

# Board & Administrator

## FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Editor: Jeff Stratton

### Can the strategic plan be changed?

The answer to the question of whether the district's plan should be altered is, "It depends."

Yes, strategic plans should take into account any changes in the law or developments in the community.

The plan, however, should not be altered because of a board member's politics or hot-button issues.

For example, many districts in recent years have seen an influx of non-English-speaking people move into the community. The district then begins teaching the children, even when initially

the staff may not have been prepared to handle the sudden increase of new students who need an education but speak limited English.

In this situation, the board may have to put the strategic plan on hold to respond to the immediate challenges. Then, because the group of people the district serves is more diverse, the board may have to rewrite some of its strategic goals, objectives, and action plans.

This type of planning flexibility helps make the school district responsive and the best it can be. ■

#### Stay focused, on task at meetings

From the board member's point of view, there is nothing worse than a poorly run board meeting.

In his article *The 6 Golden Rules of Meeting Management*, Don Jacobson stated that golden rule No. 4 is that board members need to stay on topic.

"Most groups have at least one person who

tends to go off on a tangent or tell irrelevant war stories during meetings," Jacobson writes. "All meeting participants have the responsibility of gently guiding the meeting back to the substantive agenda items."

For more information, visit <http://govleaders.org/meetings.htm>. ■

#### Quorum issue: Member leaves during meeting

Let's say the board is in the midst of a duly noticed meeting when a board member receives notice of an emergency at home. He leaves the meeting. How does this affect the quorum and subsequent board action at the meeting?

*Robert's Rules of Order* has this to say on the topic:

"Once a quorum at a meeting has been established, the continued presence of a quorum is presumed to exist only until the chair or any other

member notices that a quorum is no longer present. If the chair notices the absence of a quorum, he or she should declare this fact, at least before taking any vote or stating the question on any new motion."

For more information, visit [www.robertsrules.com/faq.html](http://www.robertsrules.com/faq.html).

Editor's note: Be sure to check your state's law and your district's bylaws for guidance on this question. ■

## Use role exercise that generates communication between board, superintendent

The board of Horry County Public Schools in Conway, S.C., and its superintendent use a facilitated roles-and-responsibilities exercise that is effective because it improves communication among board members and the superintendent.

The exercise asks board members to identify the roles they are supposed to play.

Some examples:

- \* Hiring a basketball coach.
- \* Setting school attendance boundaries.
- \* Deciding where to deposit school system funds.
- \* Establishing criteria for evaluation of the superintendent.

The facilitator encourages board members to discuss their answers to the questions and discuss why or why not the specific example falls under the board's role. That leads to further reflection and discussion among board members about how they are operating. See below for more example questions.

Another reason this type of role exercise is valuable to board members is that they are reminded of the temptation to spend time on the day-to-day issues of the district. That is a responsibility that belongs to the superintendent. The exercise asks board members to focus on policy and big-picture issues the district faces. ■

### Board-superintendent responsibility exercise (excerpted)

Please indicate whether you are:

\_\_\_\_\_ In your first term as a board member.

\_\_\_\_\_ Have served on the board for four or more years.

1. The school board is/should be totally responsible
2. The school board is/should be primarily responsible
3. The school board and the superintendent are/should be equally responsible.
4. The superintendent is/should be primarily responsible.
5. The superintendent is/should be totally responsible.

**How it is**

1    2    3    4    5

**How it should be**

1    2    3    4    5

**Issue**

1. Accepting or rejecting a request from a specific nonschool group to use school facilities.
2. Deciding how to invest \$100,000.
3. Hiring lead counsel.
4. Preparing a line-item budget.
5. Direct discussion with teacher education representatives about salary, work load, and benefits to be included in the next budget.
6. Providing orientation for new school board members.
7. Talking to the press after a weapons incident at the high school.
8. Deciding which courses to cut from the curriculum to meet budget demands.
9. Hiring an assistant superintendent.
10. Selecting textbooks for use in the school system.
11. Hiring a basketball coach.
12. Setting school attendance boundaries.
13. Deciding where to deposit school system funds.
14. Approving report cards and grading systems.
15. Writing a mission statement for the school system.
16. Establishing criteria for evaluation of the superintendent.

*Source: Dr. Cynthia Elsberry, superintendent, Horry County Public Schools, Conway, South Carolina. Reprinted with permission.*

*Editor's note: Ask your superintendent if you would like to see the full exercise from the Horry County Public Schools. ■*