

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

February 2021 Vol. 34, No. 10

Start off on the right foot as a new school board member

Running as a school board candidate and serving on the school board are two very different things. If you have recently been elected as a school board member, you may feel like you have won the race. However, you should quickly shift your attention to the next challenge: governing the operations of the school district.

Learning how to be a board member and an advocate for your district can take time. But there are a few things you can do immediately to ensure you start your term on the right foot.

Use the following checklist to ensure you have all your bases covered as a new board member:

Check boxes as completed	Actions to take as a new board member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Introduce yourself to the board president and your fellow board members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Introduce yourself to the superintendent. To get acquainted and develop rapport, consider inviting the superintendent to lunch or meeting with him individually.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review your board's mission statement, strategic plan, and goals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Obtain a copy of the board's policy manual and bylaws and review each chapter.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask the board president or other senior board member to explain board procedures for meetings and adopting and revising policies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review the board's calendar, add the dates of board meetings to your schedule, and print out the meeting agenda for any upcoming meetings. Add any other important dates to your schedule and individual calendar.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attend orientation for new board members and ask for clarification of your role as a board member.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Examine the district's most recent annual performance report. Ask your superintendent to brief you on the state's accountability system and how it works, if you are unfamiliar.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review the district's current budget and budget calendar. Obtain any necessary materials the board is developing or using to prepare the next budget.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If your board is holding a reception for you and other new board members, attend the reception. This may be a good opportunity to get to know your colleagues, the superintendent, and meet stakeholders and important members of the community.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure you review your state's Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act. Also, review state and local employment and education laws and policies. Ask the board's legal counsel for clarification if you have any questions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learn about the process for hiring and evaluating the superintendent. If the superintendent's evaluation is coming up soon, ask your board president or other senior board member for help in understanding the evaluation process. ■

Review nepotism policy

Because school districts are often one of the largest employers in the community, it's not unusual to have relatives working together in the district. To promote a fair workplace, districts usually have anti-nepotism policies. Such policies help deflect litigation surrounding hiring, promotion, evaluation, and compensation in schools.

Nepotism is the act of favoring someone for employment purposes, such as hiring or promoting, due to a non-work relationship. Anti-nepotism rules in school districts typically

prohibit a public official from appointing, promoting, employing, advancing or advocating for appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement in or to a position in the agency in which he serves or over which he exercises control any individual who is a relative. The rule then defines who is considered a "relative."

Many nepotism policies have been in place for decades. Considering reviewing your rule with district counsel to ensure that it is equitable as well as up to date. ■

Conduct a COVID-19 performance review for your district

With March 2021 marking the one-year anniversary of the extended school closures caused by COVID-19 for many districts across the country, now is the time for district leaders to take a brief step back to see how effective their district's response to the pandemic was.

As with any good performance review, districts should take the time to evaluate what parts of their response they did well — for example, maybe your district got iPads and/or laptops to your students within two weeks of the shutdown! Districts should also consider how their response could have been improved — maybe they could have reached out

to parents more, or sent additional training or encouragement to its staff. In addition, take the time to acknowledge district staff who went above and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While no one wants a repeat of the COVID-19 school closures, districts shouldn't assume that this was a one-time deal. Reviewing how their response to COVID-19 met (or missed) the mark is one of the best ways to ensure that districts are better prepared to meet the needs of their students should they need to close schools down for an extended period of time. ■

Two tips for better board meetings

Consider these two ways to improve board meetings:

1. Arrive early. Instead of arriving to board room at the last minute or sitting off alone studying your agenda materials, make it a point to meet and greet audience members. Introduce yourself to

individuals you don't know and ask whether they are interested in a particular agenda item.

2. Start off on a positive note. Ask the superintendent to begin each meeting with good news about students, employees, or the district's educational program. ■