
Foreword

Frank Pugh

Past President,
National School Boards Association

Because of the privilege of serving as President of National School Boards Association in 2018–19, I have had the benefit of meeting and working with school board trustees and superintendents from every part of this great country. Education is changing. And I believe it's changing for the good. But with changes come incredible difficulty and challenges. Governance, school boards, and superintendents are on the front line of meeting those challenges. Some are doing a great job; others are struggling.

The Governance Core by Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan is the first book that captures not only the nature of the challenges but also the characteristics of highly successful school board trustees and superintendents working together. Campbell and Fullan don't lecture or preach, and they don't just give the traditional lists of dos and don'ts (although there are a few of those). *The Governance Core* goes much deeper into the heart of effective governance.

Perhaps most powerful is the emphasis on the characteristics of highly effective trustees. Effective trustees, to a person, operate with a governance mindset. They understand that governance is much more than just coming to meetings and voting. As a 28-year experienced local school district trustee, I found the four essential characteristics of the governance mindset outlined in the book—systems thinking, strategic focus, deep learning, and managing public manner—not only on target but reassuring that someone has finally put it all on paper. Campbell and Fullan's framework captures what many of us see in our colleagues who are having a powerful impact on the children in their districts.

X THE GOVERNANCE CORE

I especially recommend the chapters on coherence, the moral imperative, and welcoming new school board members. It is important for new trustees to hit the ground with all the tools they need to begin their governance journey. The book contains many practical suggestions for helping make the transition for elected trustees, from campaigning to governing. Having a well-thought-out plan for onboarding new trustees also helps veteran board members review and recommit to effective governance practices. The analysis and recommendations throughout the book will help all trustees and superintendents examine their own roles, especially their roles in relationships when they are working together for maximum effect.

I found the extensive discussion of a shared moral imperative driving a unity of purpose on the board an essential part of effective governance. Campbell and Fullan emphasize the importance of developing a cohesive, unified board, with superintendent and board working closely together. I particularly found the identification and discussion of the challenges boards face in developing this coherence well developed and authentic. Almost all boards at one time or another are faced with one or more of these challenges. *The Governance Core* takes ten of these, one by one, and provides succinct practical suggestions for resolving them.

What many of us with years on a school board understand is that governing effectively requires structure and discipline. Campbell and Fullan show how governance principles, norms, and protocols adopted by the board can provide the necessary infrastructure to govern effectively. They further discuss four governance tools—discussion meetings, governance handbooks, board self-evaluation, and board continuing governance education—that supply the practical, hands-on assistance that every board member needs.

This book is a must-read for every school board trustee, superintendent, and anyone seeking to understand how effective governance works. Read this book individually and together. You will become much more effective as governance leaders, and your students, parents, and educators will benefit immensely.

Foreword

John Malloy

Director of Education,
Toronto District School Board

It is amazing to me that something as crucial as effective governance is not written about more often. Many assumptions and perspectives exist about what effective governance is, but seldom do we see this important topic addressed with such candor and clarity. Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan have provided great insights for us to consider in this inspiring text on the governance core.

As a Director of Education (superintendent) at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), working with 22 elected trustees and staff, students, and parents in 583 schools, I know firsthand how critical effective governance is as our board strives to fulfill the strategic commitments we have made. When I am working cohesively with the board, we can achieve so much. That said, this unity and cohesion would be fleeting if we were not intentional about how we work together—the governance core that is formulated by Campbell and Fullan does just that. The main message is that the focus of governance must be on system improvement. We need to make our schools places where our students can achieve great heights while also growing as healthy individuals. Our work as educators, supported by the board, needs to add value to every aspect of our children’s school experience. We know that challenges sometimes exist in our schools and in our school systems, and inequities can also prevail. Part of adding value to the lives of each and every student in our school district means that courageous leadership is also required to name what isn’t working, to remove obstacles and barriers, and to monitor the commitments that have

XII THE GOVERNANCE CORE

been made. Campbell and Fullan have helped us think about how to be intentional in terms of effective governance so that at the end of the day our students thrive.

It is essential that superintendents working with their board understand how to support the board to be strategic and to focus on the entire system. In other words, the superintendent must see the work of the board as central to the success of the district. Similarly, it is equally critical for the board to have confidence in the expertise of the superintendent. Without this confidence, effective governance erodes. I especially appreciated that the authors' attention centers on the importance of the board being informed, focused, and engaged. I also appreciated reading how trust can be eroded particularly if a trustee might believe that the staff is not providing appropriate, complete, or accurate information for example. This perspective around information could lead to difficult dynamics at board meetings. Campbell and Fullan provide important considerations to avoid something like this happening.

I very much valued the emphasis on the moral imperative stated throughout this book that drives our joint work between the superintendent and the board. This moral imperative is always focused on students. It is also essential for our public to have confidence in the work that is happening in schools and on school boards. This confidence is enhanced when the board and superintendent are seen as modeling effective governance practices. Most important, this confidence is strengthened when schools and school boards are fulfilling their most important goal, which is to provide the very best learning environment for each and every student. The governance core discussed in this book will certainly help boards and superintendents fulfill this privileged goal of service to all of our students. I recommend that trustees and superintendents read this book together—and act on the key messages.