

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Keep vocal board members from hogging floor

Depending on communication styles, your more expressive board colleagues may have greater floor time during board discussions than reticent board members do. To promote balanced board discussion that provides an opportunity to hear each board member's point of view, consider the following approaches.

1. *Use a stopwatch.* The board chair can keep time and allow each person to speak for two minutes on one issue. The time limit provides for an equitable exchange of ideas and keeps the meeting moving along in a timely manner. It prevents one member from monopolizing the conversation.

2. *Interrupt.* If the board member goes on and

on, another board member or the board chair should interrupt. If the speaker has gone off topic, point that out. If the speaker is just long-winded, interrupt and ask him to pause so other members can digest his points or catch up on their notes. Or just say the board needs to move on to the next issue.

3. *Reserve reaction for later.* Some members think it is their duty to comment on every issue and are serial interrupters. But, questions or opposing viewpoints can become interruptions that bog down a meeting. Try this: Once board members conclude their remarks, set aside a portion of the meeting for questions and clarifications. ■

Learn from educators on board during superintendent search

For many school boards searching for a new superintendent, it may be difficult to decide which of the numerous candidates in running is the best choice to lead the district. But if one or more of your board members is a full-time educator, you have a valuable resource that can make the superintendent selection process a bit easier.

During its superintendent search, the school board of the Oconomowoc Area (Wis.) School District relied on Board Member Chad Schraufnagel. Schraufnagel was an assistant principal at a local high school at the time, and he used his knowledge of school operations and the role of a superintendent to assist the board in selecting its new top administrator.

"He was invaluable during the superintendent selection process for his knowledge of the position as well as the overall field, if you will. Just having somebody like that ... was such a great advantage for our board and community," said School Board President James Wood in a phone interview with a local news outlet.

Similarly, the educators on your board may be willing to take the lead during interviews to determine which superintendent candidate is the right fit for your district. Alternatively, they may share insights that will help your board identify the specific skills, leadership style, and aspirations that your future superintendent should have to be successful. ■

Don't shy away from holding extra work sessions

Are you and your board colleagues making the most of your time? If you believe that your meeting discussions are running too long or board members need more time to prepare for a vote, the solution may be to hold additional work sessions each month. These work sessions, which give board members an opportunity to research and discuss specific topics and issues in greater detail, may maximize collaboration in and effectiveness of your board meetings.

Consider the results of *Board and Administrator's Survey on School Boards*, which was conducted late last year. Out of the 860 superintendents who responded to the survey, 44.9 percent — approximately 386 respondents — said their school boards held work sessions only once or

twice per month. On the other hand, 55.1 percent of superintendents — approximately 474 — said their school boards held work sessions either less than once or more than twice per month.

As the data indicate, there is no bright-line rule regarding how many work sessions a board must hold each month. That number may even vary from year to year or depend on the individual board's needs. Accordingly, don't shy away from convening extra work sessions if your board must study up on certain topics before a vote. You may be able to fit any necessary work sessions into your board's busy schedule by holding them before or after regular board meetings. ■

