

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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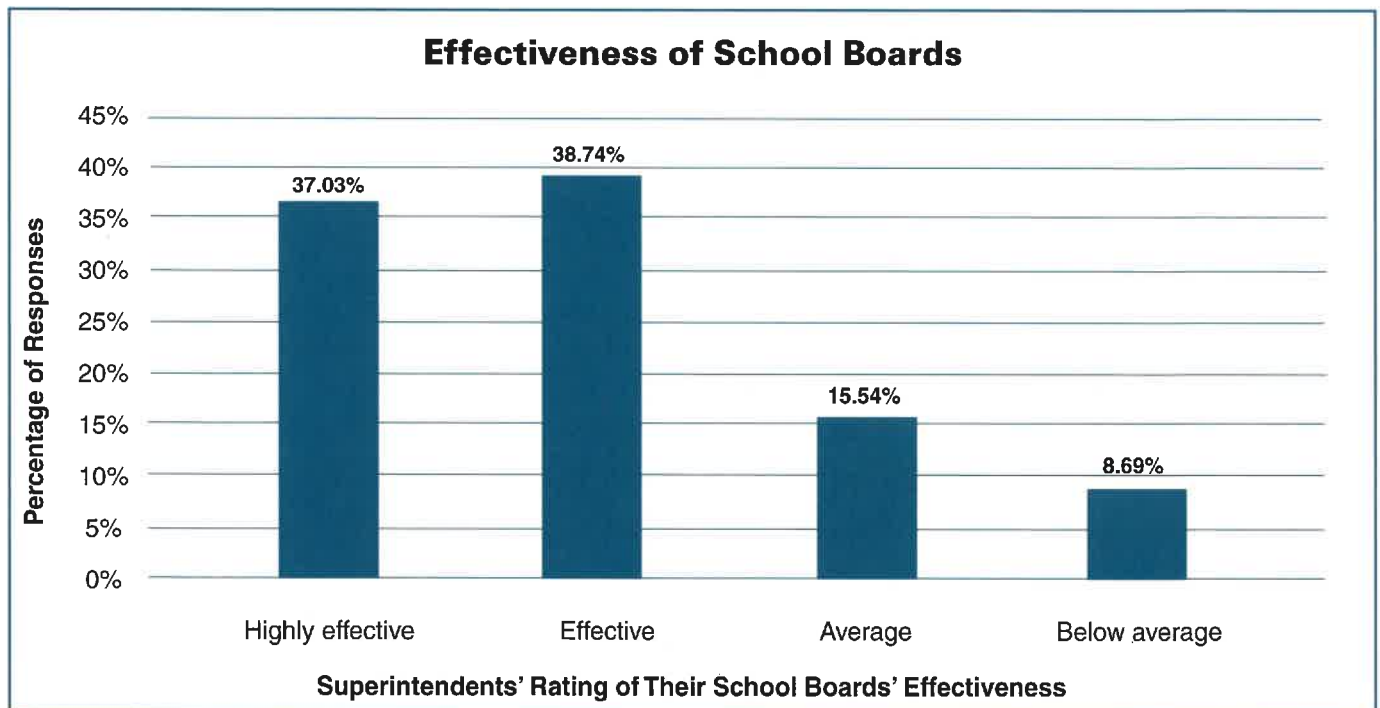
Ask for superintendent's feedback to improve board effectiveness

School boards always have an opportunity to provide their superintendents constructive criticism — often through the superintendent's annual evaluation. But because the effectiveness of a board can also impact the superintendent's performance and morale, it may be a good idea for boards to request feedback from their superintendents.

Take a look at the results of *Board & Administrator's* annual Survey on School Boards, which was conducted late last year. Of the 875 superintendents who responded to the survey, 663 —

approximately 75.77 percent — said their boards were effective or highly effective. On the other hand, 212 superintendents — approximately 24.23 percent — said their boards' effectiveness was average or below average.

To ensure you and other board members aren't viewing the board's effectiveness through rose-colored glasses, periodically ask the superintendent to pinpoint and identify areas in which the board can improve. Then, work with the superintendent and board president to schedule appropriate board development sessions. ■



Add student to school board

Many school districts have a student sitting in a seat at the board table. In fact, California law requires that a board accept a student petition and authorize installment of a student board representative.

Typically, the student board member fills a non-voting seat. The student serves in an advisory-only capacity; her role is to enlighten the other board members on students' viewpoints. The student can give opinions and engage in board deliberations.

So, what's the benefit of including a student on your board? Not only will the board better represent stakeholders, but it will also have a better understanding of how board decisions impact students and what issues they consider to be most pressing. Issues raised by student board members recently included face mask policies, decoration of graduation caps, school start times, and recycling programs.

There could be a few drawbacks of student board members. For example, it's possible that the student will have to miss class to attend, or he will need to attend long, late-night meetings. Also, the student board member may be criticized. That's what happened in Montgomery County, Md., to a student board member who stated she was in favor of the district's mask mandates, according to *wtopnews.com*.

If your board is open to the idea of a student board member, consider the following:

- Age or grade-level requirement.
- Attendance requirements.
- Level of good academic standing.
- Selection process.
- Length of service.
- Removal process.
- Rights and responsibilities. ■

Plan for unexpected when budgeting

During school year budget preparations, the superintendent and board members should consider all possible, maybe even improbable, expenses for the coming year. The district's budget should incorporate a "cushion" for unexpected expenses that may arise from emergencies and unpredictable events.

For example, districts may not have predicted inflation and increases in transportation expenses as a result of a pandemic and war in Ukraine, much less the need for funds to address serious staffing shortages, COVID-19 litigation expenses, and security for politicized board meetings.

To accurately determine potential needs and possible contingencies, the board and superintendent must weigh the superintendent's identification of the district's most pressing needs and

board members' identification of stakeholder and community concerns. Board members should set aside time in a closed meeting with the superintendent to discuss extraneous issues that may affect the district's budget. Part of that discussion includes noting suggestions for funding sources for any additional expenses.

There may be new expense categories the district should consider that weren't included in last year's plan. Districts will probably require additional funds to offer teachers and administrators, including superintendents, higher salaries to motivate them to stay. To cover all the bases, the board should refrain from using "cookie cutter" budgeting spreadsheets and from limiting budget conversations to the historically typical expense categories. ■

Keep arguments out of public eye

While it's normal for a school board and its superintendent to disagree on certain issues, board members should strive to maintain civility during public board meetings. In this era of smartphones and lightning-fast internet, an argument between a board member and a superintendent may easily be recorded or broadcast live on social media.

To ensure you and your superintendent don't go viral for the wrong reasons, address potential issues when you receive the board meeting agenda. And, if discussions become heated during the meeting, take a brief recess to give board members and the superintendent time to cool down before resuming deliberations or sending the issue to committee. ■