

# Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

July 2020 Vol. 34, No. 3

Editor: Jeff Stratton

## Add focus to the superintendent's evaluation

Give your board's members the opportunity to add specific comments about the superintendent's performance at the conclusion of his appraisal. This information should be collected by the president and used to direct the superintendent's work in the coming year.

Ask these four questions:

1. What impressed you the most about the superintendent's performance this year?
2. What specific recommendations do you have for the superintendent to improve per-

formance?

3. What should be the priorities for the superintendent over the next year?

4. Do you have any additional comments regarding the superintendent which have a bearing on her evaluation?

Question 3 "What should be the priorities for the superintendent over the next year?" lets board members provide guidance to the administrator on setting her performance goals for the next evaluation period. ■

## Build mutual trust between board, superintendent

Trust is a key element in a healthy board-and-superintendent partnership.

Here are some trust-building suggestions from the University of Northern Iowa's Institute for Educational Leadership monograph, "Strengthening Board of Education [and] Superintendent Relationships in America's Schools."

- Hold retreats for the board and superintendent away from your regular meeting room at least once a year.
- Provide regular education for board members with a mentor approach, new member orientation, and a regular meeting agenda item devoted to continuing education.

- Count on the board president to lead. The president should work at building relationships with board members and the superintendent and encourage meeting participation by all members.

- Keep board policies updated, including the administrator's job description, and a statement of roles and responsibilities for the superintendent, board president and board members.

- Evaluate the board and superintendent annually.

For information, go to [www.uni.edu/coe/iel/bssum.html](http://www.uni.edu/coe/iel/bssum.html). ■

## From The Board Doctor<sup>®</sup>: Teach board its role

After serving as a board member for more than a decade, a board member in Washington commented that board orientation is one of the most critical issues. He said that an average board member's tenure is often less than it takes for that member to understand the role he plays on the school board.

Consider a recent disagreement you have had with your school board. Then, reflect whether better board orientation could have prevented or eased the disagreement. Most major board blow-ups can trace their roots back to the superintendent's failure to give board members a thorough orientation to board roles and responsibilities and supplementing a sound orientation with regular refreshers for the board on its role.

It is never easy for a school district superintendent to manage the "boss" — in this case, the school board. But when it comes to teaching board members their proper role, you do indeed need to be assertive.

When educating board members about board service, you always need to make this point: No single board member has the authority to make decisions independently, unless the board member is acting on the authority of the full board.

There are many effective ways to teach this. In board member job descriptions, and in your board's policies, see that a statement on the limits of board member authority is included. The following language provides an example:

"The Board is a policy-making body as distinguished from the responsibility for administration of the district's affairs. The Superintendent and staff are charged with implementing and executing Board policy. The Board observes, questions, and evaluates the operational functions of the district, but refrains from direct participation in those functions.

"No individual Board member or Board officer has any authority over the district or district personnel. The individual Board member has no authority to issue instructions directly to staff. Such action can only be taken by the full Board acting in its official capacity."

As you participate in school board member orientation or a refresher course, keep this example close at hand.

Sincerely,

Jeff Stratton, Editor

(515) 963-7972; [jeff\\_stratton@msn.com](mailto:jeff_stratton@msn.com). ■

## Increase public participation in virtual board meetings

As districts continue to practice social distancing and hold virtual school board meetings, superintendents and board members should review efforts to facilitate stakeholder participation in the public meetings. Consider creating an electronic form that can be submitted in advance of the virtual meeting as a way to increase public input related to your agenda. Be sure to review the local regulations to determine what is possible for your district regarding public comments and virtual school board meetings first. The form can be posted on your district's website.

The general public comment form can contain the following:

- A notice that the comments include on the form will be read aloud during the public meeting.
- The maximum length of time permitted for commenting on the issue or topic listed on the form.
- Ample space for required information such as the stakeholder's name, address, topic or subject to be addressed, and the comment.

- A cut-off time of deadline (date and time) for submitting comments before the virtual meeting.
- The email address to submit the form or an alternative method for submitting it.
- Instructions on how the stakeholder will receive confirmation that the comment was submitted.
- An explanation that each topic on which the stakeholder wishes to comment should be submitted on a separate form.

Before the public meeting occurs, provide as much training as possible to your board to ensure each member's comfort level is high when the form comes into play. Try to host a practice meeting online with just a few members to test out the system using the comment form and reading the contents out loud. Work out any difficulties in advance.

Finally, continue discussions with your board on how long the form is intended to be used. Is this form a way to increase participation even when in-person school board meetings resume? ■