

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Avoid superintendent evaluation pitfalls

Here are some superintendent evaluation pitfalls to avoid:

- Placing undue focus on good or bad incidents. It's too easy to get hung up on a single issue and spend too much time on it.
- Basing the evaluation only on recent performance. Evaluations that reflect only the performance within a few weeks of the evaluation's due date are unfair to the superintendent. This will happen if the board isn't constantly reminded that the superintendent's evaluation is a year-long process and a professional responsibility.
- Allowing board members' personal agendas into the process. It's important for the board to be as objective as possible.
- Including issues outside of the superintendent's purview.
- "Springing" the evaluation on the superintendent. The superintendent should be given the opportunity to see his appraisal prior to it being made public.
- Using the evaluation as the single communication vehicle with the superintendent. The board needs to communicate with the superintendent about his performance throughout the year. ■

Case study: Choosing the graduation speaker

Here's a hot-button scenario with the potential to get constituents irate and generate board member confusion about their roles.

Seniors at a high school have always been allowed to choose a speaker for graduation ceremonies. This year, they voted to choose a popular former teacher to return as their speaker.

The problem is the former teacher left when his contract was terminated for "unprofessional conduct with a female student." It was never made clear why he left. But all board members, the superintendent, and principals are aware of what happened.

The high school principal told the students they must choose another speaker. But the students demanded the former teacher.

Before the upcoming board meeting, one board member brings up the topic and said he thinks the board should make the decision on the potentially explosive matter.

What would your board do?

Solution: Make sure the principal and superintendent handle the matter first. If the principal makes a decision you don't agree with, your board can always vote to instruct the superintendent to override it. ■

Board responsibilities for public relations

An often-overlooked board responsibility is in the area of public relations. Board members who serve as advocates for their school district do the school system an important service and contribute to enhancing the organization's visibility, as well as its ability to generate support for matters like bond issues and advancing the district's

position on legislation affecting schools.

The following checklist identifies key board responsibilities in the policy area of public relations, and also provides the superintendent's corresponding areas of responsibility for implementing board policy.

Is your board active in this area?

Board

1. Oversight of the communications program.
2. Develop the policy that governs public relations, to include:
 - State goals of the program, to include internal and external communication activities.
 - Identify staff and board areas of involvement.
 - Explain how complaints will be handled.
 - Describe relationships with other organizations.
 - Describe relationships with government.
3. Working with media:
 - Identify spokesperson (typically either the board president or the superintendent).
 - Understand how the media operates (No such thing as "off the record," avoid "no comment," and if you don't understand or have an answer to a question, say so).
4. Always respect confidentiality of information.
5. Enforce the chain of command. When a parent, citizen, or employee has a problem, refer to the staff member in the district (e.g., a teacher, principal, or administrator) who can assist.

6. Advocacy: Represent the district's interests to government officials at the local, state and federal levels.

Superintendent

1. Recommend the strategic elements of the organization's communications program.
2. Implement the program:
 - Includes assigning staff members to tasks necessary to implement the program and working with vendors for printing and production needs.
 - Responsible for the district's internal communications efforts directed to employees.
3. Responsible for working with the media:
 - Speaks for the schools.
 - Prepares press releases.
 - Answers media inquiries.
4. Resolves complaints brought to the district by constituents.
5. Works with other agencies in the community and government officials (may seek board assistance in these areas). ■

Board Self-Assessment

Check "Yes" if the statement is true all of the time. Check "Some" if the statement is at least partially true. Check "No" if the item is never true.	Yes	Some	No
General Board Policies			
1. Board activities are confined to policy issues rather than management issues.			
2. All management activities of the school are delegated to the superintendent.			
3. The board of education annually reviews important documents — bylaws, policy manual.			
4. The board receives policy recommendations from the superintendent and/or the board policy committee.			
5. Policies are reviewed on a cycle basis.			
6. The board adopts policy and assigns implementation of policy to school staff through the superintendent.			
Comments:			
Planning			
1. Board activities focus on the mission statement of the district.			
2. The board adjusts the direction of the school to match community and student needs.			
3. The board makes a written long-range, strategic plan (more than one year).			
4. Board members support decisions of the full board.			
Comments:			