

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Improve board/superintendent decision-making with these strategies

In its *Principles for Positive Board and Superintendent Relations*, the Iowa Association of School Boards recommends actively working on improved decision-making with these strategies.

- Recognize board members' expertise in different areas, and ask for advice when making decisions.
- Provide information in a timely manner. Board members should communicate to the superintendent

prior to meeting when more information is needed.

- Seek the advice of legal counsel when necessary. Determine who can seek the advice of the district's legal counsel for the board.
- Propose more than one solution to a complex problem. Allow for discussion.
- Support the final decision of the board.

For more information, visit <http://www.ia-sb.org/boardoperations.aspx?id=1060>. ■

Avoid endless meeting discussion

In its *Sample School Board Operating Protocol*, the Arizona School Boards Association encourages effective board decision-making with this tip:

"Board meetings are for decision-making, action and votes, not endless discussion. We

agree to move to the question when discussion is repetitive," the protocol says.

For more information, visit <http://azsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Sample-School-Board-Operating-Protocol-rev-043013.pdf>. ■

Board president stays in control of board meetings

Even veteran board presidents have a fear of losing control of open meetings. Here are two tips to keep order at meetings.

1. Ensure proper behavior by the public. If an audience member starts to speak out of turn, the board president should ask him to sit down. When people are out of order, the board president needs to remind them of that.

2. Require board members to come prepared. When meetings get out of hand, board members

themselves are often to blame. Lack of preparation is often the culprit. When board members don't study the issues beforehand or get their questions answered, the board is usually in for a long night. That's when constituents can pounce and turn the meeting into a circus.

The president should issue regular reminders to the board to review the agenda packets and get all questions answered by the president or superintendent prior to the board meeting. ■

Cure board meeting ills with annual evaluation

If board meetings are too long and tedious, the board is likely to blame. To make board meetings more productive, conduct an evaluation at least once each year, with an eye toward improving meetings. Another approach is to evaluate your meetings more regularly. Some boards do this at the conclusion of every meeting.

Distribute a simple evaluation questionnaire to the board, ask each board member to critique the meetings, and ask for suggestions for improvement.

Evaluate items such as the quality of reports to the board from committees, the level of full-board participation in meeting discussion, and the board's commitment to focusing on policy issues at meetings.

By evaluating your meetings, you also keep your superintendent on her toes. By offering her suggestions to improve meetings, the board gets to assess how well she implements the ideas.

See below for a meeting evaluation form.

Board meeting self-assessment					
Use this meeting self-assessment at the conclusion of board meetings to determine where the board could improve its meetings.					
General meeting behavior					
Rate the board's meeting behavior by assigning a numerical rating using the following scale:					
Falling = 1, Poor = 2, Satisfactory = 3, Good = 4, Commendable = 5	1	2	3	4	5
The agenda was well planned to focus on the real work of the board.					
The board followed its agenda and did not allow itself to get sidetracked.					
Board members prepared for and contributed to the meeting.					
The meeting proceeded without interruptions or distractions.					
The board's deliberations and decision-making processes were public.					
Participation was balanced. All board members participated; no one dominated.					
Members listened attentively, avoiding side conversations.					
Work was conducted in an atmosphere of trust and openness.					
Meeting participants treated each other with respect and courtesy.					
Were these principles followed? Mark Yes or No. For any not followed, please add remarks.	Yes	No	N/A		
Board actions occur at the policy level rather than at the operational level.					
The board reviews policy about each topic before discussing that issue.					
In writing additional policies, the board starts with a broad statement and becomes more detailed in a logical and disciplined sequence.					
The board minimizes time spent monitoring past performance.					
The board routinely dedicates time to reviewing/improving its own processes.					
The board clarifies priorities/values when considering potential outcomes, benefits, and costs of outcomes.					
The board follows an annual calendar based on a plan for doing its work.					
The board president helps the board efficiently conduct its meeting.					
The board spends most of its time deliberating issues, defining and clarifying its vision, and linking with its community, as opposed to "fixing things."					
The board supports the superintendent in any reasonable interpretation of its policies.					
Remarks:					

Clarify superintendent's role relative to the board

New board members may think they understand the difference between making policy and management of the school district, but at some point, questions will generally arise about this topic. It's important that board members understand which parties — the board and superintendent — are responsible for what.

In *Surviving Your First Year on the Board*, the Nebraska Association of School Boards gives this guidance for determining who does what.

"The superintendent is the only employee that is hired directly by the board. All other administrators, teachers and staff are hired by the superintendent. Where the school board is responsible for setting the vision and mission for the district, it is the superintendent who will carry out the goals. The school board tells the superintendent what it wants done; the superintendent determines the best way to do it."

For more information, visit <http://www.nasb-online.org/docs/SurvivingYourFirstYear2012.pdf>. ■