South Orange County Community College District
May 14, 2011 Board of Trustees Workshop
Discussion Notes

The following notes reflect the discussion at the workshop. The action plans and strategies developed as a result of the workshop are presented in a separate document.

Opening
The facilitator, Dr. Cindra Smith was introduced. Participants introduced themselves and identified why they enjoyed board service.

Workshop "Ground Rules"
Board members identified guidelines for discussion that will help ensure that the workshop is positive and productive:

- Engage with civility
- Everyone participates
- Honesty
- One person speaks at a time
- Reflect the zeitgeist, the spirit of the colleges
- Stay on task
- Be committed to work together
- Have fun

Outcomes
Participants identified their expected outcomes for the workshop, which were evaluated at the close of the workshop.

- Help us learn how to work together better
- Review our mission as a board
- Comply with accreditation
- Identify key issues for the board to address
- Set goals and establish a process for review
- Identify opportunities for board to learn about the colleges, programs, accreditation and educational quality
- Ensure the public is aware the board is committed to performing well

Board Self-Evaluation Process
The facilitator and Chancellor reported on the process of gathering information from those who routinely attend board meetings (administrators, managers and governance group leaders), as well as all faculty and staff to provide the Board information to use in its self-evaluation. It was noted that a number of people in each group completed the first question regarding their attendance at board meetings, but did not complete the rest of the survey.

Participants discussed issues and dynamics that affected the board self-evaluation:

- With two new members, the board is essentially a new board. It is difficult to know if the respondents were assessing the "old" or "new" board.

- With a new CEO, the board/CEO team is essentially a new team. It is difficult to know if the respondents were assessing the "old" or "new" team.
- Many of the respondents in the faculty and staff category have not attended board meetings; it is difficult to know on what they are basing their perceptions, including whether or not they view board meetings on the web or via TV.
- The newer trustees reported that their responses included a number of "neutral" responses due to lack of experience on the board. They should not be viewed as negative assessments of board performance.

Review of Employee Survey Results
Participants received the survey results on board performance and were encouraged to review them. The facilitator distributed a chart she prepared that compared responses on the short form of the survey from faculty and staff and from who those regularly attend board meetings to trustees responses on similar items in their longer survey. Trustees were very concerned about the gaps between the board and other groups on perceptions of board performance on a number of items.

Discussion of possible reasons for the gaps included: people respond who do not understand board roles and responsibilities and/or do not observe the board in action; responses may reflect dissatisfaction with board decisions, and responses are on prior board behavior rather than on the performance of the new board team.

While there may be some skewing of the results based on the above, it was noted that "perception is reality" and that therefore the responses must be taken seriously and the board needs to consider ways to improve performance that affects these perceptions. The board discussed the importance of working together in a civil and respectful manner. They also discussed ways in which certain behaviors and statements might be construed as micromanagement and direction to staff and the self-discipline needed to avoid these behaviors. They identified some actions that will help increase linkages with administrators, faculty, and staff, including but not limited to focused forums. They noted the need to maintain a balance between communicating with staff and being perceived as directing staff.

The Board discussed specific items as follows:

Item #1: The Board understands its policy role and differentiates its role from those of the CEO and college staff. Discussion included the challenge of being perceived as directing when they are communicating with staff and the discipline needed to not try to seek out or solve staff concerns and issues. Trustees affirmed that the only person they may direct is the Chancellor. They reminded themselves to listen, but don't take on staff issues and to refer them to set channels of communication. Trustees may need to remind staff members that trustees have no individual authority, and that all issues must go through local decision-making and processes establish in board policy and administrative procedures before being addressed by the Board.

Trustees will let the Chancellor and/or college presidents know about issues and concerns. Giving a "heads up" and ensuring "no surprises" is not micromanagement. Trustees requested feedback from the Chancellors and college presidents if and/or when they are stepping over the line. Board members want them to be able to say "no" without the fear of being threatened with job loss.

Item #12, The Board respects faculty, staff, and student participation in decision-making. Discussion included:

- The importance of courtesy and communicating respect for opinions and contributions from constituency groups
- If decisions are made contrary to recommendations, the Board should clarify its rationale and share their values and considerations for the decisions.
- Trustees discussed that the Brown Act constrains them from responding to presenters at the board meeting and that may be perceived as disrespect or disinterest. The constraint should be communicated.

Item #14, Trustees set a positive tone for the institution. Discussion included that interruptions and lack of civility are not appropriate either at board meetings or in closed sessions. They affirmed the need to continue to exhibit and strengthen board cohesiveness; to be civil and respectful when disagreeing; to uphold board decisions; to clarify that their focus is on the big picture.

Item #18, Board meetings are conducted in an orderly manner with sufficient time provided to explore and resolve issues. In addition to the discussion of Item #14, trustees discussed strategies to increase their ability to explore and resolve issues.

Review of Board Survey Results

The facilitator noted the detailed report provided to the trustees of their survey and highlighted a summary of the results, which included two lists: items on which 6 or 7 trustees agreed, and items on which 2 or more disagreed or were neutral. Two trustees noted that responding "neutral" meant they didn't have the experience on the board to evaluate the item, not that it was negative.

The board reviewed the some key board strengths:

- Members are active in the community
- Members are good advocates for the college
- The board is a good financial steward
- The board cares about and supports the colleges; members attend many events
- They are proud of and are cheerleaders for the district. Members identified many district accomplishments, including transfer rates, athletics, academic teams, the quality of faculty and staff.

They discussed areas in which their rating on some items was lower:

Educational Quality

In response to a facilitator question about the role of the board in educational quality, trustees identified being a "cheerleader", talking positively about the district, going to events to show support, participating in and sponsoring scholarship organizations, being aware of and talking about rankings and student success metrics. Other roles included expecting and assuring that teaching and education are of high quality, recognizing and capitalizing on the educated citizenry in the community; assuring that salaries can attract quality staff; and support and appreciation for the services provided to involve and support students.

The information the board receives (e.g. the ARCC report) is good. The Chancellor noted his plans to improve the information provided to the board regarding educational quality and student success. A suggestion was that the information addresses the processes used to achieve educational quality, e.g. in hiring faculty and staff, as well as the outcomes.

Human Relations
Board members discussed the process by which they provide direction to collective bargaining negotiations, and reinforced that trustees do not negotiate as individuals outside of the board and district process. Discussion included the need to be able to have information and provide direction early in the process; it was noted that other issues had precluded full discussion of collective bargaining parameters this year, but that members wanted full and detailed information from here on.

Board members discussed the desire to establish an environment where communications, including bargaining, are conducted in a safe, professional manner.

CEO Evaluation
Members discussed the dynamics that contributed to not conducting CEO evaluation in the recent past, or setting expectations as a board for and with the Chancellor. They agreed to re-visit and implement an annual evaluation process and to ensure that it is on the master board calendar, along with the board evaluation.

Code of Ethics/Conflict of Interest
The Board accepted a revised code of ethics policy for review at the recent April meeting that includes how to address violations of the code. The Chancellor noted that a college board policy review committee may not be able to address the policies accepted for review until September. It was noted that it was important for the board to review and discuss the ethics policy prior to that time; the facilitator reinforced the board's responsibility for that particular policy. The Chancellor will follow up to arrange that the board reviews the ethics policy over the summer.

Trustees discussed addressing expectations for board meeting behavior, communication protocols, and how trustees treat each other at the same time they reviewed the code of ethics.

Action Plans
The discussion of the survey results and board performance resulted in identifying a number of action plans or tasks to improve board performance, submitted as a separate document.

Evaluation of Workshop
Positives included the open, civil, and friendly communication; that there was good participation and everyone contributed to the discussion; and that it was valuable to have an opportunity to talk informally.

Suggestions for changes to the board self-evaluation process including ensuring that they know "which board" is being evaluated, adding the invitation and ability for respondents to comment, and identifying how people know about the Board.