

# Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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## Practice makes for better thinking on hard issues

When it comes to boards improving their skills, practice is what makes the difference.

Boards are usually made up of people who have different experiences and points of view.

That can be a positive force when the board is engaged in a problem-solving session. The more ideas and discussion that can be generated when reviewing issues, the better possible solutions might be.

But to get to the point where the board is a smooth-functioning team when brainstorming issues, it may be necessary to start small. The board can practice on the "small stuff" so that they understand the mechanics of brainstorming, and then use these techniques when the issues become more challenging.

The idea of using "the board's work" as a platform for practice is a good one. For example, the

problem might be that the board wants more community involvement.

Learning the mechanics of brainstorming while trying to come up with solutions for their problems gives the board practice.

This is a softball issue for the board to begin with. This particular problem is not likely a highly charged situation, so it can help when the board is actually faced with an intense situation.

A type of work-session activity that would be helpful to a board prior to being in serious problem-solving mode is to share all of the different brainstorming techniques that teachers use in a classroom.

This is a non-threatening and relevant way to teach particular problem-solving skills that can be applied as they are strengthened and developed. ■

### 6 ways to ask if your board is governing properly

1. Does your board govern the district instead of manage it?
2. Does your board give counsel, make judgments, and oversee the commitment and use of resources?
3. Is your board responsible for assessing the superintendent?
4. Does the board work to assure the long-term future of the district and act in the public interest?
5. Does your board understand that it does not set strategy but sets goals and direction, while the superintendent establishes strategy?
6. Does your board set policy and recognize that the superintendent and administration are responsible for its implementation? ■

## 5 board and superintendent trouble spots and how to fix them

No one — not the board, the superintendent, or the public — wants to see a superintendent's tenure end in a contract buyout. That's a waste of precious public dollars.

There are certain areas of board and superintendent contention, however, that if not addressed early on, will often lead to the administrator's dismissal.

Here are five of them, with an idea for how to address each.

### 1. Confusion of roles and responsibilities.

Board members, individually and as a body, need to respect the principle that they have no individual power and can only act as a board when reaching a decision in a legally constituted meeting.

**2. Micromanaging of the district by the board or by its individual members.** Board members need to accept that they are policymakers, not policy implementers. On a well-functioning board, members do not intrude into the superintendent's responsibilities or cross the line separating setting policy from administration.

**3. Board members spending time in schools and classrooms, making observations and rec-**

**ommendations to teachers and principals.** A clear violation of the chain of command that leads to a blurring of the superintendent's authority. Teachers and other staff will end up discussing who they really report to when a board member starts pulling rank. A board must commit itself to the idea that to function effectively, its individual board members will not engage in any behavior that causes factionalism or divisiveness.

**4. Failure of the board to face critical issues head on.** Poor meeting attendance or abstentions from voting usually go hand in hand with this. The solution is a commitment to professionalism and doing what is best for students. Professionalism is best accomplished by coming to meetings prepared, having read the support materials, asking questions during meetings, and making decisions through the vote.

**5. Failure of the board to act as a unified team with its superintendent.** When board members do not realize the importance of avoiding hidden agendas or spring surprises for personal gain, they are impeding forward momentum and damaging team unity. ■

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## Know your partners and critics to communicate well

In the article *Building Relationships to Successfully Advocate Your Cause*, Patrice McCarthy, deputy director and general counsel at the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, summarized a workshop led by Catherine Blinder in which she stressed identifying “partners and critics.”

“Your advocacy success will be enhanced by

identifying allies and partners,” McCarthy reported. “It is equally important to identify opposition to your issue, and develop an appropriate response to those critics.”

For more information, visit [www.ctnonprofits.org/ctnonprofits/sites/default/files/fckeditor/file/resources/publications/NPA-articles/FindYourVoice.pdf](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/ctnonprofits/sites/default/files/fckeditor/file/resources/publications/NPA-articles/FindYourVoice.pdf). ■

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## Stop thinking small to free board up for big issues

In a post titled *Governing Teamwork vs. Micromanagement*, the Arizona School Boards Association suggests that a board can prevent micromanagement of the superintendent if they stop “thinking small.”

“Instead of wading through reports filled with details, ask for executive summaries and data that is related to the district's goals,” AZSBA writes.

To “think big,” AZSBA suggests using board committees “to act as the board's governing engines providing a stronger foundation of information and analysis for full board decision making focused on ‘big ticket’ issues.”

For more information, visit [www.azsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Governing-Teamwork-vs-Micromanagement.pdf](http://www.azsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Governing-Teamwork-vs-Micromanagement.pdf). ■

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