

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Consider experience, skills of interim superintendent candidate

Given the current climate of staff shortages and divisiveness, it's harder than ever to hire and keep a superintendent. For that reason, school boards often find themselves needing to hire an interim superintendent while they search for a permanent candidate.

To increase the chances of selecting a successful interim superintendent, boards should consider the following.

- **Whether the individual has previously served as a superintendent.** A candidate who has served as a superintendent in another district may be more prepared for the intensive schedule and pressures of the position than someone whose highest position was school principal. The board might also consider individuals who have previously served as an interim superintendent. Such an individual may be able to come into the district knowing how to make changes and guide the school system before leaving.

- **The educator's experience.** Boards should examine the candidate's experience in terms of both

time and variety of positions held. For example, an individual with two decades of experience as a teacher, principal, and district administrator may be more effective than a long-time teacher who served only one year as a principal.

- **Consider hiring from within.** Hiring from within the district will likely mean foregoing selecting someone with experience as a superintendent. However, one benefit is that the individual may already have the community's trust, as well as familiarity with the district's most pressing challenges. Another benefit is that if the person succeeds, the board may then consider her for the full-time job.

- **Consider the individual's ability to communicate.** If the candidate is a former superintendent at another district, for instance, the board might examine the individual's history of interacting with that board. Did the superintendent often clash with board members? If there were numerous clashes, that might indicate the individual could bring unwanted friction to the interim position. ■

Beware of overuse of executive sessions

Last fall, the West Virginia Board of Education authorized the immediate intervention of the Logan County School system as the result of a Special Circumstance Review Report that resulted in 46 points of non-compliance. One of the reasons for the immediate intervention, according to West Virginia Department of Education's website,

was the overuse of executive sessions.

The report found 79 separate executive sessions were held during the 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 school years. Not only did the report find that many of these sessions failed to comply with the state's criteria for executive sessions set forth in the Open Governmental Proceedings Act, but "the overuse of

executive sessions displays to the community and stakeholders that there are extraordinary opportunities for the board to conduct the business of the board in a private setting.”

Among other measures, the county’s school board’s decision-making authority will be limited and in some instances delegated to the state superintendent of schools.

This situation in Logan County, W.Va., should prompt you to review the limited statutory exceptions in which your board can go into executive session. Some reasons may be to conduct strategic planning, evaluate the superintendent, or ex-

amine a legal issue with the school solicitor. The board president and superintendent should not hesitate to challenge the use of an executive session called without a valid reason. Using detailed executive session board meeting agendas should assist in staying within the lines of those limited exceptions.

Also, ensure all board members understand that no final action, except in specific instances, may be made in the executive session. A state’s open meetings laws protect transparency in government.

The report is available at www.wvde.us. ■

Conduct self-review before running for reelection

Although serving on a school board can be incredibly rewarding, it can also be emotionally and mentally exhausting. This may cause some board members to hesitate when it’s time to run for reelection. Because it’s imperative for a board mem-

ber to be fully committed to the job, board members who are on the fence about continuing their service should conduct a self-review to determine whether they are up for the challenge. Use the assessment below or a similar form to reach a decision. ■

Board Member Self-Review: Running for Reelection

Instructions: Answer the following 10 questions about your current and future board service. If all your answers are “yes,” serving on the board for another year would likely feel positive. If you answered “no” to any questions, reflect on the reasons for your answer and whether it would be rewarding.

Questions	Answer	
1. Am I still highly committed to the district’s mission?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Can I effectively and professionally address contentious issues and difficult discussions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Have I continued to act candidly and civilly during exchanges of opinion?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Do I collaborate effectively with the superintendent and other board members?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Am I able to keep an open mind during board decision-making?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Have I made an effort to attend and participate in school district events?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Have I attended all school board meetings, work sessions, and training events?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Am I able to successfully balance my responsibilities as a board member with my professional and personal life?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Am I still enthusiastic about serving on the school board?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
10. Do I still have the energy to meet the time commitments of board service?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No