

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Editor: Jeff Stratton

School board consultant offers tips on superintendent performance feedback

- Do not discuss with other board members. “They SHOULD NOT discuss their online responses with other board members prior to the board meeting,” said Hughes. Whoever administers the survey (superintendent assistant, board president, etc.) collects the responses and prepares a single document for the board to review and discuss during the meeting.

- Send the collected responses out in the agenda packet. This document is sent out with all meeting materials several days in advance, so that board members can see ALL comments and think about them before the meeting, said Hughes.

- Discuss and vote. “During the meeting the board discusses input and votes on what the board’s response is [three out of five agreeing],” said Hughes. The response is not just a compilation of comments; it is a collection of ONLY those comments that a majority of the board agrees with, Hughes said.

“Sometimes a comment is not included because it is irrelevant to the question of superintendent compliance, or it relates more to whether the policy should be revised for the next round of monitoring,” he said.

Those comments and other discussion of policy revision is reserved for another time, AFTER the basic board response is prepared, Hughes said.

- Prepare board response post-meeting, “After the meeting a board response document is prepared, signed by the board president and retained

as a record of district performance,” Hughes said. Again, all this discussion is about operation of the district, so is not considered in executive session, he said.

These three options (above) are in a somewhat priority order, meaning the better the district is running, the less need for a formal “system” to record board member comments, Hughes said.

“When two or three board members begin to have concerns about specific operations within the district, documentation of their concerns over time will be of increasing value, particularly during the annual superintendent contract renewal negotiations,” Hughes said.

How have other school boards done this?

University Place, Washington uses electronic surveys to get board member input (individually, so as not to conduct an illegal “meeting”), and Bellingham does the same, according to Hughes. Mercer Island, Federal Way, Finley, and Lake Washington [all in Washington] have varying degrees of formality. It tends to have to do with board members’ preference and/or how much trust they put in the way the superintendent is handling the district, Hughes said. “There is no need to make this overly complicated — it should fit the staff capacity of the district and the preferences/personality of the board. It may sound complicated, but once put in practice, it is not,” Hughes said.

For more information, email bobh@policygovernance.net. ■

Balance what's best for all with your personal interests

Some board members believe they were elected for one reason and one reason only: to serve as the community's fiscal conscience.

Too often, that mindset can lead to this kind of thinking: "We could do more if we didn't have so many teachers and administrators on the payroll."

Nick Caruso, senior staff associate for field services at the Connecticut Association of Boards

of Education, suggests that is the wrong way for a board member to approach board service. "The majority of learning takes place between a child and a teacher," Caruso said. "The board member is on the board to make the staff's job easier."

Point: Your entire staff must feel they are part of the team if the district is going to be successful in educating every child. ■

Evaluate your board meetings

It's touchy for the superintendent to criticize the way meetings are run. After all, it's not officially your meeting.

Management of the board is the board president's job. It's appropriate and necessary for the superintendent to help with the meeting evaluation, but the president should take the lead in

initiating the evaluation process.

This type of effort should be a positive process. The idea is to make the board function better — not to critique individuals. Be sure to identify strengths as well as any opportunities for growth. If the board is doing something exceptionally well, but sure to point that out.

Meeting Evaluation Form

Meeting Goals	Adequate	Needs Improvement
Our meeting was businesslike, results-oriented, and we functioned like a team.		
Our discussion was cordial and well balanced (not dominated by just a few members).		
We confined our discussion to agenda items only.		
Our agenda included positive items as well as challenges.		
We discussed policy issues rather than day-to-day management issues.		
We followed parliamentary procedure.		
The president controlled and guided the meeting.		
We dealt successfully with controversial items and attempted to find solutions acceptable to all members.		
Everyone participated.		
All members were prepared to discuss the materials that had been sent to them in advance.		
Reports were clear, well prepared and provided adequate information for decision making.		
Our meeting room was comfortable and conducive to discussion and decision making.		
All members were in attendance and on time — and the meeting began and concluded on time.		
For committees, there was adequate reason for them to meet. ■		