



CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION

25 Best Practice Legal and Operational Tips for School Board Members

Since many districts will be having new board members joining them, we thought the following information on boardmanship would be helpful. It is also a good refresher for veteran school board members.

1. Do not take individual action. Only actions taken at an official board meeting are legal and binding. A board succeeds or fails as a group.
2. Be consistent. Follow your policies and procedures if you expect others to do so.
3. Do not "surprise" board colleagues, the superintendent, employees, or the community. Express your concerns, ideas, or questions privately to the board president or superintendent so they can be prepared to deal with them or so the topic can be included on a meeting agenda. Keep key people informed on where you stand.
4. Listen to persons who address the board at meetings but don't enter into dialog with the audience. Members of the board deliberate themselves-not with the audience.
5. Don't get "middled." Don't carry the ball for others. Let people advocate their own causes or raise their own questions.
6. Let the administration handle implementations (HOW to do it). The school board should concentrate on policy (WHAT to do).
7. Monitor yourself and your board colleagues. Talk turkey with the board member who endangers the board's effectiveness. If frank talking is not successful, use formal reprimand to stop improper activity.
8. Stick to the meeting agenda. Don't be detoured by surprises or narrow self-interest advocacy.
9. Support your board president. Your president is your leader, elected by the board. It is a difficult job and deserves the help and support of all members.
10. When pressured by threats, stick to the issue. Don't over-react. Don't dig in (defensively) or cave in (capitulate) to treats.
11. Avoid the "my school/your school/their school" dichotomy. You represent the entire district, not a particular school, area, or constituency.
12. Avoid even the appearance of nepotism, cronyism, or patronage. These reduce the effectiveness of your schools and the respect people have for your district.
13. Make sure your recruitment and hiring policies are effective, fair, understood, and consistently applied.
14. Do your homework before each meeting. Study the agenda
15. Don't lose your temper. Control your emotions. Civility should be the rule for all members.
16. Respect the sanctity of your right to vote on matters before the board.
17. Respect the right (and responsibility) of the superintendent to advise the board. Seek a recommendation from the superintendent on almost all matters.

18. Learn by asking questions. But ask them sometime other than during a public meeting. The only dumb question is the one you did not ask-or the one that creates public embarrassment for the district.
19. If discussion seems endless, make a motion or call for the vote.
20. Keep closed meetings to a minimum. Conduct board deliberations in public.
21. Start meetings on time. Don't wait for late arrivals.
22. Be a cheerleader for the schools. Express both praise and appreciation where merited. A board meeting should have a "gratitude Attitude."
23. Avoid secret meetings where a majority of the board is together discussing board matters.
24. Stage board meetings so that the board members can see one another and the audience can see the board members' faces.
25. Expect your president to direct and lead the board. No other board member should dominate or lead. That is the presidents role.