

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Board teamwork is vital: Lone Rangers do the board no favors

A board member's letter to the editor of the local paper can be a bad thing when the timing is all wrong. It's important for the board to understand that when dealing with the media, intentionality and coordination are important. Here's what I mean:

A Tennessee board had been mulling over the possibility of going to the public for money to build a new school. The district was getting its ducks in a row and planning a news blitz in coordinated fashion.

A board member, however, got a bit excited by the board's plans and fired off a letter to the editor sharing his enthusiasm for the building project. The letter writer wasn't going in a different direction than the board; he was just moving at a different speed.

It was a fine letter to the editor that the board member wrote; all agreed. It called the public's attention to the space issues that the district faces. And the board member made a good case for the need for public money. But the board had not yet approved the project. And the board and district were not yet ready to respond to the reaction they received.

Moral of the story: The board needs to act as a corporate body. No single board member should ever undermine the authority of the full board.

When a board member is excited about a new program, idea, or project, first run it by the board president and/or superintendent and get his input. ■

Why should board members let staff handle constituent complaints?

One temptation for board members is to get involved when a citizen brings a concern to their attention.

The proper response, of course, is to refer the individual to the superintendent or the correct staff member on the school chain of command for resolution to a problem.

Keep this thought in mind if you are faced with an angry parent or teacher who wants your help. Count the number of administrators you have in your district,

and multiply these positions by an average salary of \$100,000. The figure you come up with is a good reminder that the board has hired administrators to run the district, so let them do their jobs.

Here is language the board and superintendent can use to reach agreement on this principle:

Communicate directly with the superintendent when a question arises or a concern is voiced by a staff member, student, parent, or community member. ■

Understand the purpose of the superintendent's evaluation

When the board conducts its annual evaluation of the superintendent's performance, it should understand what it wants to accomplish. Remind yourself why you are performing this performance evaluation. The superintendent's evaluation is a time to:

1. Improve the superintendent's performance.
2. Improve superintendent-board relations.
3. Base a salary recommendation on the results.

Remember, evaluations are often uncomfortable for everyone involved. But with some forethought, you can make your meeting efficient and productive. Here are four tips to avoid creating undue tension when the board conducts its annual appraisal of superintendent:

- **Incorporating undue focus on good or bad incidents.** It's too easy to get hung up on a single issue — like the complaints of a disgruntled employee — and spend too much time on it.

- **Basing the evaluation only on recent performance.** Evaluations that reflect only the performance within a few weeks of the evaluation's due date are unfair to the administrator. This will happen if the board isn't constantly reminded that the superintendent's evaluation is a year-long process and a professional responsibility of the board. An effective method to avoid this problem is for board members to request their superintendent provide the board with regular updates on her progress on the board's goals for the district.

- **Allowing personal agendas of board members into the process.** It's important for the board to be as objective as possible.

- **Including issues outside of the superintendent's purview.** An example: criticizing the administrator for his implementation of a board policy that is poorly written or unclear. ■

Assess board's work on strategic goals at the end of each meeting

Here's a terrific way to keep your board focused on its strategic goals.

The Watertown, Wis., Unified School District reinforces its commitment to its goals for the district is by reviewing where it concentrated its attention at board meetings.

The board conducts a post-meeting evaluation after every meeting to reflect on how well it is staying targeted to the goals in its strategic plan for the district.

See below for the board's meeting evaluation form. ■

Evaluation of Board Meeting	
Board Member Name: _____	Date: _____
1. Was tonight's meeting effective? (Check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Focused	<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Population
<input type="checkbox"/> Productive Discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing People and Partnerships
<input type="checkbox"/> Balanced Participation	3. Did I make a positive personal contribution? (Check all that apply)
<input type="checkbox"/> Goals Oriented/Aligned to	<input type="checkbox"/> Prepared
Strategic Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Focused
<input type="checkbox"/> Informative/Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Engaged
<input type="checkbox"/> Engaging	<input type="checkbox"/> Challenged
<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Inspired
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective Presentation (clear, timely, understandable)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	4. What did you learn at tonight's meeting?
2. Did the Board make progress toward supporting any of the District goals? (Check all that apply)	5. Suggestions/thoughts/improvements for our next meeting?
<input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing Teaching and Learning	6. Other comments: _____

Source: Watertown, Wis., Unified School District School Board. Reprinted with permission.