

# Board & Administrator

## FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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### Superintendent and board should 'protect' each other

In a healthy, positive relationship, members of the board and superintendent team have each other's backs.

The superintendent, for example, protects his board from political foul play and attacks on board members' characters.

But that goes both ways, as the board should

ensure that the superintendent doesn't take heat on her own. Board members shouldn't allow any "superintendent bashing" without providing a defense of the administrator.

In the spirit of "building each other up," the board and superintendent can also brag on each other to show a united front to the community. ■

### Board provides guidance to the superintendent

As the story above points out, board members can be proactive about supporting their superintendent by not allowing unfair criticism. There are other ways to support your administrator as well.

One of the board's primary responsibilities is to support the superintendent — without giving him daily orders or instructions.

A board's role is to provide the direction in which you want your superintendent to take the district. Then, provide the superintendent with the necessary resources to achieve the board's vision for the school system.

Give your superintendent direction and resources, and then let him freely manage the school district's day-to-day business. Expect your superintendent to provide

feedback on the performance of the district, student achievement, and progress toward the board's goals.

As you receive this information, regularly provide feedback to the superintendent about how she is doing.

Board members, acting as a full board, select the district's CEO — the superintendent. The superintendent becomes the board's manager.

Nurture your superintendent by providing adequate compensation and reasonable direction. Because she is the board's only employee, give the superintendent a contract, a written job description, and explicit guidance about what the board expects.

Once the superintendent knows what the board wants, stand back, and let her achieve the board's goals. ■

## Review the board's relationship with school employees

A board member receives an email from a district employee complaining about the superintendent. The board member takes the employee's email to the president of the board, and they call a meeting to discuss the complaint — without informing the superintendent.

Later, the board contacts other employees and solicits more complaints about the superintendent.

The problems in this example are numerous (for example, staff end runs around the superintendent to the board are patently unfair to an administrator), but they can be prevented if the board abides by two simple rules for board/staff relations.

1. All communication between the board and staff should be channeled through the superintendent.

2. Boards do not manage personnel; administrators do.

One question about staff that board members frequently ask is:

• **What part should a board play in hiring staff?**

Keep in mind that the school board hires one employee only — the superintendent. The board hires the best superintendent to administer the district and then delegates all other staff hiring to the superintendent. The board should not interview applicants for staff positions or evaluate staff because those are solely the superintendent's responsibilities.

Now, there may be times the superintendent asks a board member to sit in on an interview for an open position in the district. But that is a different matter than the board conducting the interviews for a teacher's job. ■

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## Great board meetings begin before the meeting

Each board member has an obligation to do what she can to ensure board meetings are productive and put the board and district on display in the best light. Here are six things any board member can do in advance of meetings to ensure they go off without a hitch.

1. **Read the agenda materials.** This needs to be done before the meeting. No one wants to wait for a fellow board member to be brought up to speed on an issue at the meeting.

2. **Call for clarification.** Contact the superintendent or board president before the meeting to have your questions answered.

3. **Talk to constituents.** The board is the district's connection to the community. Board members should be in contact with stakeholders and

be prepared to bring their insights and thoughts to bear on pertinent issues.

4. **Know your policies and applicable laws.** When you have a good handle on legal and policy issues, the meeting won't bog down in debate.

5. **Place issues on the agenda in advance of the meeting.** It is unfair for a board member to spring a new issue on the superintendent and board colleagues at a meeting when they have had no chance to prepare. Use the board's process as outlined in board policy to include your issues on the meeting agenda.

6. **Make meetings a priority.** This includes preparing for the meeting in advance, coming to the meeting on time, and participating by sharing your thoughts and views on issues before the board. ■

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## Review superintendent performance data prior to evaluation

If the board has a question about what to evaluate about the superintendent's performance, here is some guidance.

In its *How to Evaluate the Superintendent* procedure, the Texas Association of School Boards offers this suggestion about which performance-related information the administrator should provide the board before board members complete the evaluation forms.

The superintendent will prepare a report and present it to the president for distribution to board members with the blank evaluation instruments.

The report will include:

- a. Summary results of superintendent performance goals established following the previous year's summative evaluation.
- b. Summary of progress on current year's district goals.
- c. Report on student performance required by state.
- d. Any additional district or professional highlights the superintendent believes will demonstrate effective performance for the past year.

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