voice" commitment and to criticize privately and praise publically.

- We established a specific chain of command and governance process for handling

  formal and informal constituent complaints based on suggestions from the

  Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB).

Table 4

Breakdown of Action Plan with Timelines for Goal #2

Strategies	Tasks	Timelines	Responsibilities
Establish communication protocols	- Formal discussion - Board action to adopt document - Ongoing review - Individual and/or group discussions as needed	- Annually in August during board retreat - As needed to reinforce proper protocols - Review if communication is lacking	- Superintendent - Board members - Board president
Establish standards of practice	- Formal discussion - Board action to adopt document - Ongoing review - Individual and/or group discussions as needed	- Annually in August during board retreat - As needed to reinforce proper protocols	- Superintendent - Board members - Board president
MASB training	- Encourage members to attend training - Bring MASB to White Pigeon	- MASB to White Pigeon in January of 2011 - Ongoing reminders	- Superintendent - Board members
County-wide school board association	- Encourage members to attend biannual meetings - Participation of district representative on board	- October and January meetings - Summer and winter association board meetings	- Superintendent - Board members - District school board association representative

Table 4—Continued

Commitment to speak in one voice	• Formal discussion • Board action to adopt document • Ongoing review • Individual and/or group discussions as needed	• Annually in August during board retreat • As needed to reinforce proper protocols • Review if communication is lacking	• Superintendent • Board members • Board president
Formal chain of command	• Establish process for handling complaints • Administrative chain of command • Practicing and reinforcing chain of command	• Annually in August during board retreat • Annually with administrative team and leadership team • Reminders as needed	• Superintendent • Board members • Administrators • Leadership team members

Action Plan for GOAL #3: The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will establish effective evaluation procedures and instruments at all levels of the organization to increase efficiency and accountability. Table 5 below lists the strategies, tasks, timeline, and responsibilities for the implementation of the action plan for Goal #3.

- The district instituted an effective measurement tool (NWEA) that will provide summative and formative evaluation data for the K-12 instructional staff three times annually.

- The superintendent adopted robust evaluation instruments for leadership and administrative team members for all annual reviews.

- The district instituted a teacher evaluation process that aligns with the state evaluation expectations to include the use of student data as a significant measure of performance.

- The board established district and learning goals for the superintendent.

Table 5

Breakdown of Action Plan with Timelines for Goal #3

Strategies	Tasks	Timelines	Responsibilities
Create evaluation instruments and processes for administrators and leadership team members	• Research best practice • Design evaluation instrument • Match job description to instrument • Establish process and timelines	• Research instruments 2009-10 • Design instruments spring 2010 • Implement process for 2010-11	• Superintendent • Administrators • Leadership team members
Revise teacher evaluation instruments and processes to meet the new state requirements for teacher evaluation	• Research best practice • Design evaluation instruments • Consult with WPEA • Negotiate teacher contract • Train teachers and evaluators	• Research instruments 2009-10 • Design instruments spring 2011 • Negotiate the evaluation tool into contract summer of 2011 • Implement process for 2011-12	• Superintendent • Administrators • Teachers
Create evaluation instrument and process for the superintendent	• Bring MASB to White Pigeon • Work with MASB evaluation instruments • Include student achievement in evaluation	• MASB to White Pigeon in Jan. of 2011 • Board and superintendent review instruments 2010-11 • Establish evaluation process 2011-12	• Superintendent • Board members

Table 5—Continued

Institute NWEA testing for all students K-11	• Train staff on administration • Train teachers on data analysis • Align curriculum to the content expectations • Administer three times per year	• Begin process in the fall of 2011 • Administer first test in January of 2012 • Familiarize staff with the testing process and data analysis during the 2011-12 school year • Full implementation 2012-13	• Superintendent • District administrators • Teachers • Support staff
Establish a culture of accountability at all levels of the organization	• Formal discussion at board level • Administrative decisions on accountability process • Ongoing review • Formal evaluations conducted	• Annually in August during board retreat • Administrative work on all evaluation instruments and processes 2009-10 • Implementation for 2010-12	• Superintendent • Board members • All district staff

Action Plan for GOAL #4: The White Pigeon Community School's governance team will develop and communicate a district vision and mission statement capable of providing direction to all internal and external stakeholders. Table 6 below lists the strategies, tasks, timeline, and responsibilities for the implementation of the action plan for Goal #4.

• The superintendent held numerous community meetings to gather opinions and input about the goals and direction of the school district. A facilitator from the Michigan Leadership Institute (MLI) conducted the meetings in 2012.

- The superintendent conducted three SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) activities with multiple stakeholder groups across the district.

- The administrative team developed strategic change initiatives to provide direction in decision-making.

- In September of 2012, the district conducted a customer satisfaction survey from MASB to gather feedback and direction from district staff, students, parents, community members, and families electing to send their child(ren) to a neighboring school via schools of choice.

- The district conducted a formal district-wide strategic planning process, facilitated by the Michigan Leadership Institute (MLI), designed to develop a district vision, mission statement, goals and cores values.

Table 6

Breakdown of Action Plan with Timelines for Goal #4

Strategies	Tasks	Timelines	Responsibilities
SWOT analysis with district stakeholder groups to develop strategic change initiatives	- Conduct multiple SWOT analysis with different groups - Use SWOT to establish change initiatives - Communicate work to the Board of education	2009-10 school year - Create change initiatives in 2010 - Communicate with board - ongoing	- Superintendent - Administrators - District staff - Community

Table 6—Continued

Develop a formal strategic plan for the district	• Conduct forums to gather input • Create district vision, mission, guiding principles, and promise • Develop district goals and targets • Establish benchmarks and baseline data • Implement plan	• Public forum conducted fall of 2012 • Vision, mission, guiding principles, and promise developed 2012-13 • Targets, goals, benchmarks and data developed 2012-13 • Implement plan 2013-14	• Superintendent • Administrators • Teachers • Staff • Community • Board of Education
Administer a customer satisfaction survey to be used to develop the strategic plan	• Contract with MASB to administer survey • Develop questions and format • Survey community, staff, students, board members, parents • Report and disaggregate data	• MASB hired in August of 2012 • Survey conducted September 2012 • Reporting of data ongoing	• Superintendent • Board members • All staff • Parents • Community • Students
Establish a culture of accountability at all levels of the organization	• Formal discussion at board level • Administrative decisions on accountability process • Ongoing review • Formal evaluations conducted	• Annually in August during board retreat • Administrative work on all evaluation instruments and processes 2009-10 • Implementation for 2010-12	• Superintendent • Board members • All district staff

The success of the action plan will be measured using the following indicators of success. Multiple data sources will be used to document progress and modify the plan as needed.

• Student enrollment

- Schools of choice data

- Success rate of future school elections

- Feedback from board members and administrators about governance team effectiveness

- Establishment and successful practice of governance team communication protocols

- Establishment and successful practice of governance team standards of practice

- Development of goals and evaluation processes for all employees, including superintendent

- Increase in marketing and positive public relations

- Development and implementation of a district strategic plan that includes vision, mission, guiding principles, promise, goals and targets

- Increase of formal board training and professional development

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It was necessary to establish the proper roles, responsibilities and procedures of all governance team members to enable effective policy creation while leaving the operational decision-making role to the superintendent. A clear distinction between policy-making and oversight and the superintendent's role of leading District operations needed to be established. This concept was foreign to the Board. New governance strategies needed to be introduced and the established behaviors of micromanagement needed to be relearned. Also, the superintendent needed to establish credibility and trust while transitioning into the new position.

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In August of 2008, one of my first tasks as superintendent was to work with the board and establish standards of practice and protocols for board superintendent communication to guide governance team behavior. This was a new concept to all the members and a good first step. The guidelines defined roles of board members and separated policy making from operations. For example, the document contained the statement, "we (the board) will emphasize planning, policy making, and public relations leaving management to the administration". It was nice to see in print but to define that in practice was the true challenge. There were frequent conversations with board members discussing the protocols and defining boundaries. Some board members understood but others were skeptical of the changes and felt that I was infringing upon their authority as a board member. It would take a constant campaign to change the established behavior and it would take time.

The process of defining roles and responsibilities and getting board members to accept and follow them has been a constant struggle and continues to be a struggle to this day. Every August, the governance team met to review and revise the established standards of practice and protocols for board superintendent communication which serves as guide to governance team behavior. These protocols are discussed annually and more frequently as needed. As a result of these discussions, the team has made progress. For example, two board members have taken it upon themselves to state their role publically and make it clear that the superintendent has the authority to determine staffing levels and assignments. However, every so often we still get into debates over the role of board members and their desire to influence the operations of the district. When that happens,

it must be addressed publically or privately as a group or individually depending on the circumstances.

In the summer of 2010, three Board members attended formal board training through the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB). All board members were encouraged to attend the MASB training and the training was paid for by our county-wide school board association. A new White Pigeon board president was sworn in on July 7, 2010, and the previous Board president chose to no longer serve on the board of education. In the fall of 2010, the board president and I attended the two day superintendent/board president workshop sponsored by MASB in Lansing. The training was extremely valuable as much information pertaining to defined roles and responsibilities leading to improved effectiveness were discussed. The information was well received and my new board president and I formed a partnership that would benefit us in the years to come. As a result of this training, the new board president understood the role of the board and superintendent and how important these roles are to effective district governance. Two other board members attended a class sponsored by MASB titled "Introduction to School Board Service" the same day. The experience was enlightening to both and they have mentioned what they learned at the board table.

It was difficult to get more board members to attend training outside the district on their own time. As a result, I decided to bring MASB to White Pigeon to review basic boardsmenship with the entire board of education. In January of 2011, Mary Kerwin, MASB Adjunct Consultant, presented a three hour workshop covering the essentials of effective governance teams. She discussed board roles, responsibilities and relationships, the importance of vision and mission development, and the superintendent evaluation

process. The workshop was beneficial and impacted our ability to effectively govern the district for the benefit of the students. The inner workings of the board changed and the administration was able to more clearly focus on operations as a result of the board focusing on vision, structure, accountability, and advocacy.

Over the past four years, board members have been encouraged to participate in the St. Joseph County School Board Association biannual training sessions. The county-wide school board association meets twice a year to discuss issues pertinent to school board members. Prior to every meeting, the association hosts a new board member orientation designed to welcome and inform board members new to the position. In addition, new board members are assigned a mentor from another county school district.

Two of the seven current board members participated in the new board member workshops. Four of the seven current members attended at least one county-wide school board association meeting. Board members have been encouraged to take Certified Boardmember Award (CBA) classes on their own. Three of the current members have taken CBA classes and one board member received the Certified Boardmember Award from the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB). She completed all nine 100 level CBA classes and received certification in January of 2012. She is the first board member from White Pigeon to receive MASB Certification.

Board members are constantly reminded and encouraged to complete MASB CBA classes. The classes are beneficial and provide a framework for service. It has been difficult to get veteran board members to see the usefulness of such activities but it has been much easier to influence new members to get involved with MASB. If new members continue to get formal board training, it will become the norm instead of the

exception. My goal is to make board member certification a part of the culture and expectation of board service.

Board member training is an ongoing and critical part of my action plan. In October of 2010, I subscribed to the monthly publication titled "Board and Administrator. It is a "how to" guide on building a strong working relationship with your board while educating them on good board practices. The publication provides practical solutions for common board-management issues. It addresses roles and responsibilities, micromanagement, and proper procedures for dealing with complaints. The list of topics addressed is extensive and every month I get a two page newsletter that I "snail mail" to each board member. This publication is an easy read and the titles are attention grabbing. The topics in this newsletter tend to address issues we are currently dealing with such as budget (in March) or hiring (in June). I also receive an eight page guide for administrators that reminds and reinforces behaviors superintendents should be focusing on to improve board governance.

Since the subscription, the "newsletter' has been brought up in conversations at the board table. Board members have mentioned articles relating to topics of discussion and give the board direction on how to handle issues needing their attention. More importantly, it reinforces much of what they have been told. It adds another credible source that makes my information that much more believable.

The membership of the board of education has changed since my arrival. Three board members are in their second or third term while four board members are in their first term. The new board members took over for three departing members who left the board after multiple terms of service. It is a good mix of experienced and inexperienced

members. Three new members come from a business/executive background. One is a banker, another runs the human resource department for a medium size company, and another is a college dean. It appears that most of the new members will run for a second term. If that is the case we will have a seasoned and experienced board in a few years. We have focused on getting the right people to run for the board of education. I work in cooperation with current board members to identify and recruit qualified individuals for open seats. We have set the informal expectation that all new members serve for a minimum of two terms and get CBA certified.

Of the seven board members who hired me, only three remain. One of the three will leave the board in December of 2012. The board turn-over has been good because it brought a mix of new ideas and brought people to the board who understood the value of good board governance. However, board member retention is important. I often communicate the need for consistency and the new members of the board have committed for at least two terms. The board is starting to work well together as a team and they understand effective governance.

For the 2011-12 school year, the board established formal goals for the superintendent. This may not seem like a big step, but this was the first time in many years that the board established such goals. The board participated in the goal development process and focused on district outcomes. The goals are listed below and were approved on November 16, 2011.

> GOAL: The superintendent will implement a marketing plan to provide positive public relations for the school district. The plan will include a comprehensive pre-sinking fund campaign designed to involve and inform the voters of the district.

GOAL: The superintendent will engage the district in a comprehensive 3-5 year strategic planning process that involves key district stakeholders and addresses multiple areas of the school district. (Begin Fall 2012)

GOAL: The superintendent will provide leadership and oversight of the instructional program in multiple areas such as MiBLSi, common core, assessment, and evaluation to increase student achievement levels throughout the district.

The goals were developed in concert with issues facing the district at the time. As stated, the second goal is to develop a 3-5 year strategic plan which is the result of the board now understanding the importance of long-term planning. In addition, the goals are part of the superintendent's annual evaluation process.

For my first two years in the district, the superintendent evaluation process was haphazard and unpredictable. The board had no formal evaluation tool and no way of examining data or outcomes. At the March meeting, the board would typically conduct a closed session and would supply positive or negative comments which were not supported by data. There was little or no reflection on the accomplishments for the year and no way to measure my performance or how well I addressed district issues. The process was of little value to me and allowed for random issues to influence the discussion. The process was not built on trust, accountability, and professional communication but rather rumor and innuendo.

The board developed a superintendent evaluation tool designed to provide professional feed back and accountability in December of 2010. The evaluation instrument closely matched the version suggested by the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB). This instrument focused the board on the performance of the superintendent and less on other employees. The evaluation tool caused the board to

think long-term and focus on outcomes, not process. The evaluation tool contains eight categories: relationship with the board, community relations, superintendent/staff relations, business and finance, educational leadership, personal qualities, student achievement, and achievement of goals determined by the board of education. The evaluation tool encouraged a fair and objective measure of district progress and reminded the board of the importance of effective district governance.

The new evaluation process for the superintendent set the tone for increased accountability and oversight of all district programs. The development and implementation of evaluation instruments and processes was started in the spring of 2008. Leadership and administrative evaluation instruments were reviewed and revised and contract modifications were made as needed. The evaluation instrument was developed based on the job descriptions of the leadership team members and the expected outcomes of their performance. The last few years we have adjusted and revised the document as needed. All evaluations of the leadership and administrative team members were done by the superintendent annually since the 2008-09 school year. The board was not part of the development of the evaluation document or the evaluations themselves. However, the board was kept informed of the evaluation and goal setting process twice a year.

The expiration of the White Pigeon Education Association (WPEA) contract in the summer of 2011 and the recent changes to tenure laws allowed the district to modify and alter the teacher evaluation process. Significant changes were made to the entire process and it was modeled after the work of Charlotte Danielson. The evaluation instrument included the use of student achievement data as a significant element. The

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new instrument aligns with the recent legislation, Public Act 336, passed in 2011 that reformed teacher tenure. Along with the standard MEAP and ACT/MME testing, the district instituted Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) instruments for grades K-12. Data from the NWEA can be used both from a formative and summative perspective. The NWEA provides more accurate and immediate data than the other state (MEAP and MME/ACT) assessments. The NWEA assessment is administered in the fall, winter and spring at all grades K through 11th. The scores are returned in days so the teachers have immediate access to the test results. The tests are administered in the fall to establish baseline data and the winter testing measures progress. The spring assessment compares all three scores and provides feedback for the entire year of academic growth. The NWEA is aligned with the new common core national standards. Merit pay was also added for instructional staff based on the results of their evaluation and other components of job performance.

The board of education did not play a formal role in the development of the leadership, administrative, or instructional staff evaluations, however, they were kept informed. The board was encouraged that measures of accountability at all levels of the organization were being implemented. Evaluations are the instruments to document growth and reward outstanding performance. More importantly, there was a process and procedure in place to evaluate all district programs. We were becoming more data and outcomes driven.

The board and district employees were not familiar with nor had they ever participated in vision and strategic planning development and the informal feedback I received was that the process was not valued by district leadership. We started having

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discussions regarding the process and conducted a few SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and it generated thoughtful discussions at the staff, administration, and board level. We decided to involve the community so a district-wide task force was formed and two forums were conducted in December and January of the 2009-10 school year. The discussion was effective and it generated valuable dialogue in moving the district forward. As a result of the feedback, the administrative team developed eight strategic change initiatives that the task force supported. The change initiatives included district provided daycare, world language immersion at the elementary, high school laptop program, and the establishment of a district endowment fund.

The eight strategic change initiatives were brought to the board of education and they were receptive to the concepts. Two board members participated in the two public forums so they were able to share some of the dialogue that occurred at the meetings. The change initiatives were well-received and the board saw the benefits of looking ahead and planning strategically for the district's future. The board was beginning to see that strategic planning was not something we could do but it was something that was absolutely necessary. Also, the board saw the administrative team use their knowledge and expertise and take the lead in the development of the change initiatives.

In the fall of 2012, we began the process of strategic planning. The impressive part is that it was board driven. The board now understands the importance of planning and put the need to develop a strategic plan in the superintendent's 2011-12 and 2012-13 goals. As a result, we contracted with the Michigan Leadership Institute (MLI) to develop a district-wide strategic plan. This is the first time in recollection that the district

has engaged in this process. We have contracted the services of the Michigan

Association of School Boards (MASB) to assist us with a customer satisfaction survey.

The survey was administered in September of 2012 to students, parents, staff and

community members. The data from the survey will help us determine strengths and

weaknesses of the instructional program and community opinions on the overall

performance of the school district. The results of the survey will also be used in the

development of the district vision, mission, promise and guiding principles.

Student enrollment at White Pigeon Community Schools has remained steady

since 2010. We are pleased with that statistic and it reverses the trend of enrollment loss.

The district had 789 students enrolled in the fall of 2010 and it has 789 students enrolled

for the fall of 2012. One encouraging trend is that the enrollment in the earlier grades is

increasing. For example, there are 67 kindergarteners enrolled in 2012. That represents

the largest kindergarten class in quite a few years. Graph 2 below shows the district

enrollment over the past two years.

Schools of choice numbers are also trending to the positive. The ten year average

for loss of students from 2000 to 2009 was 34.7 students per year. The average from

2010 to 2012 is 27.0 students lost. In fact, in the second semester of the 2010-11 school

year, White Pigeon had a net gain of 8 students. That was the first time in the history of

school of choice in St. Joseph County, 1996-97, that White Pigeon had a net gain of

students. Parents and community members are speaking highly of the school district and

that is making a difference in retaining or attracting students who live in the area. Graph

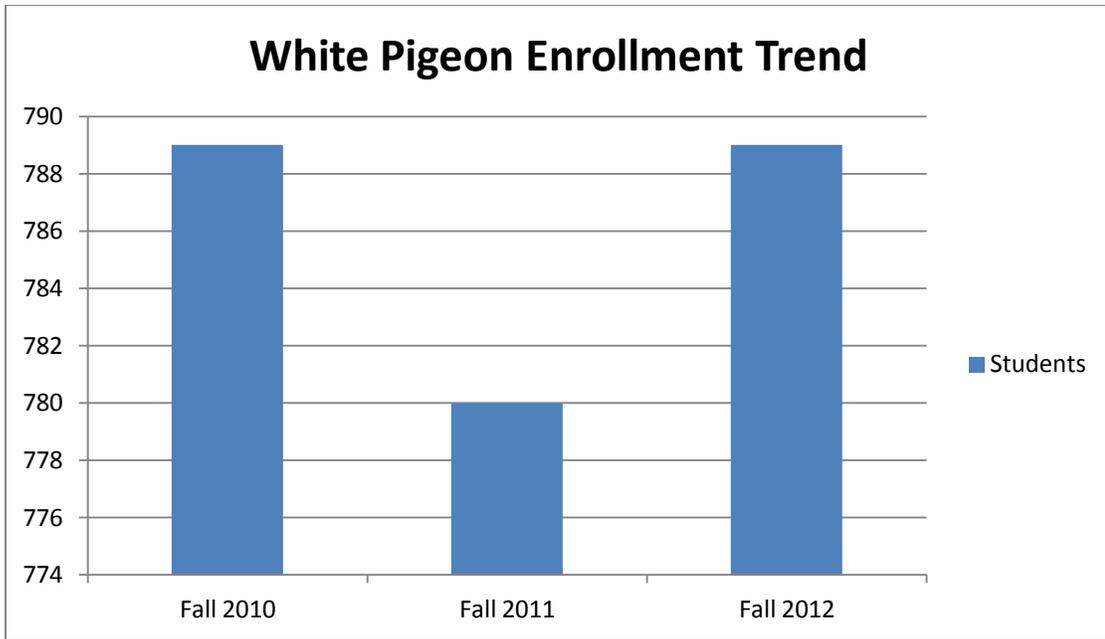4 below shows the net loss of schools of choice students from 2010-2012.

Figure 3. Bar Graph Showing Fall Student Enrollment from 2010-2012.
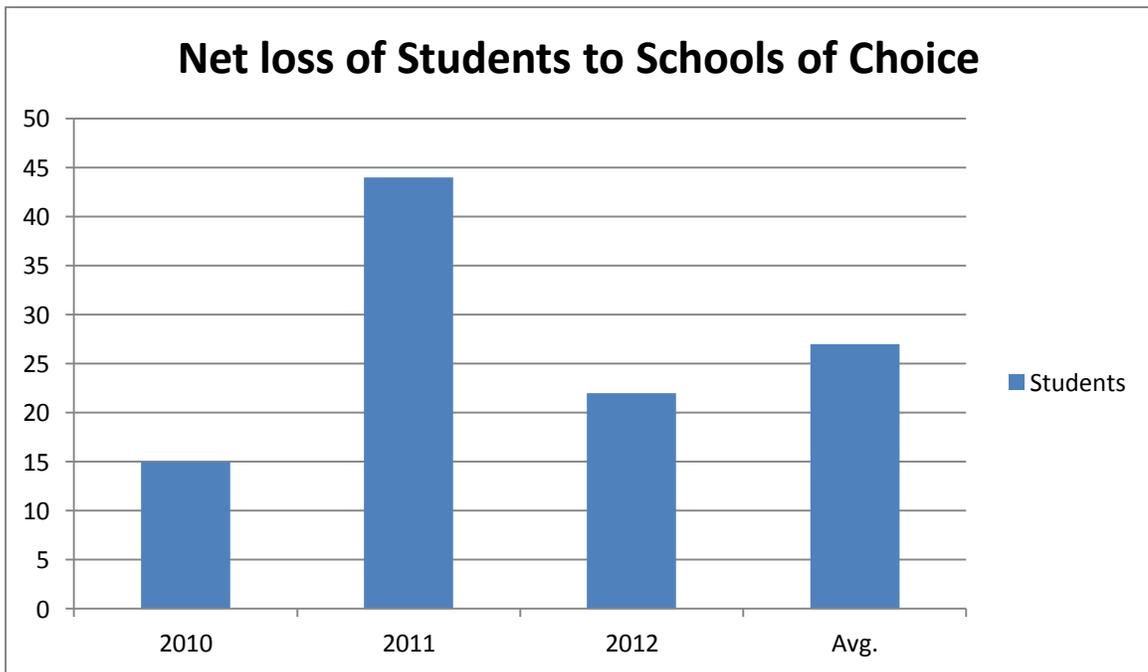

Figure 4. Bar Graph Showing the Net Loss Of Students to Schools of Choice from 2010-2012.

The most encouraging data is from the recent school bond election. In March of 2012, the school district asked the voters to approve a 3.0 mill sinking fund renewal for 5 years. An overwhelming 69% of the voters approved the proposal, more than a 2 to 1 margin of support (see Table #7 below). In the village and township of White Pigeon, the approval rate was 80%. This community support is unheard of in the past 20 years. The strong "yes" vote was a breath of fresh air for the district and a positive result of the work being done by district employees. A group of parents worked diligently on the passage of the proposal and it was truly a community event from the start. Since the election, people feel more positive about our future as a district. Chief Pride is alive and well.

Table 7

Voting Results of the Most Recent Ballot Proposal in 2012.

DATE	BALLOT ISSUE	RESULT	VOTE
5/8/12	Sinking fund – 3 mills for 5 years	Passed	595-271

The school district governance team has made progress towards effective leadership in the areas of vision, structure, accountability, and advocacy. There have been many positive trends worth mentioning that reflect the work that has begun. The Board of Education and superintendent have undertaken new initiatives designed to provide a healthy structure of governance and administration of the school district. The changes have been well received by both internal and external stakeholders.

CONCLUSIONS

The work we started this fall on vision, mission, guiding principles and promise development has created excitement and renewed focus. The district-wide staff meeting held in August was well received and there were many positive comments shared. The work of the group focused on what makes White Pigeon unique, what is our brand. It also brought up some great discussion on what we want to become and where are we headed. In the past few weeks, we have held small group discussions to review the current drafts of the district vision, mission, guiding principles and promise. The excitement is evident and people have engaged in the process. The board of education has also been involved. Their oversight and support of the work is noticed and appreciated by all. It is clear that the governance team's focus on vision is paying dividends and has been positively received by the staff and community.

The focus of the board of education is more on outcomes and less on the operations of the district. Less micromanagement is occurring and board conversations center around leadership, direction, and performance. Administrative team members report a positive climate and less interference, directly or indirectly, from board politics. A formal chain of command has been established and followed.

The goals of this project have been met in some capacities and growth is ongoing. The governance team has cultivated and increased public trust and support. That is evidenced by the overwhelming support of the sinking fund renewal millage. In the MASB survey administered in September of 2012, 94.8% of respondents had a positive or neutral overall opinion of White Pigeon Community Schools. In addition, the district

has seen an increase in private donations such as $25,000 for a new sprinkler system for the football field and $22,000 to paint the high school gymnasium.

The leadership demonstrated by the governance team has increased the image of the school district in the community. Over the past few years, we have instituted a marketing program designed to improve the image and perception of the district. That program has included a new newsletter, mailings to all residents, and placemats promoting the school in local restaurants. The district significantly enhanced its website making it more attractive and appealing and has a Facebook page with over 1,100 followers. In the MASB survey administered in September of 2012, 78% of respondents felt that school board members project a positive image of the school district and 98.9% had a positive or neutral experience after participating in a White Pigeon Community School meeting or activity.

However, the process of leadership development never ends. Working with a board of education is a work in progress. It is a constant campaign to define boundaries and to keep board members focused on the right things. Every now and then we ignore protocol and procedure and we are reminded that governance team leadership is critical to the success of the school district. In January of 2013, we will welcome one new member to the board of education and the process of education and induction will start all over.

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