

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Map successful approach to attendance rezoning plan

Whether school attendance rezoning is necessitated by transportation issues, like those in Lake Tahoe Unified School District in California this year, or overpopulation concerns, as seen in Killeen Independent School District in Texas, it typically comes with pushback from some stakeholders. The board can prepare for the probable discord by forming a strategic plan.

First, help all members get up to speed on the reasons rezoning is on the table. Then, discuss whether to form a zoning advisory committee and who will serve on the committee. Also, consider if the district should hire an education and planning expert to assist with long-term planning and analysis.

Next, develop criteria to be considered in setting the new attendance zones. For example, will fiscal considerations factor into the decision? What about demographics and maintaining existing neighborhoods? Will utilizations of existing buildings be part of the assessment? Will the district take advantage of natural boundaries, such as rivers?

Regular communication with district staff and the community is important. Discuss how the school assignment planning will be transparent, efficient, and equitable. Specify how stakeholders can provide feedback and how the rezoning committee will review and discuss their comments. Flagler County Schools in Florida recently established "Let's Talk," a communication channel for the public to provide input about its rezoning plans to its committee.

Also, decide whether any group of students will be "grandfathered" in to attend their current schools.

Finally, map out how the district will inform parents of the boundary changes in addition to formally unveiling the plan to the public at a school board meeting. Although districts regularly communicate with parents through web portals and emails, a boundary change may require written notice. The district could also include an information packet to students and parents to make the zoning transition smoother. ■

Have a plan to replace exiting board member

Whether it's disputes over safety protocols or teachings about race, there is a steady trend across the nation of board members resigning their positions.

The school board should ensure it's prepared to respond promptly and effectively when a board member can't complete her term. The board should look to state law for any rules regarding how quickly the

board must replace the member. The school district should also have a policy indicating how fast it needs to happen. Boards can consider the following steps to prepare for a board member's unexpected departure:

- Prepare a model vacancy announcement indicating the board is accepting applications. If a board member resigns, flesh out the announcement with any specific details.

- Create a board ad hoc committee to review applications, conduct interviews, and make recommendations to present to the full board. Have the committee develop a set of questions that are connected to the qualifications for board membership. These are based on board policy and would likely include responsibility, service, sound judgment, broad vision, dedication to the interest of education, unselfish concern for the public welfare, and freedom from prejudice, bias, or commitment to any special interests.

- Maintain a list of potential candidates, including those who have indicated an interest in board

membership in the past, who have been heavily involved with and helpful in public board meetings, or parents or other members of the public who are heavily and positively involved in district activities.

- Create a list of things to do to separate from the departing board member, such as: 1) making any changes to login credentials and other information to restrict her access to confidential board information; 2) retrieving board handbooks and other materials so they can be provided to the new board member; and 3) changing website and letterhead information to accurately reflect current board membership. ■

Streamline selection of board officers by establishing criteria, qualifications

A strong leadership team is not only critical for a district's success, but it may also significantly improve the board's relationship with the superintendent. Although many board members have the skills and experience necessary to spearhead the board's efforts, some may not be aware that they qualify for a position as a board officer. Accordingly, to ensure that board officer qualifications and the selection process are clear and streamlined, the board should develop and publish appropriate criteria for its officers.

For example, your board policies may state that a board member may qualify to serve as board president or vice president if the board member:

- Has served at least two years on the board;
- Has attended at least 90 percent of board meetings in the current school year;
- Has maintained appropriate levels of communication with other board members and the superintendent;

- Has appropriate knowledge of parliamentary procedures; and

- Is willing to speak on the board's behalf during public conferences.

Similarly, board members up for the position of board secretary must meet certain qualifications. For instance, board policies may state that to serve as board secretary, a board member must:

- Have served on the board for at least one year;
- Be willing to attend all board meetings except in case of an emergency;
- Have appropriate knowledge of parliamentary procedures; and
- Be able to multitask during board meetings and record meeting minutes.

Take the time review policies and qualifications before the next officer takes on her new role. ■

Look ahead to prevent conflicts in board meeting schedule

Many school boards schedule their board meetings on a specific day of the month. While this is a great strategy to keep stakeholders apprised of upcoming meetings, doing this may also result in scheduling conflicts.

Consider what happened to the Franklin County (Tenn.) School Board. The board usually holds a board meeting on the second Monday of each month. However, the board had to suddenly re-

schedule its monthly meeting to Feb. 7, 2022, so board members could attend the Tennessee School Boards Association's Legislative and Legal Institute meeting on Monday, Feb. 14.

To prevent a similar issue, research dates for important conferences, school breaks, and holidays ahead of time and work with colleagues to map out a conflict-free board meeting calendar for the quarter before publishing it on your district's website. ■