

*Washington State Center for
Childhood Deafness & Hearing Loss*

*Board of Trustees
Special Meeting
via phone conference*

February 17, 2011

**WASHINGTON STATE CENTER FOR
CHILDHOOD DEAFNESS & HEARING LOSS
Board of Trustees Special Meeting
via phone conference
February 17, 2011**

- 3:00 p.m. Call meeting to order and determination if a quorum is present
- 3:10 p.m. Cover letter and Board position paper
- Pat Clothier, Allie Joiner, Rita Reandeau, Larry Swift, Sidney Weldele-Wallace
- 3:50 p.m. Future Board meetings
- April 15, 2011
 - June 3, 2011
- 4:00 p.m. Adjourn



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE CENTER FOR
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Draft Cover Letter for the Board's Position paper on Governance

Date

Dear ?

We submit this position paper to support our request that the Governor's education re-organization legislation retain the current governing authority of the Board of Trustees at the Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss.

We emphasize that we are not opposing the Governor's re-organization proposal. Indeed, we believe that our report to the legislature last December addresses the lack of integration and consistent services in deaf education that the Governor is seeking to address in the education of all of Washington's children and youth..

Our objective with this position paper is simply to retain one of the strengths of our current system for overseeing the education of Deaf, Deaf Blind and Hard of Hearing students. We respectfully request that the Governor and her staff re-consider this particular element of the legislation that is currently under consideration.

Thank you for giving your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Rita Reandeau, Chair
CDHL Board of Trustees

Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) - "Go Terriers" 
The Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness & Hearing Loss supports all modes of communication. WSD is an ASL-English Bilingual campus.

**THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
CENTER FOR CHILDHOOD DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS
SHOULD IT BE RETURNED TO AN ADVISORY BOARD?**

In 2002 the legislature converted the advisory board at the Washington School for the Deaf into a governing Board of Trustees. That was deemed necessary because of concerns that student safety and welfare were at risk as a result of an environment of lax supervision. In addition, the school was perceived by many to be an island with little contact with the state's public school districts that actually served the majority of deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing (D/DB/HH) students despite having far less experience and staff with expertise in teaching deaf children.

Nine years later repeated safety audits by DSHS have found the school's policies and practices to be consistent and effective protections of student welfare. Its student behavior management practices have been described as "exemplary". The school is serving students in many parts of the state, it is providing consultant assistance at little or no cost to public schools throughout the state and its enrollment on campus has grown by nearly 25% while the enrollment trend nationally at state schools has been declining. Its recent report to the legislature with recommendations for a more systemic way of serving the educational needs of D/DB/HH children, was highly dependent upon the work of a core team of stakeholders from all parts of the state. While they have no direct connection to the school, they see it as the central resource for building more effective collaborations among parents, public schools, health agencies, the deaf community, and others that affect the education of D/DB/HH children. That has been the vision of the Board from the beginning and is wholly consistent with the governor's re-organization objectives.

Is this dramatic change solely due to converting the Board from an advisory body to a governing entity? Of course not. Very strong administrative leadership and dedicated staff members that have invested countless hours in upgrading their skills and changing their practices are the primary reason. So what value did the governing board add? **Close oversight with authority.** Central to its role has been the ability to use the power of the question -- a board's most potent tool -- to focus attention on key issues such as student behavior management, administrative leadership, academic outcomes, and the needs of deaf children regardless of where they attend school. But that oversight has been backed by authority.

Early on the Board focused its attention on the school's leadership. For example, it directed its first interim superintendent to evaluate the performance of mid-level managers, set clear goals for them and hold them accountable. As a result his permanent re-placement was able to organize a new leadership team. The Board has twice managed superintendent searches for the governor. In both cases outstanding candidates were recommended, because the Board had developed a clear understanding of both the needs of the school and what was needed in the long term to improve learning for D/DB/HH students regardless of where they attended school in the state.

The Board is composed of people who bring substantial and diverse experience to bear on the work of the school. They know how to work as effective board members without attempting to micro-manage. But when asked, they have the knowledge to assess technical issues. For example, one interim superintendent asked two board members with years of experience in special education to audit some individual educational plans. It resulted in more intensive management of that key educational tool. While that kind of involvement is rare, the staff knows that the board members are both experienced and have the authority to hold the school to high standards of performance.

It is simply not possible to provide close oversight to a complicated educational organization from a distance. Effective board members are neither so close to an organization that they are caught up in its prevailing culture, nor so distant that they lack detailed knowledge of what is happening at the operating level. That is particularly important for schools where children's vulnerability is at risk.

There is no doubt that advisory boards are useful. They can do many of the things that governing boards do. But there are subtle yet powerful differences between the two. First, the staff is more attentive to the questions and decisions of the Board, because the staff knows that it is bound by those decisions. The executive leader is strengthened because he/she cannot be seen as acting alone; instead, his/her decisions must be seen as backed by the collective authority and experience of the board. And, just as importantly, the members of the Board intuitively have greater commitment to and engagement in the work of the school, because they are responsible for it. They are far more likely to spend time thinking about the needs of D/DB/HH students in between Board meetings because of that sense of responsibility. While these are intangible consequences of governing authority, they are powerful.

No doubt the reason for suggesting that the Board of Trustees at the Center be returned to the status of an advisory board is concern for the chain of command. Under the proposed arrangement in SB 5639 the director of the center would be responsible to the Secretary of Education. Some may be concerned that with a "governing" board the director could be faced with conflicting demands from two "bosses". But that is only a theoretical concern. Currently, the Center's director reports to the governor. The Board understands that it cannot require the director to act contrary to the governor's directive. However, to make that clear, the board's authority under current law could be expressly made subject to review and revision by the Secretary of Education. In that way the advantages of a governing board, which the legislature foresaw in 2002 and which subsequent history has shown to be valuable, can be retained while still accomplishing the objectives sought by the educational re-organization proposal.

School boards here and across the nation work at the confluence of two of America's central values: representative democracy and universal public education. Their mission is to use the one to achieve the other. Board members volunteer their services because of a caring concern for the welfare of children and a sense of obligation to give back to their community. We should maximize the value that we can get from their service.