

A handbook to keep School Board trustees focused on important work

BARRY RUEGER

NOVEMBER 1, 2018

When four new trustees join the North Vancouver School Board of Education this month, they'll have the advantage of a brand new Trustee handbook.

The 69-page handbook aims to explain the things that trustees need to know, including explanations of how meetings are run, a detailed explanation of "conflict of interest," and a list of more than 100 acronyms that they might encounter while doing their work.

The four years of the previous Board were notable for ongoing personal conflicts among trustees, culminating this month with a complaint by outgoing trustee Susan Skinner alleging sexual harassment by a colleague as well as alleging workplace bullying by other trustees. The handbook was one of several recommendations from governance consultant Lee Southern, who was appointed by Ministry of Education to assist the board in resolving their organizational problems.

The handbook was written over the course of 10 months by a school board staff member, with direction and input by trustees. It tries to answer questions that trustees might have, and define the behaviour that is expected. According to chair Christine Sacré, the goal was to take information from existing documents, both at the school board and from the BC School Trustees Association handbook, and tailor it to the needs of North Vancouver.

One important part of the handbook is the explanation of the different roles of a trustee and the School Board staff. The handbook explains it as "Governance is the role of the Board of Education. Opera-

tions is the role of Senior Staff and deals with day-to-day functions of the School District. It is recommended that the boundaries be observed and respected."

The handbook goes to great lengths to explain that a trustee's job is to develop policy which staff will implement. Trustees are not responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school system — that lies with the Superintendent. In particular, trustees do not have any role to play in managing teachers and other employees. At best, they can pass on concerns to the Superintendent

who will deal with it through regular channels.

One of the most difficult parts of the handbook deals with "conflict of interest". According to Sacré, this wasn't because there was any disagreement about the need for the section, just that everyone was concerned that the language used was exactly what was needed. She explains that new trustees often arrive with specific concerns and aren't always clear that they now represent all of the members of their community, not just one group or another.

The ultimate goal of the handbook is to help trustees understand that the power to make policy lies with the entire Board, not with individual trustees. Although trustees can speak out if they disagree with a decision, their first objective is to support the work of the board as a whole, and the school district in particular.

Sacré hopes that by making everyone clear on expected behaviour and roles the incoming board can spend the bulk of their time on more important matters like bargaining the new teacher contract, and managing upcoming changes to the provincial funding formula.



**CHRISTINE SACRÉ, CHAIR,
NORTH VANCOUVER BOARD
OF EDUCATION**

**SACRÉ HOPES
THAT BY MAKING
EVERYONE CLEAR
ON EXPECTED
BEHAVIOUR
AND ROLES,
THE BOARD
CAN SPEND THE
BULK OF THEIR
TIME ON MORE
IMPORTANT
MATTERS LIKE
BARGAINING THE
NEW TEACHER
CONTRACT.**