

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Use agenda when board member won't participate in PD

Most school boards require new members to participate in orientation and professional development. For example, Missouri requires 18.5 hours of training completed within a new board member's first 12 months of school board service. During these sessions, board members learn the essentials of school governance, so they can assume an active role in the decision making and choosing how to serve their community.

Typically, a board's orientation and training policy requires members to fulfill three obligations:

- 1) Meet any state-mandated training requirements.
- 2) Undergo an orientation to board service upon election to the board.
- 3) Participate in a board/superintendent team-building session each year.

Most board members welcome the training and plan accordingly. But what if you have one board member who rarely participates and believes it is a waste of time. What should the board do? Is it enough to ask the board president to counsel the resistant board member and attempt to persuade her to participate in the training and team-building activities?

The board president can try to talk the board member into being a team player, but a better ap-

proach to the problem might include reinforcing board expectations for PD by:

- **Restating expectations.** At the beginning of a new school year, have the superintendent communicate educational requirements and expectations for all board members.

- **Revisiting board's orientation, training policy.** Does it have consequences for board members who miss too much professional development? Depending on your state's law, these might include losing voting privileges or being suspended.

- **Putting board training on each meeting agenda.** List a discussion of board training opportunities and reports from PD events members have attended as an agenda item.

- **Using a monitoring tool.** Publish an annual Board Member Training Calendar that includes each member's name, PD opportunities, and the number of PD hours each board member logged. The local media may pick up on the discrepancies in participation and start asking questions.

- **Making fulfilment of PD requirements part of board's annual self-evaluation.** Publish the results, along with board comments, and state which board members failed to meet the board's expectations.

Measures like these can convince the disinterested board member to become a team player. ■

Set communication plan when superintendent goes on medical leave

The superintendent for Cedar Rapids School District (Iowa) recently went on medical leave,

according to the Cedar Rapids Gazette. She decided to continue fulfilling her duties while on

leave but announced that she would resign at the end of the 2022-23 school year, the Gazette reported.

If your district superintendent goes on leave, the board will need to adjust to ensure it effectively communicates, both with the public and with the superintendent or her replacement.

First, the board should confirm the best methods for communicating with the superintendent. The board should also determine whether there will be times when the superintendent isn't available, such as during medical treatments. If that's the case, the board should come up with a plan for responding to urgent issues that arise when the superintendent is unavailable.

To reassure the public, a board should generally release a public statement to show the board-superintendent relationship is still intact. If another administrator will temporarily take on

the superintendent's responsibilities, the board may want to include a message that it looks forward to working with that person. The board president also may need to discuss with other board members the acting superintendent's preferred communication style and meet with that individual to bring her up to speed on important issues.

Members of the public may ask the board about the nature of the superintendent's condition. The board president should tell board members how to respond to such questions. In most cases, the president should instruct board members to direct those questions to the president.

Finally, if it's unclear when the superintendent will return, the board should set up a regular time to review the matter to verify whether the leave duration remains the same or whether it will be changing. ■

3 tips for heading off superintendent turnover

Finding a new superintendent for a district isn't easy. Getting a good superintendent to stay can be even harder.

While some superintendents may stay in their current positions for a decade or more, others decide to leave before their contract has expired — sometimes after only a year or two in the district's top job. Factors such as stress, family issues, and better opportunities elsewhere can play a role in this decision. Sometimes, however, a superintendent may leave a district because of a strained or difficult relationship with board members.

Superintendent turnover can cost a district far more than the time and money needed to search for a replacement. High-level departures can affect employee morale, raise questions about the direction in which the district is heading, and complicate the district's efforts to attract qualified candidates. While board members can't control every factor that might prompt a superintendent to leave the district, they can take steps to reduce the likelihood of a departure. Board members should:

1. Trust superintendent to do job. Remember that the board's role is to create district policy, and the superintendent's role is to enforce it. Constant clashes with the superintendent over the best way to implement district policy can create a sense of mistrust and prompt the superintendent to start looking for opportunities elsewhere.

2. Know when to listen. Some board members may focus so much on being heard that they forget to seek input from other stakeholders, including the superintendent. A school board that is receptive to new information will have a much easier time keeping a superintendent in the district.

3. Handle grievances professionally. If the board has concerns about the superintendent's performance, it should identify those concerns promptly and work with the superintendent to find appropriate solutions. This joint approach to problem-solving can serve as an important reminder that the superintendent and the board members are on the same team. ■