

Board & Administrator

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Should school boards manage? Yes, themselves

Boards should be comfortable “managing” in two areas: They should manage but not micro-manage their superintendent, and the board should manage itself. That second point may be most critical to the district, according to John Almond and Lloyd Wamhof, member assistance advocates for the Association of California School Administrators.

“In our work, we see some boards that accomplish both of these functions very well,” Almond said. “Our observation is, however, that a significant number of school boards have not set any guidelines for managing themselves.”

For evidence to back up this statement, look no further than the number of boards that are always at odds within their own ranks, Almond said. “Such boards have become divided on certain core issues and, in some cases, recall after recall of board members has created dysfunction within the district,” he said.

Regular and counterproductive superintendent turnover due to board dysfunction is another sign that boards are not adept at managing themselves, Wamhof said. Here are several suggestions from Wamhof and Almond to help a board manage itself professionally, successfully, and in a way that allows the board to do the job trustees were elected to do:

1. Agree on written norms/protocols that outline how the board will manage itself and conduct business efficiently at its meetings. The norms/protocols should be laid out in a short list that is agreed to by all members. (See an example of board norms/protocols on page 2.)

2. Restate board norms/protocols at the beginning of meetings and board workshops.

3. Reach agreement as a board on what a successful school district looks like. “Part of this process is examining and visiting successful districts and then deciding on what best practices board members can implement in their own district,” Wamhof said.

4. Rely on the superintendent to conduct the daily business of the district.

5. Be willing to hire a board coach to assist in establishing board norms/protocols and to utilize the coach in maintaining a positive relationship with the superintendent.

6. Be willing to censure fellow board members who continually disrupt the smooth running of the district and don’t observe the board’s own norms/protocols and agreements on how to run the district.

When the board is unprofessional, breaking the cycle of poor board management isn’t simple, and there isn’t a quick fix pill to swallow to change the behavior of disruptive board members who get themselves elected based on a negative personal agenda, Wamhof said.

Can a cycle of negativity be broken? Yes, Wamhof said.

For this to occur, however, there should be a process in place and board members must be willing to discipline themselves. That starts with norms and protocols.

For information, www.acsa.org; 559-905-2057. ■

Board norms/protocols help board manage itself

John Almond and Lloyd Wamhof, member assistance advocates of the Association of California School Administrators, suggest the following board norms and protocols for school boards to help them “manage” themselves professionally:

We agree:

- To respect differences of opinions in making decisions for the district.
- To follow best practices in managing the superintendent and the management of the board itself.

- To stay on task when conducting business for the district including while at board meetings.
- To never surprise the superintendent or each other when conducting official business of the district.
- To read these norms at the beginning of each board meeting and at board workshops as a reminder of how to conduct our meetings.
- To continually self-check to determine if we are following our norms when conducting district business. ■

Advocacy never more important to public schools than today

If school board members won't speak to their elected officials about support for public education, who in your community will?

The Kansas Association of School Boards, in its “10 rules of effective lobbying” offers these tips to help school board members when they reach out to their elected officials.

- Prioritize. “When everything is important, nothing is important,” KASB States. “This applies to how you spend your time as well as what you communicate to your legislators. They probably will not support you on every issue. Let them know what is the most important.”

- You need friends. “Shore up lobbying allies from your community to demonstrate broad support,” KASB advises.

- Manners, manners, manners. “Always be positive and courteous,” KASB states. “In politics, no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, but always politeness.”

For information, https://www.kasb.org/wcm/Advocacy_Services/Advocacy_Tips/10_Rules_of_Effective_Lobbying/wcm/_AdvS/Advocacy_Tips/10_Rules_of_Effective_Lobbying.aspx?hkey=fc5eead5-95a9-4a6f-a781-39e982263cab. ■

Participate in new member orientation with these 3 ideas

Here are three ways all board members can play a role in the orientation of a school board trustee, thereby ensuring that your newest teammate has a smooth start to the job:

1. Policy commitment. The board should have a policy in place stating that new board member orientation is required and listing who participates in the orientation, what orientation consists of, and when it should occur.

2. A belief that ongoing board education is vital. The board expects school staff to engage in professional development; it should expect the same of itself. Take time at board meetings to discuss

how to be a better board, how to improve policy, and how to ensure that thorough discussions take place so that all board members are up to speed on the complex issues you face.

3. Treat staff as a valuable resource. This starts with your relationship to the superintendent. The board should understand that he wants to answer board questions, whether they are from veterans or newbies. Expect the superintendent to reach out to new board members to check their comfort level with board work and maybe call on board veterans to assist with this. ■