



Conflict Scenario Activity - Participant Hand-out.

Scenario 1 – What is the real issue?

Marion Fong, a new school trustee from a small board, was surprised to receive an angry email message from a parent with children in the board’s middle school because she was unaware of any issues brewing. In the email, the parent complained about the lack of suitable basketball equipment in the school’s play yard for her daughter, whom she described as “an up-and-coming basketball star with a great future”, to use during and after school to practice her skills. She complained that the parents in the school had raised funds for the school’s sports programs and now wondered why the money wasn’t being spent on basketball equipment. The parent asked Marion, as her elected representative to “get to the bottom of it” and “direct the principal to have basketball nets installed immediately”. She also referred to a larger, on-going problem with the principal, whom, she said, “never listens to the parents” and “doesn’t do as we say.”

Notes & questions:



Scenario 2 - Internal Conflicts

The school board meeting was running late into the evening again and people were tired and frustrated. There were opposing opinions about pending budget decisions and several trustees felt very strongly about the issues. Tempers were flaring, voices were getting louder and trustees were deadlocked. Because the public was keenly interested in the debate, arguments and outbursts made the local television news on a nightly basis. Conflicts over competing points of view were becoming personal disputes, and both the effectiveness and credibility of the board was suffering as a result. Trustees' phones were ringing off the hook as members of the community called to criticize the board and express their disappointment in the behaviour and effectiveness of the trustees. As a trustee with a few years experience, Jeanne Thibeault decided she would like to help resolve the conflict and improve the working atmosphere and productivity of the board, but wasn't sure about how to proceed.

Notes & questions:



Scenario 3 - Trouble in the Board Room

Trustees Carol Henderson and Marla Gibson disagree on just about everything. Their inability to get along and constant sniping at each other are disrupting meetings and undermining the work of the Board. The Chair has been unable to deal with the situation effectively. Other trustees are fed up with their behaviour and even the media and district constituents are becoming aware that animosity is an issue at the Board table.

Notes & questions:

Good Governance for School Boards
Trustee Professional Development Program





Scenario 4 - School Council Strife

Charlie Peterson has served as a school trustee for his large urban board for two terms. He is known for his even-handed approach and ability to work well with people in the interest of students and their success. Some of the newer trustees look to Charlie for support and guidance when they are faced with challenges. Paula White, the chair of the school council at White Cove P.S., was struggling with the responsibilities of her role. The parents in the school were highly politicized around some of the issues in the school, especially the replacement of an experienced and well-liked principal by a “rookie”, and the loss of the school’s librarian due to funding cuts. Different groups of parents in the community had started petitions about these issues, more parents were coming to school council meetings to speak out, and a real split was developing in both the parent community and the school council. Parents were also complaining that the principal was not advocating strongly enough for the school. The more vocal parents sometimes voiced their complaints openly at student pick-up time or when they came in to volunteer, which was causing stress for teachers. Paula called Charlie to ask him to attend the next school council meeting to help parents understand the issues from a board perspective and to calm the waters so that the school council could work more effectively and cooperatively with the principal.

Notes & questions: