



WASB GoLD Staff Answers Your Questions

Q. With school board elections taking place and new members on the way, how can a school board work to smoothly integrate new members?

A. April school board elections will bring new faces to many school boards across the state of Wisconsin. With these new members, the dynamics of school boards will change as well. Some boards may adjust to the new dynamics rather easily while others will struggle to develop any level of group cohesion.

This Column is for YOU!

Each issue, a member of the WASB Governance and Leadership Development (GoLD) Team answers member questions about board governance. Submit your question by visiting the WASB website, wasb.org. Click on the "GoLD" tab and then select "Governance Questions" at the bottom of the page. Complete the form and your question may appear in the *Wisconsin School News*.

School boards face complex challenges today. Understanding the stages of group development and generating strategies to work through each stage can help you and your school board better work through the stages, leaving you time and energy to focus on the important decisions you need to make.

At last summer's President/Leadership Conference, we discussed the stages of group development using a model adapted from work by William Schutz and University Associates, Inc., Kathy Germann Consulting, and A.B. Orlik at Writing Barefoot, LLC. This model uses color labels for each stage — Cool Green, Hot Red and True Blue.

Groups will move back and forth between the stages. Understanding when your group is in a particular stage provides an opportunity for the group to use strategies to successfully navigate that stage.

First, remember that each time someone leaves a group or a new person joins a group, you now have a new group. For the new group to be successful, you will need to acknowledge that fact and return to the initial stage if only for a little while. Failing to spend time in Cool Green will make the next stage, Hot Red, difficult to navigate.

In the first stage, Cool Green, people are generally polite with each other and there is very little commitment to the work of the group at this stage. New school board members may be unsure of processes and members who

have been around awhile may become frustrated that the group's progress has been slowed down or modified. Recognize that everyone's reactions are perfectly normal and that no one is wrong about their reactions regarding the changes in the group's composition. Spend some time getting to know one another. Review procedures. Establish group agreements. In Cool Green, members have an opportunity to get comfortable with other members and begin to develop a level of trust.

In the second stage, Hot Red, the group begins to grapple with issues. Some groups will move through this stage quickly. Others will struggle.

Diverse ideas and positions emerge. Conflict can take center stage here. The conflict itself is not problematic. How the group works its way through the conflict is important. This is where group agreements can come in handy. The group may also want to return to Cool Green and revisit routines and relationship issues to better navigate Hot Red. If the group did not take sufficient time in Cool Green to develop relationships, they may never leave this stage.

A group that successfully navigates Hot Red moves into the third stage, True Blue. In this stage, the group is functioning well. Trust is present. Conflict emerges and is even welcomed. The group is able to use conflict productively to test ideas that lead to better decisions. The skill sets and ideas of all group members are appreciated and used to address issues.

Expecting a school board to agree unanimously on every issue is unrealistic and not even good for the decision-making process. Expecting that the group navigate the conflict successfully is realistic and very doable.

Understanding the stages of group dynamics is one tool you can use to work through the complex challenges of group dynamics. Working toward True Blue can help your school board make better use of meeting time, appreciate the contributions of every member of your school board, and lead to better decisions that will make better use of resources in service of improving student achievement in your school district. ■

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