

Are You Mired in Minutiae?



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This is a common malady of school boards, especially following an election. Take a breath . . . it is not a criticism, just an observation. Until new board members learn their role from a governance oversight perspective, getting into the weeds is a natural part of that learning process. Just discovering how to actually lead as a governing unit, combining individual leadership styles, makes the board governance oversight task even more difficult to learn and board turnover makes it equally difficult to sustain.

New board members and sometimes entire boards periodically get caught up in the details of a project or a matter under consideration. It can be difficult not to. Still, uninvited incursions into administrative or day-to-day matters, however well intended, disrupts the line-of-authority, and can confuse who is actually accountable and to whom. In an ultimate authority accountability model, most often followed in traditional K-12 public education, the responsibility for success, or failure, always resides with superintendents. However, that model breaks down appreciably when board members step over the line between leadership and management.

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An occasional foray beyond the accepted governance oversight boundary is typically easy to forgive and a gentle nudging is usually all it takes to set things right. However, when board member oversight boundaries are continually stretched, or broken altogether, a serious leadership and management situation evolves that can be much more difficult to correct. Suggesting that these breaches are harmless, what is expected, part of what board members should do, etc. are textbook misrepresentations of board member roles and responsibilities, not just here in Indiana, but across the nation.

It may not be an easy task to stay out of the minutiae and collectively evaluate and measure success from a perspective that distance provides, especially if your own profession or personal system for accomplishing objectives requires that your approach be hands-on. But you are already ahead of the issue if you acknowledge it and are resolved to step back and allow the system to perform. You might be amazed at how well things run without outside interference.