

# Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Editor: Jeff Stratton

## Board member demands district job for child

A Minnesota superintendent is facing a dicey problem from a “legendary” board member who wants his daughter to have a job in the district after her baking business failed.

The board member feels he is “owed” this for his lengthy service to the district.

As a kicker, the board member is pressuring the district’s cafeteria director to purchase the daughter’s business equipment for use in the district.

“I have explained to the board member the optics on this will be horrible in our community -- with no luck,” said the superintendent.

Carol Weisman ([www.boardbuilders.com](http://www.boardbuilders.com)), a board consultant, minces no words on this matter.

“The answer from the superintendent should be a firm ‘no,’” said Weisman. “This is called a conflict of interest.”

If there is a position open in the district, the board member’s daughter could get an interview without bias, said Weisman.

The board member’s duty of loyalty is to the students, not to themselves and their families, said Weisman. “Unless the equipment is needed, budgeted for, and at a reasonable price, the district should not purchase it,” she said.

“When you sign up to be a school board member, your reward is in heaven, not for your child,” said Weisman. ■

## 7 ideas for giving the board a policy focus

Make these policy-focused ideas and strategies a part of the district’s new board member orientation, and you’ll be giving trustees an excellent orientation to board service:

1. Pre-service potential board members. In the information the district provides prospective board members, give them materials that highlight board roles and responsibilities.

2. Invite prospective board members to meetings. The superintendent or board president can call and personally invite them to attend a board meeting. They’ll see the board’s focus is policy, finances, and monitoring results — not managing.

3. Set up a group meeting with board members. Use the meeting to show prospective board members the policy manual, finances, and strategic plan. At this session, point out that the board’s

authority comes from its collective action in a legally constituted board meeting.

4. Provide a one-on-one orientation to new members. This way the superintendent and board can reinforce the board’s policymaking role.

5. Use workshops and training sessions. Send board members to association events to help them learn what actions are properly the board’s and which belong to the superintendent.

6. Share your personal assessment of roles. When you meet with the superintendent and board members, provide your perspective on management’s role and the board’s policy role, using examples to clarify. This can generate healthy discussion.

7. Give board members a year’s worth of minutes. In black and white, board members should see that the board takes a clear policy focus. ■

## Create a top-notch governing board

Good boards don't just fall off trees.

A governing board is nurtured, over time, by hard work and commitment. Use these three strategies to build a strong board-administrator relationship and a board that remains focused on governance:

1. Develop trust. Count on your superintendent to run the organization and to tell you about the district's problems and what she is doing to resolve them. On your part, keep lines of communication open and practice "no surprises" at all times.

Ask the superintendent when you have questions on an issue the district faces, and be prepared to tell her about any skill or interest areas

where you might contribute.

2. Eliminate any and all committees related to programs. Program committees are, in most cases, a holdover from a board that micromanages.

Instead of a board committee or advisory committee with a program focus, ask your superintendent for program-related information about how programs are faring and quarterly statistical updates.

3. Be prepared to offer the superintendent help when asked. Offer your assistance when an issue falls into your skill set. This might be legal, financial, or audit expertise, where your administrator requests your insights. ■

### Use process, code of ethics to correct underperforming board member

Most boards will, at some time, experience a "problem" board member.

For instance, what do you do about a member who shows up at schools to "evaluate" teachers, or encourages citizens to come to him with their complaints so she can do the school staff's job?

Consider the following procedures to correct the performance of members who get out of line and don't learn from the experience.

#### Procedures

Encourage individual board members to express their concerns about another member's performance directly to that member.

If addressing the issue directly with the member does not resolve the concern, then take the matter up with the board president.

The president should discuss the concern with the individual in question on behalf of the board member or shall moderate a discussion between the members.

The president should remind the board member whose behavior is in question about the board's code of ethics and discuss how the questionable behavior does not comply with the code.

If the board member does not believe his or her behavior is in conflict with the code of ethics, an agenda item specifying "evaluation of individual board members' performance" may be listed on the agenda for an upcoming board meeting.

The matter should be discussed by the full board in closed session in an attempt to identify behavior that may be inappropriate and discuss possible solutions. ■

## Teamwork tip: Spend time together

Spending time together can build trust and teamwork between the board and superintendent.

An idea: Travel with your superintendent to state school boards association events. The time in the car can help your team bond.

Ask your superintendent for his or her suggestions on which sessions are the best and most educational. Plan to share extra conference handouts with your board teammates.

The trip home is a terrific opportunity to share what you learned. ■