

Howard M. O’Cull, Ed.D.

810 Hughes Drive · Saint Albans, W. Va. 25177 · 1116 Smith Street, Suite 206, Charleston, WV 25301 · ocullworks@outlook.com (alternate email: ocullmartinh@gmail.com) · 304-549-9463 *Objective: To influence public policymaking, including public education policymaking, through appropriate use of role or position to promote sustained innovation and accountability at the local, district and state levels.*

Professional Profile

Owner, Chop Wood, Carry Water Enterprises LLC, which provides visionary governance services with especial emphasis on customized governance design that is strategic, Policy-driven, Innovative, Practical.

Retired chief executive officer of an association of publicly elected county boards of education members.

Relies primarily on an interdisciplinary approach to inform public education policymaking

- Uses interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and entrepreneurial strategies to achieve and sustain innovation
 - Respects research or data as prompts for decision-making, providing contextual considerations - resources, capacity, sustainability, and reliable methodologies for measuring results - reinforce research or data applications, ensuring research-based decision-making isn’t an end unto itself
 - Accomplishes authentic, adaptive, strategic, and situational leadership for results
 - Promotes considerations of accountability, articulating such to diverse internal and external constituencies
 - Fosters collaboration while preserving articulated CEO leadership accountability for results
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Degreed Credentials

- Advanced Degree – West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va. · Doctorate Educational Leadership Studies (Ed.D.) (2001) / May be granted permanent administrative certificate for county superintendent licensure (§18-4-2).
 - Master of Arts Degree - Marshall University, South Charleston, W. Va. · Educational Leadership Studies (2000)
 - Undergraduate degree – B.S. Journalism · Marshall University, Huntington, W. Va. (1978)
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Career

- Owner Chop Wood, Carry Water Enterprises LLC. Founded in July 2022, Chop Wood, Carry Water emphasizes, conducted the 2023 Berkeley County (Martinsburg) West Virginia, Superintendent Search; Current projects include providing services to a West Virginia Educational Services Cooperative as well as additional consultation services
- Provided West Virginia 2023 Regular Session (and Interim legislative session reporting) for major West Virginia lobbying firm serving diverse clientele
- Retired Executive Director West Virginia School Board Association (WVSBA), a statutorily sanctioned quasi-public educational association comprised of the state's fifty-five county boards of education and two hundred seventy-five elected boards of education members, serving from August 1985 – December 31, 2022
- Numerous duties and responsibilities incumbent to Association position, including executive level administration, management and oversight; service having commenced August 13, 1978
- Programmatic development, including promotion of varying accountability measures for effective county board service, including statutory qualifications for office (1989), training and development emphases (1990 +), performance self-appraisal (2003), emphases on governance effectiveness (1993 -); codification of County Board Member training Standards Review Committee (2009); enhanced collaboration with the West Virginia Board of Education, West Virginia Department of Education and Legislature to achieve accountability objectives
- Development of entrepreneurial programs and services, including development and deployment of customized technical assistance initiatives aiding in corporate county board/county superintendent growth and development, based on meaningful facilitation, team-building and effective role emphases
- Responsibility for WVSBA legislative advocacy efforts, including development and articulation of strategies to achieve its legislative objectives based, as appropriate, on meaningful input of the Association membership and constituencies best positioned to inform or enrich the organization's advocacy efforts with the West Virginia Legislature; adept at articulating conceptual considerations for drafting legislation
- Utilization of strategic input aimed at informing West Virginia Board of Education and West Virginia Department of Education policymaking or implementation of West Virginia Board of Education rules between and among county boards, including technical assistance provision at the behest of the state Board and/or state Department of Education
- Reliance on research emphases to inform public education policy issues facing county boards and public education as a whole
- Utilization of effective reportage and communications regarding county board approaches to emergent public education issues, including writing, editing and publishing *The Legislature* (1980-2020), considered the most thorough publication regarding public education as issued by an Association
- Values use of collaborative initiatives to achieve and sustain articulated Association goals

- Adjunct Professor Marshall University Graduate College (*politics of education*)
 - Interviewee for West Virginia Superintendent of Schools (2005)
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Professional / Career Orientation

- *Dwell in Possibility* – Using an analogy of prose and poetry, Emily Dickinson (I Dwell in Possibility – 466) juxtaposes a “metaphorical” house, called "Possibility," with an inferior house called "Prose." The speaker presents the metaphorical house as “fairer” than the prose house. According to the speaker, poetry offers greater room for freedom and creativity. Its metaphorical house has more windows and doors than that of prose. This suggests that poetry makes it easier to try out multiple perspectives or viewpoints (windows), perhaps letting in more of the light of truth, and having more "doors" that open on the realm of the imagination or possibility.
(<https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/emily-dickinson/i-dwell-in-possibility>).
 - *Chop wood, carry water* – Zen Buddhist koan: An organization *is* what the organization does, meaning all organizational endeavors/outputs impact the organization’s abilities to achieve its mission and goals. The organization, rejecting scripted allegiance to missional goals or standards which have become leadened or outdated, ensures tasks are neither mundane nor magnanimous. Rather the organization realizes, as American lawyer and politician Frank Clark stated, “Everyone is trying to accomplish something big, not realizing that life is made of little things.” – little things compound, enhancing continuous organizational growth and development.
 - *Ita est...rerum natura, post omnia oceanus, post oceanum nihil.* (Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca is attributed with this maxim which, translated, is ‘Thus, is nature. Beyond all things is the ocean, beyond the ocean nothing.’) Policymaking progression leads one from confinement or allegiance to the status quo - past successes or approaches - into constant, consistent scanning of the environment in which the organization operates. Thus, the organization is nimble, shaping policy and strategies, including “shifting coalitions,” to augment its standing, forgoing allegiance to or discarding outdated modes or organizational structures or culture, especially ineffectual attempts to leverage increases in student achievement.
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Reports, Research, Scholarly Endeavors

- Dissertation - *An Investigation of Factors Influencing School Board Decision Making in West Virginia*. Articulated *decisional locus in quo*. In terms of this construct, the county

superintendent, relying on foundational credentials, training, and skills acquisition, both discerns and ensures heightened county board decision-making capacity, displacing county board/county superintendent reliance on compliance as the primary decisional prompt. Thus, the effective county superintendent harmonizes linkages between various disciplines, informing and ensuring county board decision-making is innovative and entrepreneurial, emphasizing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary components as appropriate or functional

- Member and Writing Committee Chairman *Facing the Challenge: The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund (Century Fund) Task Force on School Governance* (1991-1992). Report ushered policy governance emphasis for county boards in West Virginia and resultant West Virginia Board of Education policies or statutes, including §18-5-4, “Policies to promote school board effectiveness”
- Instrumental in establishing West Virginia Commission on Holocaust Education with support of Gov. Cecil H. Underwood (1998)
- Member Governor Joe Manchin’s 21st Century Jobs Cabinet of West Virginia. Authored 2010 Report regarding establishment of public charter schools which would have been accountable to county boards and state Board of Education
- Developed, in collaboration with the West Virginia Department of Education, Project Leadership, a comprehensive development program for persons aspiring to become county schools superintendents. Project Leadership received funding from the WVDE, West Virginia Legislature, Claude E. Worthington Benedum Foundation supplemented by extensive in-kind contributions
- Member of Governor Gaston Caperton’s Public Education Committee, assigned to subcommittees focusing on Local School Improvement Councils (LSICs) and county board accountability
- Transition teams for Governors Caperton, Cecil H. Underwood, Bob Wise, Manchin, Earl Ray Tomblin, and Jim Justice
- Various appointments to state Board of Education teams and study groups
- Published *Decentralization, Primacy: Tomorrow’s School System, Today’s Vibrant Agenda*, Monograph outlining policy governance concept (1993)
- Authored *Balanced Governance: improving Educational Performance & Fiscal Efficiency / Report of the West Virginia Board of Education’s Commission on School District Governance and Administration* (2014). The Report concentrates on methodologies for effective, efficient school district governance, given persistent declines in student enrollments and the State Board’s enhanced emphasis on student achievement
- Established series of county boards of education special meetings regarding utility and viability of Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs). The Report is entitled: *House Bill 2940 Regional Meetings on Shared County Level Services and Functions*. Provided to West Virginia Legislature in tandem with Report of Legislative Auditor’s Office concerning RESAs.
- Various efforts at state legislative/state Board of Education level, including author of *Brick Walls: WV School Board Association Report About Consolidating County Boards*. The Report, presented to the Legislature’s Joint Standing Committee on Education (October 2021), notes the Legislature has statutory authority to consolidate school districts. The Report, however, explores alternate considerations for school district realignments based on service delivery to ensure sustained

thorough and efficient public-school considerations, especially between and among school district central offices given what may be insufficient staffing in some counties necessary to augment state-level school achievement objectives. The report drew largely upon *The Digest of a Report of a Survey of a Report of Public Education in West Virginia*, work of Columbia University Professor George Strayer, Ph.D., circa 1940s. The Report became the prompt for Senate Bill 99, which the West Virginia Legislature adopted in 2023. (The Senate adopted a predecessor bill, Senate 687, in 2022, although not considered by the House of Delegates in the 2022 Regular Session)

- Authored 2022 Resolution adopted by West Virginia Senate regarding Local School Improvement Councils (LSICs). As envisioned, the Legislature would study whether LSICs, given reconstituted memberships, should have greater ties to county boards *and* the county superintendent who, in appointing certain LSIC members, would ensure leverage for LSICs to ensure greater school or site accountabilities, especially relating to site or school-based academic achievement. While LSICs would remain complimentary of school administrations, the state Board of Education would have greater assurance its policies, rules, and regulations - and school district policies relating to accountability for academic achievement as enunciated in state Board of Education §2322 – are implemented effectively. Moreover, LSICs would provide enhanced community involvement and accountability for decision-making. Given ensconced alternatives to public schools as state-level policy, greater ease of access to public schools by clients, including parents and community interests, becomes integral for public school success, fiscal support, and “sponsorship”

Presentations

- Member of Governor Gaston Caperton’s Public Education Committee, assigned to subcommittees focusing on Local School Improvement Councils (LSICs) and county board accountability
- West Virginia Board of Education (numerous presentations), including major presentation in 2003 regarding WVB role in education governance vis-à-vis county boards of education and county superintendents
- Prichard Committee, Kentucky school reform group (*Facing the Challenge*); also presented to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education Colloquium for School Committee Members (*Facing the Challenge*) and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, School of Educational Leadership (*Facing the Challenge*, including implications for aspiring school administrators). Presentation regarding *Facing The Challenge* also provided to Education Commission of the States.
- West Virginia Board of Education Educational Administration (*Facing the Challenge* implications for aspiring school administrators). Presentation also provided to Education Commission of the States (ESC) concerning public education reform with especial emphasis on Facing The Challenge and its implementation, including possibilities and limitations

- County Boards of Education All Stakeholder Meetings (2 sessions held; presented varied stakeholder groups platform to provide conceptual design for policy board concept, based on Carver Governance Design principles. Meetings served as prompts for the West Virginia Legislature's adoption of §18-5-14)
- National School Boards Association (NSBA), including presentation to NSBA State Association Executive Directors regarding implication of 2018 West Virginia teacher walkout
- Numerous presentations and trainings provided to county boards, then Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), public education associations and other groups regarding various facets of public education

Publications

Author of numerous public education presentations, including articles for West Virginia School Board Association flagship publication, The Legislature (1980-2020), including analysis, commentary, general reporting, writing and editing; various newspaper Op-eds, including

- Local Policies should steer education debate / June 29, 2019 / https://www.wvgazette.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/howard-ocull-local-policies-should-steer-education-debate/article_e1e647fa-8a48-5606-9373-2f53b3317cb0.html
- Howard O’Cull: Local policies should steer education debate https://www.wvgazette.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/howard-ocull-fix-public-schools-and-pay-teachers-well/article_2482b37c-ab2a-5e1b-986b-8ef465dd63a4.html
- Howard O’Cull: Fix Public Schools and Pay Teachers well / February 25, 2018 / https://www.wvgazette.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/howard-ocull-fix-public-schools-and-pay-teachers-well/article_2482b37c-ab2a-5e1b-986b-8ef465dd63a4.html

Accolades

- Special Award John W. Teel Writing Competition Maier Foundation (Marshall University) – 1978

□ Commendation The Honorable Cecil H. Underwood, Professor Political Science / Marshall University (1995)