

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Require continuing education for all board members

Create a training program to “onboard” new members and require veteran members to revisit board policies and procedures as part of mandatory continuing education. That way, board members don’t become complacent, they are cognizant of their role, they’ll make the most of valuable meeting time, and the board will reach its full governing potential.

The board should dedicate resources and time to professional development. Its continuous investment in its members evinces that they are valued and appreciated. The effort will lead to school and student success. Provide each other mentoring and support, organize subcommittees to tackle specific needs, work as a team, and don’t rely on the superintendent to lead the call for ongoing education about governance and leadership.

Group training can prove to be an effective team-building activity, accomplishing more than individual training for each board member. Encourage members to share ideas to solve problems and make improvements so that the board will be more effective. New members might have surprising and valuable insight on board operations. Long-term board members may know, from experience, what strategies work best to produce specific results. Consider assigning a subcommittee to develop a program to teach about leadership, governance, administration, and effective project management. Never assume that members already know basic tenants.

Reviewing what a board member’s role entails can only help to focus each member’s efforts, ensure they stay on task, and foster a strong and productive board. ■

Board members: school visitors policy applies to you too

School board members planning to visit their district’s schools this school year to get insights on teaching methods, student curriculum, or building conditions should think twice before showing up unannounced.

Many districts around the country have either adopted their own visitation policies or required individual schools to do so. These policies not only help keep campuses safe for students and staff but also minimize disruptions to learning. Unless those policies state otherwise, which is unlikely, they will apply to board members as

well as the public in general. Most policies require advance notice of all visitors.

With districts around the country ramping up security efforts, it’s more important than ever for board members to follow policies on school visitors. Here are a few tips for board members who are planning site visits to district schools:

- **Review school’s policy.** Does the policy require advance notice of a visit? Will the board member require the approval of the school’s principal or another administrator? Board members should ask about rules beforehand to avoid uncomfortable

conversations and conflicts with school staff or getting turned away at the door.

- **Comply with visitor guidelines.** Board members should be prepared to sign in at the main office, wear badges that identify them as school visitors, or be accompanied by a staff member if that's what the school requires.

- **Respect student privacy.** Some board mem-

bers may not see any harm in photographing students or posting details about classroom activities on social media, but such actions may be upsetting to parents or the students themselves. And it may conflict with privacy laws and school policy. The best way to avoid controversy or community backlash is to focus on observing, not self-promoting on social media. ■

Plug into community's needs

School board members should remember that they are an important connection between the school and its larger community. The board is meant to represent the various communities and address their needs. How can board members ensure that they are effectively meeting the needs of their constituents?

Attend different community events. Get insight into the priorities and needs of individuals from the different communities your constituents come from. Doing so will give you new and refreshing perspectives to consider. It can help you frame your board meetings in a way that speaks to a larger swath of people.

Keep track of topics parents frequently mention or bring to your attention. You can become

aware of — and proactively tackle — minor concerns before they spiral into larger concerns. Is there an underlying theme or concern repeatedly raised? Keeping those concerns in mind can lead to a more nuanced discussion at your board meetings. Are they raising new or novel issues that you have not considered? Perhaps you need to investigate these concerns or notify the superintendent.

Point your constituents in the right direction. Remember that some issues are better addressed by other individuals. If the matter relates to school management or personnel, it is probably best addressed by the superintendent or other school official. Notify the proper person where appropriate. ■

Don't wear two hats at once: Separate board, parent roles

The desire to improve the educational system may be an important motivator for any parent who serves as a member of the school board. This may be especially true if you, as a parent, disagree with certain district policies or practices and became a board member to enact change. However, your aspirations and desires as a parent should not control all actions you take as a member of the board.

As a best practice, board members with children should separate their role as a parent from their role as a member of the district's governing body. Here are two tips when you are both a parent and a board member:

1. **Take off board member hat when meeting your child's educators.** Serving as a board

member doesn't restrict your ability to actively participate in your child's education. Just remember to take off your board member hat when you speak or meet with your child's teachers and other school personnel. For example, you can discuss your child's performance with a baseball coach, but don't threaten the coach with discipline if he doesn't make your child the starting pitcher.

2. **Support decisions made by board.** As a member of the board, you are responsible for acting in the best interests of the district and your constituents. If the board votes to enact certain policies that you disagree with as a parent, you should nonetheless present a united front and support the board's decision in public to maintain professionalism and decorum. ■