



Governing through Conflict

Key Lessons from the Past and Present

a discussion facilitated by

megan mann

independent school partner, parent, alum, and trustee

founder, **approach**

approach



Hello, **thank you**,
notes, and goals

Goals

- Continue the work that you are doing to elevate your governance practices, including:
 - Navigating the impact of geopolitical events on campus and examining the board's role in that work
 - Reflecting on other common areas of conflict in and out of the boardroom and common dynamics we see on trustee teams
- Chat, learn from each other, move when you want, ask questions

Notes

- Let's commit to this being an okay space for:
 - Learning (it's okay not to know the answer - that applies to me too)
 - Mistakes
 - dis-a-gree-ment / ,disə'grēmənt/ *noun* : a difference of opinion/perspective;
natural & common occurrence in human interaction
 - *warning: side effects may include:* healthy debate & exchange of ideas.
- No legal advice today, friends.
- The stories aren't about you (even if they sound like it).



HIERARCHY OF NONPROFIT BOARD GOVERNANCE



Governing through conflict requires:

Regular, intentional reflection on good governance principles, especially:

1. Roles & responsibilities;
2. Rules of the road;
3. Embracing healthy, respectful disagreement in discourse
4. Future-focused mentality; and
5. *Self-awareness, not self-centering*

Roles & responsibilities

+

Rules of the road

(explored through case studies)

Because ...

Plans are worthless.
But **planning** is
indispensable.

Former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower (sort of)

Tuition increase

Jessie Spano is a Bayside School trustee, and also a parent who was denied financial aid. She recently became very passionate about a potential land acquisition idea for the school. She has raised this in committee meetings and persuaded the board to consider an outside expert's voice on the topic. Having been gently shut down on this topic, she decides to try one more time at the upcoming board meeting.

Incidentally, it was at this very long board meeting that the trustees voted on a 9% tuition increase. Jessie was among the dissenters. Extremely frustrated, she tells her fellow parent-friends at a school social event that Bayside isn't trying hard enough to contain costs, and she tried but failed to make the board see that 9% was "insane". She says that this could have been avoided if they had listened to her investment ideas.

1. Identify the issues, conflicts, or potential for conflict.
2. Discuss how to manage them.
3. Who has a role in this work?

Tuition increase

Jessie Spano is a Bayside School trustee, and also a parent who was denied financial aid. She recently became very passionate about a few trendy investments, including the self-driving car market. As a member of the finance committee, she attempted, unsuccessfully, to persuade the group to consider investing in the cars. Although she fancies herself a bit of an expert, she did bring an outsider in to educate the group, again, to no avail. Believing fully that this is the best path for the school's future, she decided to raise it before the full board at the next meeting. Incidentally, it was at this very long board meeting that the trustees voted on a 9% tuition increase. Jessie was among the dissenters. Extremely frustrated, she tells her fellow parent-friends that Bayside isn't trying hard enough to contain costs, and she tried but failed to make the board see that 9% was "insane". She says that this could have been avoided if they had listened to her investment ideas.

Election pre-week

The week before the U.S. presidential election, a group of students organize an on-campus march in support of Kamala Harris. However, on the day of the event, a verbal altercation ensues between Kelly Kapowski (one of the protestors) and Lisa Turtle (a student who was chanting “we WILL take it back and make America great again!”) to the marching group. An administrator sees and ends the exchange when she hears Lisa use profanity and the phrase “DEI hire.” Other students are filming this event, which they post on social media. A group of concerned parents gather to share concerns about the school’s liberal agenda, and they go online to try and get more information about the head of school and board chair. Based on her career and the groups she follows or “likes” on social media, they make assumptions about her political leanings. They pen a letter to the board stating that Bayside is not a safe space for conservative voters or their children. They cite the altercation that only resulted in one disciplinary action (for a Trump supporter). They claim that there will be no change, no “equality” for all, with this new board chair at the helm. The board chair would like to draft and circulate a public community response.

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The follow-up

At the next board meeting, Zach Morris, who is both a current parent and trustee, wants to discuss activism incident. He says that parents keep asking him what happened to Lisa, whether Kelly was also disciplined, and what Bayside is doing to ensure that *all* students feel seen and heard, no matter who they or their parents are voting for.

He says he doesn't know how to respond to these questions, and he feels that the board has a responsibility to assess the discipline system at Bayside to ensure fairness. He cites Bayside's mission, which includes the phrase "fostering a sense of community and belonging for today's learners and tomorrow's leaders" and his fiduciary duty to consider the school's reputation and future.

Another trustee, Screech, replies - your focus on Lisa tells us all who you are voting for.

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Most importantly →



(Thank you for having me.)

