

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Don't subject superintendent to 'evaluation retaliation'

It's unfair for the superintendent to make a decision that displeases an individual board member and later suffer for it in her performance appraisal. Yet it happens, and it's called "evaluation retaliation."

Interim Executive Director Betsy Miller-Jones of the Oregon School Boards Association (www.osba.org) said this problem is best prevented by the full board maintaining a strong working relationship with the superintendent. Here's what she recommends:

- **Speak with one voice on the superintendent's appraisal.** "When a conflict arises with only one board member, it is up to the board to make sure that the final evaluation represents the decision and view of the board as a whole, not five separate viewpoints," Miller-Jones said. The superintendent works best when working for a "single voice," she said, and that is the board majority.

"The minority should be listened to, but unless it carries a majority, the minority viewpoint should not be reflected in the evaluation," Miller-Jones said.

- **Practice sound governance.** Using the evaluation as a weapon against the superintendent is

certainly not a good governance practice, Miller-Jones said. "We can even question if it is ethical," she said. "However, the board has the power and the authority, and the pragmatic bottom line is that the board can do it if the majority allows it." But having the ability to do this to the superintendent doesn't make it right, she said.

- **Seek to improve communication.** When there is a conflict between the superintendent and more than one member of the board leading to a majority having a conflict with the administrator, the evaluation really becomes meaningless, Miller-Jones said. "The exception is if the team can use the appraisal to improve communication," she said.

In most cases, however, this kind of communication between the board and superintendent should have occurred much earlier, Miller-Jones said. "These talks need to have taken place between individual board members and the superintendent and the board as a whole to alleviate any conflict," she said. ■

School board service is worth it

Sometimes, it may seem thankless to serve on your local school board. Endless stress over budgets and money can make you forget why the board exists in the first place. Here is a reminder from the Tennessee School Boards Association that puts into great perspective why boards are important to the workings of American democracy.

School boards are necessary because:

- Local school boards keep the public schools in the possession of the public and not a central government, professional educators, or private corporations.

- School boards are a check on education professionals and thus carry out the American system of checks and balances.

- School boards afford a means for debating varying points of view in formulating school policy.

- School boards allow representatives of the community to become well-informed and govern the schools in the best interest of the community.

For more information, visit http://www.tsba.net/Resources/Quick_Facts_Guides and click on "New Board Member Guide." ■

Meeting preamble publicizes, clarifies role

Here's a resource that can help you clarify the board's role before meetings, setting the stage for an effective meeting. The board president could read the following preamble once at the beginning of each school year and then print the preamble on future meeting agendas:

As board members, we consider ourselves trustees of this organization and will do our best to protect, conserve, and advance its mission. As board members, we are motivated by a desire to see that all students receive a world-class education.

We will attempt to appraise both present and future needs of the community and trans-

late them into the programs of the district.

As board members, we function as a policy-making unit, not as administrative officers. Our responsibility is to help the school district run properly, not to run it ourselves. We hold the superintendent accountable for the management of the school district.

As members of the board, we will work to inform ourselves of the proper duties of a school board. Individual board members recognize that board business is transacted only in a duly noted school board meeting. Individual board members exercise authority only when they vote to take action at a board meeting. ■

Review board's responsibilities to the district

A school board sets district policy for the superintendent to implement. While the definition of a board as policymaker is certainly correct and makes a very important point, it tells you little about what you actually do as a board member. Here are some specific examples of what the board does as a policymaking body. Take time to regularly review the board's responsibilities and reinforce exactly what work your board should be doing. Discussing this article as a board team is a good start.

1. The board hires the superintendent. The board's first responsibility is to hire a competent administrator to run the district by managing all aspects of its day-to-day affairs. The superintendent works for the board of education, while all other district employees work for the superintendent.

Most board members have little inclination, not to mention the time necessary, to manage the day-to-day business of the district. By hiring and then supporting a professional who keeps things running smoothly, you ensure that the district is well managed and in a position to fulfill its mission.

2. The board plans for the school district's current and future challenges. Because the board delegates the management of the district to the superintendent, it frees itself up for giving the district a strategic direction that ensures its future is a healthy one. Strategic, long-range planning for the district is a key board responsibility.

Social, regulatory, and economic changes mean that boards must anticipate and plan for what the future will bring. This is one reason the board should regularly engage in generative thinking around the district's key challenges

and opportunities.

Once the board approves a strategic plan for the district, it should monitor the progress that the superintendent makes toward meeting the plan's goals and objectives. Short-term operational planning is necessary to achieve your plan, and this is the administrator's responsibility. Expect the superintendent to keep you up to date on his progress.

3. The board monitors and evaluates. A board cannot watch every detail and every activity that takes place in the school district, nor should it. That is called micro-management, and it interferes with the superintendent's responsibility.

But a board must monitor and evaluate bottom-line results.

You should monitor the district's performance in key areas such as: financial health, student achievement, and progress toward the board's strategic, long-range educational plan for the district.

4. The board serves as an advocate. Because you are an elected official, you are in a unique position to advocate for your school system.

You're not being paid for your service, and you have a higher motive: service to the community at large. This gives you inherent credibility, which is the key to any advocate's success.

As a board, use this credibility to give your district a voice in state and national education policy. As an advocate, you might lobby local, state, and federal lawmakers, or communicate your district's goals to constituents and the community. ■