

Basic Top Ten Board Rules

1. No surprises at Board Meetings - If you have concerns about a topic of discussion, discuss it ahead of time with the chairman or superintendent. If you need more information on topic, ask for it well before the board meeting. We are a team working together and trust is crucial to that teamwork. Use our agenda review to share your thoughts with others.
2. Reprimand or correct in private - Praise in Public. This would apply to personally directed questions or statements that might be controversial or personal in nature. No one should ever be publicly called out or questioned about their performance.
3. No innuendos or hearsay will be entertained by the board. If one can't tell who said it and in what context, the board will not accept the information. If one is concerned about retaliation- that's bullying and we do not accept that in this district. Come forward and if the retaliation takes place, we will reprimand accordingly.
4. Be prepared for board meetings. Read the packet well ahead of time. Attend the board trainings to learn more about your responsibilities.
5. If you have questions (especially possibly controversial questions) ask them ahead of the meeting. Ask questions seeking to understand concepts not undermine authority or question judgment.
6. Understand the board's responsibilities - they set the goals (vision), policies and oversee the finances. The board says *what* they want to accomplish, not *how* to accomplish it. Ask yourself- is the issue of concern based on a policy or goal of the district? If not, it's not your job to DO or necessarily say anything about it. Concerns can always be shared with the superintendent, but not direction as to how to take care of the concern.
7. Understand the superintendent role - Chief executive officer. He's the one who decides *how* to accomplish what the board directs through policy and goals. He's the one who decides how to deal with administrators and directors in accomplishing the District goals.
8. Visits to schools should be unobtrusive. A chance to cheer on students and staff through sporting events, open houses or other school events. Do not make a visit if your primary purpose is to "spy," investigate or check-up on an issue or concern.
9. Realize you were elected by your area to make decisions based on the information you receive as a board member- not to further personal agendas or community biases. Often community members don't have all the information, so they trust you to use the information you have in making decisions on their behalf.
10. As one board member, you have no power or authority - don't promise anyone anything. Only as a board is the power and authority. Once the board makes a decision, it is the responsibility of every board member to support the decision in moving forward.

Minidoka County School District #331
School Board Information - 8-17-17

The following excerpts were taken from “Essentials of School Board Service: A guide to surviving your first year” published by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association

“1:3. What exactly do school boards do?”

A school board:

- Sets the district’s direction with performance-based goals
- Ensures alignment of strategies, resources (including the approved budget), policies, programs and processes with district goals
- Assesses and accounts for student achievement using comprehensive data, thorough deliberation and open communication
- Annually conducts a written performance assessment of the district superintendent and assistant district superintendent(s)
- Leads the district, accentuating and reinforcing the positive while correcting the negative

Keep in mind the school board’s job is to focus on the ends, while the superintendent focuses on the ways and means to attain the ends. In other words, the board oversees the education of students and is responsible for school district operations, but does not directly run the district’s day-to-day operations.

1:4. Now that I’m a director, what does my community expect of me?

As a new director you will be asked to make decisions on major issues that affect the students and citizens of your community. You will be asked to vote publicly on matters that you may know little about. As with every new job, it takes time to learn the ropes. You need to take that time to learn about your job and the issues at the same time you are performing your job.

Some of the activities you will be expected to do are: attend board meetings, participate on committees, attend school functions, keep yourself informed about issues, pursue developmental opportunities for yourself, and interact with your fellow directors and the superintendent. These activities require a significant amount of time, but it is time extremely well spent when you consider that you are helping to shape the future of the children in your community.

1:7. How do the school board’s responsibilities differ from the superintendent’s?

The school board is the district’s board of directors and is responsible for establishing goals, adopting policy and overseeing resources for the school district. The superintendent – the district’s chief executive officer – works for the school board and is the person who translates the policy into action. Consistent with the goals established by the school board, the superintendent and staff make the day-to-day decisions that affect the operation of the school district, deploying resources, assigning staff and documenting results.

1:11. What is the board's role when there are problems with an administrator?

If there are concerns about an administrator's performance, the board should raise these concerns with the superintendent in executive session. It is the superintendent who has the responsibility to handle these issues. Take care not to cross the line into micromanaging the relationship with this administrator. It's the superintendent's job to lead and manage the employees in the district.

2:1. Is it ok to call the superintendent?

You need to establish a productive working relationship with your superintendent. To do this, you will have to talk to that individual. If you have questions, it is better to call the superintendent and discuss them before the board meeting rather than surprise him or her at a public meeting. If these questions are concerns or relate to negative feelings from the community, the superintendent will appreciate knowing about these in advance of the board meeting so that he or she can come prepared to address them. It is appropriate to call the superintendent, set up a meeting to discuss questions, or even email him or her for simple questions or requests.

2:2. If I disagree with directors or the superintendent, what is the best way to let them know how I feel?

Always treat your fellow directors and the superintendent and administrators with respect. Don't be afraid to disagree on an issue, however. In fact, a discussion about an issue that reflects two or more views usually results in a better decision than if everyone agrees with the first solution offered. Be certain you debate the issue, not the person. Demeaning comments or angry discussions do not facilitate effective decision making.

2:3. How do I approach my superintendent or board if I have a suggestion for a change?

If your suggestion needs to be discussed by the entire board and voted on, it should be added to an upcoming board agenda. Contact the superintendent or the board president to discuss your idea and have it either put on the agenda or referred to committee.

2:4. Is it OK to talk to district administrators and staff?

In addition to the superintendent, you will come in contact with district employees, including administrators, teachers and other staff members. While there's nothing wrong with talking to district staff, keep in mind the chain of command. For example, teachers report to principals; principals report to the superintendent; the superintendent reports to the board. If you have a request for information, you should ask the superintendent unless he or she indicates otherwise.

2:5. Can I talk to directors outside the board meeting?

Based upon case law and the Sunshine Act's [Public Meeting Law in Idaho] definition of the term "meeting," it is unlikely a court would find a violation of the Sunshine Act [Public Meeting Law in Idaho] just because a group of members chat in the parking lot after a meeting, provided that the parking lot get-together is spontaneous and is not held for the purpose of deliberating or taking action on agency business. School directors may get together in a social setting, even if it is prearranged, provided they are not getting together for the purpose of deliberating or taking action on agency business. It is wise to be cautious whenever a quorum of a board or committee is present in an unadvertised gathering. Even the most innocent and legal of gatherings could raise public suspicion and invite legal challenges.

2:6. What can I say, or not say, to parents and friends about school issues?

School board business that is discussed in executive session or relates to confidential matters (such as an employee personnel issue or student discipline issue) should never be discussed with anyone other than another director or the superintendent. A good rule of thumb is to discuss only items that have been made public at a school board meeting. Adhering to this rule of thumb will go a long way in maintaining trust with the superintendent and the other directors, and to protecting staff and the public.

2:8. I have children in school. How can I talk with their teachers now that I'm on the school board?

This is a tricky area. No matter what you say about "speaking as a parent, not a director," it's difficult for some teachers to separate your role on the school board from your role as a parent. It's not surprising that some teachers may be somewhat intimidated by your role as a school director. Some married school directors have indicated that their spouses frequently take the lead in speaking to their children's teachers.

Make sure you're not using your position as a school director to secure special treatment for your child. Your child should be treated the same as other students and be subject to the same rules and requirements. If there are issues you wish to discuss with a teacher, you should follow the normal procedures for contacting your child's teacher to discuss them. Keep in mind you don't have to relinquish your parental rights now that you're a school director. At the same time, you must remain sensitive to the fact that because you are on the school board, you are not just like any other parent.

2:9. As a school director, may I visit the schools?

You have the same right as a parent or community member to visit the schools in your district, so long as you follow whatever procedures your district has for visitors. As a school director, you may also visit the schools in an official capacity for purposes and in accordance with procedures authorized by the board.

As a school director, you should use school visits to build good working relations with building principals and staff, to celebrate the positive accomplishments of the schools, and to show your pride as a member of the board. Look for opportunities to visit when a school is hosting a special event or recognition program for students and staff. In any event, be sure to tell the superintendent and/or principal in advance of attending such events and follow the established procedures for arranging other authorized visits.

2:10. How do I respond to a community that questions the school board's decisions?

It's normal to hear questions about the board's decisions. You will at times find yourself dealing with controversial, complex issues, and the board's final decisions may be unpopular. Explain the thought process that went into the decision and why the board arrived at the conclusion it did. Be sure to answer honestly and without emotion. One of your roles as a school director is to be an advocate for the district. Being asked about board decisions provides an opportunity to promote the positive activities that are occurring in your schools while at the same time responding to community questions.

2:12. How should I respond to reports from community members about staff misconduct?

This kind of question arises frequently, and is something members of the PSBA Legal Services try to address training programs designed for new school directors. You may be glad to learn that whether the allegation involves serious misconduct by staff or by students, the recommended course of action is the same and is relatively simple. There are four basic steps.

First, you should thank the person for saying something about it to someone. Second, tell them you want them to call the superintendent of schools and give the superintendent the information directly. Third, explain that school directors are not a proper channel for handling such matters because school directors must be careful not to appear as though they are participating in the investigation or prosecution of serious staff and student misconduct, so that they do not become disqualified from helping to decide what will happen as a result of a possible board hearing in the matter. Fourth, tell the parent that you will call the superintendent yourself to let the superintendent know about the matter, and tell the superintendent that the parent is going to call him or her to report the information directly. That way, the superintendent will be expecting the call, and can make sure it is given priority.

When you handle it that way, you have helped make sure the matter is properly reported, and you have fulfilled your responsibility in a way that does not interfere with your ability to perform your other duties as a school director.

It is a fair question to ask whether the person instead should be told to report the matter to the school principal or other person designated to receive complaints under the various school district policies that address complaint procedures. That would not be an inappropriate

response, and might be best for less serious issues, like complaints from parents about a student's grade in a course.

2:13. Can I use email or social media to communicate with my board colleagues?

School directors should take care to ensure that use of email to communicate with each other about school district matters does not take the place of discussions that should be happening at public meetings, or become a way to avoid open meeting requirements. The same holds true with social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. You should be particularly careful to avoid sequential email communications or social media conversations.

Pennsylvania courts have expressed concern about multiple school directors discussing school district business via back and forth email even though there is no court decision yet directly saying it is unlawful. PSBA recommends taking a safe approach, limiting emails by and between school directors to things such as coordinating schedules and availability for meetings, and distributing background information in advance of meetings.

Under [State] Law, emails from your personal or school district account may be public records subject to disclosure, and they may also end up being disclosed in the event of litigation. Your online communications may also become public as well, even with privacy settings set to "friends only." If you don't want your conversations to become front-page fodder, then don't have them online.

3:15. Can I ask questions during the board meeting?

Absolutely! Hopefully, you have taken time to review the materials in your board packet and have asked for any clarifications from the superintendent or board president prior to the meeting. Certainly as the discussion of an item ensues, other questions may occur to you that you have not previously asked.

3:16. How may I ask questions at a board meeting and still adhere to the "no surprises" rule?

If you think your question may be controversial, let the superintendent or president or both know ahead of time. They can help you decide if there is a better way to address the issue. If your question is to clarify an issue or if it is prompted by the discussion, then it is appropriate to ask it at the board meeting, as long as you don't stray into topics more properly discussed in executive session. If you have a question that may require collecting data or information not already in your board packet, you should let the superintendent know prior to the meeting so that he or she can come prepared to answer your questions.

3:22. What does it mean when we are told that all board members should support decisions of the board, even when they disagree with them?

This concept is often misunderstood and expressed unclearly. It does NOT mean that you are expected to pretend to be a cheerleader for a course of action you argued and voted against.

What it does mean is that once the vote has been taken, school directors should accept that the time for debate on the issue is over, and that it is time to move forward constructively. Once the course of action has been decided, all members of the board are expected to work together to find the best way to implement it. It can be damaging to students, the district and the community if at every step along the way the focus is diverted from the best way to move forward by continued sniping and rehashing of the original decision, or attempts to throw new roadblocks in the way.

4:2. When are issues serious enough to bring to the board?

You are the link between the school district and the community. You should be aware of issues confronting other districts that could become an issue in your district. You also must filter what you bring to the board for consideration to be sure it truly requires board attention and is not best routed through the administration first. If you are hearing concerns from community members, you might want to ask other school directors whether they're hearing the same concerns. An issue or activity that is counter to board policy should be brought to the attention of the president or the superintendent. When in doubt, feel free to discuss concerns with the superintendent and the president. They can help decide if the board needs to be proactive about a particular issue.

4:5. How can I best assimilate into the team?

You may be joining a board with members who have been together for a number of years. As the "new kid on the block," it will take you time to become part of the team. Talk with your new colleagues. Respect their experience, knowledge and the backgrounds they bring to the board. Earn respect by being a good listener, asking questions and doing your homework. Time and experience will help you become a contributing member.

4:6. What should a board do when it is not working well as a team?

Open communication is critical to the proper functioning of your board. If you feel your board is not functioning well, it may be appropriate to suggest a workshop where the board reviews its ground rules that establish how it will function. If these ground rules are not effective, then consider adding to or clarifying them. Consider developing a specific set of guidelines or a board protocol or code of conduct. You may want to hire a facilitator to assist your board in improving the board's working relations. PSBA can help with a custom workshop tailored to your board's specific situation.

4:9. What can or can't school directors reveal to each other?

School directors will learn information that is confidential and should not be discussed outside of a board's closed session. This does not limit discussions among school directors at appropriate times in conformity with the Sunshine Act [Public Meeting Law in Idaho]. Information discussed at executive sessions of a committee should not be disclosed to anyone who is not a member of that committee unless authorized by the committee to do so.

4:10. When I'm in the minority on the board, how can I influence the other school directors to consider my point of view?

You can practice patience, respect the majority and develop your skills. Genuinely listen to your colleagues. Use one-on-one conversations outside of meetings to get to know them and fully understand their views. At meetings, don't interrupt. Wait to be recognized, then make your point, but don't deliver a monologue. Argue from fact, not emotion, and avoid saying things that seem aimed at the person rather than the issue. Concisely identify the problem or the potential opportunity. Use facts to make the point that it is a district-wide problem or opportunity. State your recommendation and explain how it helps attain a district goal. Finally, be prepared to compromise.

5:1. What is the role of the superintendent relative to the school board?

Consider the superintendent the chief executive officer of the school district who reports to the board of directors – the school board. While the school board is responsible for setting the vision and goals for the district, it is the superintendent who implements the policies to attain the goals the board sets. The school board tells the superintendent what it wants done; the superintendent determines the best way to do it. The superintendent also is the board's principal adviser – identifying operational needs and recommending policies for board action.

5:2. How do I communicate with the superintendent?

You should feel free to communicate in any way you are comfortable. Usually the superintendent is more than willing to meet with you, discuss issues on the phone or respond by email. The important thing is not how to communicate, but that you do communicate with the superintendent, especially when you have questions about agenda items being discussed at your board meeting.

5:5. How do I gain the respect of the superintendent and other administrators?

As with any relationship, you have to earn it. Respect the superintendent and district administrators – they're the education experts. Seek their advice. Listen to what they have to say. Ask thoughtful questions. Be open, honest and direct. Take time to learn about the school environment and issues that may be unique to your district prior to making suggestions and trying to effect change.