

# Board & Administrator

## FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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### Officer selection: What should the board do?

**Board member question:** "We have a three-term board member who feels she is entitled to the president's position," said a California board member. "It's 'her turn,' as she puts it.

"The problem is she's dysfunctional, confrontational, and lacks leadership and organizational skills. How do we tell her no?"

**Answer:** Board members can and should control the process of who gets elected to the board's leadership positions. If the board doesn't want this individual to serve as president, don't vote her into the position, no matter how badly she wants the job.

Let me tell you a couple of stories that illustrate why a board might decide a colleague isn't suited to an officer's position:

- I know of a district where a board member is a total outlier behaviorwise with the rest of his board team. He consistently interrupts and disturbs the smooth flow of board meetings. The board's other

members ignore him when he gets that way, or they call him on it if he is particularly out of line. The board has made it clear in discussions amongst themselves that this individual will never be allowed to serve as president regardless of what their traditional election process might be. It's just not going to happen.

- In another district, a five-term board member has yet to be elected to an officer's position. The full board recognizes that he struggles to speak coherently and, as repeatedly demonstrated, he lacks the skills to control a public meeting where there might be 150 people in the audience. Again, the board has reached an internal understanding that this board member should not serve as an officer.

Board leadership positions are too vital to internal board chemistry to simply assume that a member has "earned" the office. Select the best person to serve as your board's president. ■

### Follow policy to avoid liability

Failing to abide by district policy is a common source of litigation against school boards.

One of the best ways to reduce the board's exposure to liability is for board members to understand and follow the board's policies.

If your board has a policy that requires the superintendent to seek bids on purchases over \$5,000, for example, and board members sometimes skirt this policy, the board might face a suit from vendors who weren't allowed to bid.

For instance, let's say a board member has a cousin in the

parking-lot-repair business. The board member tells the board that his cousin can give the board a sweet deal on the district's repair business, and the board goes along with this.

The board has just ignored its own policy in order to grab a nice deal.

You can expect to hear from somebody's lawyer if you get caught throwing business to a board member's cousin without following the board's bid policy.

You should review your policies annually and update them to reflect changes in the laws and regulations that apply to your district. ■

# How do your administrator's benefits compare?

Is the board treating the superintendent fairly when it comes to the benefits the district provides? Review the charts at right and below to learn what benefits other boards provide their superintendents. The data come from *Board & Administrator's Annual Survey on School Boards* conducted late last fall and represent findings from the B&A readership only. ■

Paid Days Off	Avg # of Days
Sick leave	13
Personal days	3
Vacation	21

Additional Compensation	Yes	No	Yes #	No #	Totals
Car or car allowance	38%	62%	40	65	105
Housing or housing allowance	2%	98%	2	96	98
Supplemental retirement	15%	85%	15	87	102
Executive physical	28%	72%	27	70	97
Health club membership	3%	97%	3	99	102
Cellphone	68%	32%	66	31	97
Laptop	77%	23%	74	22	96
Additional contribution to retirement	28%	72%	28	72	100
Additional contribution to life insurance	39%	61%	36	57	93
Insurance Benefits	Yes	No	Yes #	No #	Totals
Group health	85%	15%	86	15	101
Family health	70%	30%	69	29	98
Group dental	69%	31%	71	32	103
Group life	71%	29%	72	29	101
Long-term disability	41%	59%	41	58	99
Short-term disability	33%	67%	33	66	99
Long-term care	11%	89%	11	86	97
Vision insurance	46%	54%	45	52	97

## Focused training cures board dysfunction

Mary Anne Hipp, an educational consultant and accreditation leader in Lake Charles, La., suggests that training is the answer for a school board that can't get along internally. Focused training on issues like the board's vision can get a school board moving in a better direction, she said.

"When I do accreditation visits to a school district, it seems that boards that truly focus on the vision and purpose of the organization have better outcomes, with less emphasis on personal agendas and drama," Hipp said. ■

## Follow these steps to improve your public-relations efforts

In *Raising the Bar for School PR: New Standards for the School Public Relations Profession*, the National School Public Relations Association recommends that the board set the tone for a comprehensive school public relations program.

Here are some tips the NSPRA recommends for boards:

1. Adopt and periodically review the district's mission and goals.
2. Use a code of conduct that stresses the

board's modeling respect, civility, and integrity in its internal operations.

3. Concentrate on working with the superintendent in a relationship that is built on trust and respect.

4. Understand that the board's role is setting a clear policy direction for the district.

5. Seek input from stakeholders prior to developing policy.

For information, [www.nspr.org](http://www.nspr.org). ■