

**PLEASANTDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT 107
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER HANDBOOK**



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I. Onboarding of Board Members

a. *Welcome*

Welcome to Pleasantdale School District 107! Thank you for your service as a School Board Member. While this position is an unpaid, volunteer position, our district could not operate without you. You help set the direction and goals for the district; approve budgets and policies that guide the district's actions. As a board member you also play a role in setting the expectations and yearly goals for the Superintendent. The

Superintendent is the Board's one and only employee. It is through your work, along with the other board members and Superintendent, that our students see academic success, (fiscal responsibility to the community) and our teaching staff reach their professional goals. Thank you!

b. The Board's Belief Statement

The goal of the governance team (Board of Education and Superintendent) is to ensure that the district is focused on enhancing the educational experiences of the Pleasantdale SD 107 students and to support the community. Further, the Board and the Superintendent realize that they must be transparent, honest and work as a collaborative team that functions in a respectful and professional manner. ¹

In an effort to adhere to this belief statement, the Board and the Superintendent observe a set of operating procedures. These procedures allow all parties to have access to timely information and ensure that the Board can focus on Board work (the what) and the Superintendent can focus on administrative work (the how). The belief statement and supporting operating procedures can be found [HERE](#). ²

c. Your Responsibilities as a Board Member

The District is governed by a School Board consisting of seven members. The Board's powers and duties include the authority to adopt, enforce, and monitor all policies for the management and governance of the District's schools. But as stated in the Board member oath of office prescribed by the School Code, a Board member has no legal authority as an individual. ³

Official action by the Board may only occur at a duly called and legally conducted meeting at which a quorum is physically present. As a Board Member, you have a duty to take action during lawfully called meetings to faithfully fulfill the Board's responsibilities in accordance with State and federal law. ⁴

Your three primary responsibilities include: 1. Approving budgets; 2. Approving policies; and 3. Hiring and Retaining a Superintendent. The Superintendent provides the leadership necessary to improve educational outcomes for students and guides the day-to-day work of the district to ensure that the district's goals are achieved. Within these three buckets, however, are substantial responsibilities, the specifics of which are enumerated in Board Policy 2.20. ⁵

d. Board Members Roles and Duties prior to and during Board Meetings

- i. General Duties:* The major responsibility of each board member is to be prepared for meetings, which includes studying the agenda and understanding the supporting documents prior to the meetings. There should be no surprises at the board meeting. Board members should be informed and feel reasonably

comfortable with their votes. Sometimes this means trusting the judgment and expertise of the Superintendent or other staff members, delaying a decision for further research, or in certain circumstances, making a decision that must be made quickly without being provided all of the desirable facts on hand. ⁶

- ii. *Chain of Command:* The District has an organizational chart indicating the channels of authority for communications. These channels should be followed, and no level should be bypassed. If a board member is approached by a community member or school personnel they should refer them to the proper chain of command. You can read more about the chain of command in policy 3:30 Chain of Command. The chain of command / Organizational Chart can be found [here](#), on page 2.

- iii. *Points for Effective and Efficient Meetings:*⁷

1. *Keeping to the agenda:* It is the president's job to keep the discussion focused on agenda items only.
2. *Communication between board members:* Although board members should be free to express their thoughts and feelings to one another, they should be respectful and civil with one another.
3. *Focus on policy.* Board members should focus on broader policy issues rather than fixate on small matters to ensure that the **bigger issue get adequate time and attention**. Focusing on small matters may lead to a less efficient use of time. A board that takes on administrative decisions may cause the meeting agenda to be crowded with problems related to daily operations. ⁸ The board's role is to direct the district (administration and staff) through board policy.
4. ***Making Mistakes:*** Boards should feel free to admit mistakes and make corrections. But most mistakes that need to be corrected occur when the board makes decisions that should be delegated to experts on staff.
5. *Attempts at unanimity.* Efforts to find a common ground do not always succeed. Sometimes people just disagree. Boards should do their best to vote and move on, accepting that sometimes they will be on the losing side. **Ultimately, the board acts as one when making final decisions/votes, even if each individual member does not entirely agree with the outcome.**
6. *Delegating decisions:* Decisions that are best delegated to staff should generally be kept off the agenda.
7. *Use of Policy.* When the board is presented with a problem the board should call the superintendent's attention to the board's policy on the topic and not attack the problem head on or try to solve it themselves.
8. *Adopting clear rules of order:* The board has rules governing their meeting procedures that promote efficiency and order at meetings. It can take longer to debate how we will debate an issue than the debate itself.
9. *Problem solving through policy:* It is best for the board to shift board attention away from problem solving toward improving organizational

performance. That is, treat most decisions as policy decisions rather than as solutions to problems that the staff should be solving. The board's policy choices can then guide staff as it deals with specific problems.

e. *Choosing Board Officers*

Board officers (President, Vice President and Secretary) are chosen at the board's organizational meeting.⁹

Every other June the Board elects a legislative representative, who serves in that capacity for two years.

[Policy 2.30](#) covers the process by which officers are elected.

f. *Board Members Act as a Collective Body*¹⁰

As a Board, you can only act as a body. Individual members cannot bind the District to a contract or any other action. As such, generally the Board speaks as a body, not as a set of individuals.

Obviously, you have your own opinions and thoughts on issues that might come before the Board. You are entitled to have your own thoughts, and to express those, but not as the thoughts or beliefs of "the Board".

Even when the vote by the Board goes against one's personal beliefs on a matter, it is incumbent upon each Board Member to support the decision of the Board or work with the Board to adjust it, rather than using your position as a Board member to oppose a decision by the Board. Conversations should be focused on solutions and the board should rely on the wisdom of the group.

g. *Superintendent's Relationship to the Board*

- i. *Relationship to the Board:* The superintendent is the sole employee of the Board of Education and as such is the only person whom the Board may direct to take, or refrain from taking, an action. The Board completes an annual evaluation of the Superintendent, sets compensation, and annually reviews and, if appropriate, extends, the Superintendent's contract.¹¹ The Board-Superintendent relationship is governed by Board Policy & Procedure [2.130](#).
- ii. *Communications to the Board:* Board members receive communications in a number of ways to keep them informed on board matters. The board is notified by text, phone, and/or email in the event of an emergency and receives a weekly update from the Superintendent via email. Board members receive the

board packet typically the Thursday prior to the Board meeting and as components of the Board packet become available, they are released to the Board for timely review. When possible, the Board receives confidential information prior to the Board meeting. When a question is asked by an individual Board member, the answer is included in the next weekly Update. Individual Board members receive a phone call from the Superintendent prior to each Board meeting to answer any questions about the meeting or the packet.¹²

Questions or a need for more information/clarification should be addressed with the superintendent or board president before the meeting. If a board member has received a complaint or is dissatisfied with the agenda, they should call the Superintendent prior to the meeting to try to resolve the problem.¹³

- iii. *Board Meetings:* When the agenda is planned, the superintendent often makes a recommendation or takes a position on most action items. At the meetings, the superintendent should not be expected to repeat orally at length what was already written and distributed in advance. Members of the board then discuss and may vote on the Superintendent's recommendations. In general, boards tend to approve the recommendations made by their superintendents assuming that the superintendent has adequately researched the issue and weighed the alternatives, in light of existing board policy. Following the meeting the Superintendent is accountable for seeing that board decisions are carried out and is delegated the authority necessary to do so.¹⁴

II. Retreats

The Board Members and Superintendent meet once a year in the summer to discuss the state of the district. These retreats are an opportunity for the Board to build the Board/Superintendent team, consider and clarify roles and responsibilities, assess the board and its processes, identify next steps and board development efforts, review data about our goals, and other data that may be of interest to the Board. The agenda for each retreat is set jointly by the Board President and Superintendent.¹⁵

Generally the retreats are a half day, with board members (and other key staff, as necessary) attending for data review and discussion about progress towards meeting goals.

III. Working with Your Constituents

Board members have two main constituent groups—schools (staff) and community members, including parents and families. Board members also may work closely with other elected officials.

Remember that talking about personnel issues is generally prohibited based on confidentiality rules. Of course, passing along a compliment is always welcome. ¹⁶

a. *Working with Schools* ¹⁷

Our schools, and our students, are our reason for existence. As such, what happens in our buildings is of the utmost importance to each of us. Board members are encouraged to visit schools, meet with the principal, and take walk-throughs to learn about what is happening in our schools.

Visiting schools is a great opportunity to hear directly from principals and staff about their successes and concerns. However, school visits are generally not the time to bring up specific constituent concerns about a school or staff member, unless you have already discussed the issue with the Superintendent and have agreed that raising the issue is appropriate.

Specific constituent concerns should always be forwarded to the Superintendent and (if appropriate) the appropriate contact in the chain of command. This allows the district's normal concern process to be followed, and ideally allows the concern to be resolved at the lowest level in the organization. Most constituent concerns are best resolved at the school level; by notifying the Superintendent and allowing the district's concern process to be used you avoid inserting yourself into the process and ensure all constituents are treated in a similar fashion.

Certain concerns require that the Superintendent be notified immediately so that our compliance officer(s) can be notified—we have very tight timelines for investigating claims such as discrimination or harassment and need to make sure that we follow our complaint processes.

b. *Communication with Families & Community Members*

- i. *Community Liaison:* As elected officials, you are the link between our communities and the district. Board members are encouraged to meet regularly with their constituents and discuss the work of the district. It is always important to forward concerns raised by constituents to the Superintendent for follow up. ¹⁸
- ii. *Public Comment:* The Board also hears public comment during Board meetings. Board meetings are not opportunities for the Board to engage in discussion with the commenters, it is an opportunity for the Board to hear input on items before the Board. ¹⁹
- iii. *Special Group/Individual Interests*²⁰: A school board member does not represent a particular area, interest or group. Each member must work for the welfare of all

the children in the district and base decisions on what's best for the total community, rather than a particular area, vested interest group, or organization.

The board should devote most of its time to major issues and policy discussion and strictly avoid conversations, discussion, or debate with members of the audience; Board members should not play to the audience.

- iv. *Social Media*: Board members recognize that while we may be giving our individual opinion or stating a fact on social media, it has the potential to impact the entire board. When promoting official district business and activities, personal use of social media should be limited to directly sharing links from the district media platforms, without personal editorial or opinion. Board members should not post rebuttals/responses/corrections to district-related social media posts. Board members may post general district-related posts on their personal social media sites.²¹

c. *Working with other Elected Officials*

Board Members frequently interact with other elected officials, including City and County Council members and members of the State Legislature. It is important in those interactions to represent the district accurately and fairly, and to make sure that when concerns are raised they are forwarded to the Superintendent for follow up.²²

IV. Local Governance

a. *Legal Status of the District*

The Illinois Constitution requires the State to provide for an efficient system of high-quality public educational institutions and services in order to achieve the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capabilities. The General Assembly has implemented this mandate through the creation of school districts. Pleasantdale School District 107 located in Cook County, Illinois ("the District") is governed by Illinois laws for school districts having a population of not fewer than 1,000 and not more than 500,000. The District constitutes a body corporate that possesses all the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes, and in that name may sue, purchase, hold and sell personal property and real estate, and enter into such obligations as are authorized by law.²³

b. *The Authority of "The Board" Versus Individual Board Members*²⁴

The power of the Board lies in the collective body, not in the individuals. Board members should recognize that as a Board member they have no legal authority as an individual and that decisions can be made only by a majority vote at a public Board meeting.

The Board must take a stance on a topic, via a public vote, before it can be said that “the Board” supports or opposes an action. Votes may only occur during regular or special board meetings; other meetings, such as work sessions, are for information and for giving direction to the Superintendent.

When the Board has not taken a public stance on a topic, individuals may speak about their interest or disagreement in the topic, but only as an individual. It is important to make that distinction when communicating internally or externally, to ensure that the recipient understands the distinction. It is important to recognize that approving Board Policies is considered taking a public stance on a topic.

The Board’s policy book is the most important public manifestation of the interest of the Board. This is why it is important to have an up-to-date policy book. The Board will periodically review its policies for relevancy, monitor its policies for effectiveness, and consider whether any modifications are required. The Board regularly monitors policies weekly by reviewing sections in weekly emails provided by the Superintendent and at each monthly board meeting. By knowing the policy book thoroughly you will have a good understanding of where current and prior Boards have placed their priorities, and you will have a good grounding for our actions. The policy book is too large to reproduce here, but can be found online [HERE](#).

V. School Board Meetings and the Open Meetings Act (OMA)

As a public entity, the School Board is subject to the Open Meetings Act (OMA). This means that in general all Board activity must take place in public, and that actions by the Board must be taken in an appropriately noticed public meeting.²⁵ The Act sets out how “notice” of a meeting is to be provided and sets out the requirement that agendas be available at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.²⁶

The Open Meetings Act (OMA) also sets out the exceptions to the ‘meeting in public’ requirements. These exceptions are what permit us to hold Closed Sessions behind closed doors.²⁷ The full OMA exceptions can be found [HERE](#).

To move into closed session the presiding officer must call the meeting to order and then move to adjourn the closed session at a recorded time.

The full text of the OMA can be found [HERE](#).

VI. Types of Meetings Held by the Board

There are five main types of public meetings that the Board holds: General, Regular, Closed, Reconvened/ Rescheduled, Special and Emergency Meetings and each is governed by the OMA and Board Policy. Board Policy on types of school board meetings can be found [HERE](#).

a. Regular Board Meetings

The Board announces the time and place for its regular meetings at the beginning of each fiscal year. These are the Board's pre-scheduled (generally the third Wednesdays in each month) meetings where business is undertaken. The Superintendent shall prepare and make available the calendar of regular Board meetings. Meeting dates may be changed with 10 days' notice in accordance with State law. A meeting agenda shall be posted at the District's main office and the Board's meeting room, or other location where the meeting is to be held, at least 48 hours before the meeting. Items not specifically on the agenda may still be considered during the meeting.²⁸

In order to have a duly constituted regular Board meeting where votes can be taken a quorum of Board members must be in attendance. A quorum is four members (a majority) of the Board. Attendance can be via telephone or other type of technology if certain conditions are met.²⁸

Regular board meetings are a time when the Superintendent and staff present information to the Board for the purposes of informing the Board and getting direction from the Board.

At each regular and special open meeting, the members of the public and District employees may comment to the School Board, subject to reasonable constraint as outlined in Policy 2.230. Members of the public are generally afforded 3 minutes each to speak, with a limit of 15 minutes total on any one topic. The public can address their concerns in writing to the board on the provided green forms with the expectation that any questions will be answered by the administration within 48 hours. Open forums take place at the beginning and end of each regular meeting.²⁹

b. Special Board Meetings

Special meetings may be called by the President or by any 3 members of the Board by giving notice thereof, in writing, stating the time, place, and purpose of the meeting to remaining Board members by mail at least 48 hours before the meeting, or by personal service at least 24 hours before the meeting. Public notice of a special meeting is given by posting a notice at the District's main office at least 48 hours before the meeting and by notifying the news media that have filed a written request for notice. A meeting agenda shall accompany the notice. No matters will be discussed, considered, or brought before the Board at any special meeting other than such matters as were included in the stated purpose of the meeting.³⁰

c. Closed Sessions

The Board may hold a closed meeting, or close a portion of a meeting, by a majority vote of a quorum, taken at an open meeting. The vote of each Board member present, and the reason for the closed meeting, will be publicly disclosed at the time of the meeting and clearly stated in the motion and the meeting minutes. ³¹

Closing a meeting does not waive any public-notice requirements, whether it is a special meeting or part of a regular meeting. Moreover, final actions must be taken in an open meeting, the closed meeting is limited to discussion. Closed session is limited to only the topic that is covered in the meeting notice. The Board cannot transition from a closed session-approved topic to another topic without violating the OMA. ³²

d. Public Hearings

Public hearings are open meetings conducted by the board to present information and gather public comment. Many such hearings are necessary to satisfy legal requirements in the School Code or state board of education regulations. Unlike public meetings at which the citizenry generally observe the members of the board as they conduct business, a hearing is designed specifically to gather citizen viewpoints. ³³

VII. Communications and the Open Meetings Act³⁴

As a publicly elected Board, the business of the Board should be done in public. That is the basic tenet of the OMA, and why we are very careful about ensuring that meeting rules are adhered to. While the rules require the Board to act in a public fashion, that does not mean that Board members cannot communicate amongst themselves or with staff regarding Board business. This section is designed to provide some quick guidance for Board members on communicating without violating the OMA.

- While generally a meeting of more than 3 Board Members (a quorum) requires public notice, this is only true when the Board will be discussing District business. Three or more Board Members can, for example, attend fundraisers by the Pleasantdale PTO without running afoul of the OMA, as long as district business is not discussed.
- Board members may individually communicate amongst each other for casual purposes, such as reminding the Board President that you will be late to a meeting or reminding other Board Members about an upcoming event that might be of interest.
- Board members may also communicate amongst each other for business purposes, with more restrictions. If communicating for business purposes you should communicate one-on-one, rather than to the full Board. Communications that relate to an upcoming agenda item should be limited to seeking clarification or another Board member's thoughts on an issue. Discussion of district business between two Board members is encouraged to discuss positions on issues and to discuss policy issues that may be before the Board.

- In accordance with the Open Meetings Act and the Oath of Office taken by Board members, individual Board members will not (a) reply to an email on behalf of the entire Board, or (b) engage in the discussion of District business through electronic communications with a majority of a Board quorum.

VIII. The Board's Policy Manual

As discussed previously, Board policies are the primary way that the Board sets the direction of the district. Generally policies are higher level, and Superintendent procedures are more detailed direction to staff about how to reach the goals set by the Board. It is ongoing work to keep the policy book up-to-date.

All policies are numbered within a specific Series within the policy book. The series are:

- Section 1: Governance and Planning
- Section 2: School Board
- Section 3: General School Administration
- Section 4: Financial and Operational Services
- Section 5: Personnel
- Section 6: Curriculum and Instruction
- Section 7: Students
- Section 8: Community Relations

The Board Policy Manual can be found online [HERE](#).

IX. Organizational Structure of the District

Technically there are two organizational structures at work in the district. The first is the Board-Superintendent structure, with the seven Board Members at the top of the chart with a direct line to the Superintendent. The Board and Superintendent make up the district's governance team, and an open, communicative relationship is key to the success of the district.

The second structure is that of the Superintendent and staff. These are different because there is a break between the Board and staff—the Board's authority is to direct the Superintendent, and separately, the Superintendent's authority is to direct staff. The Superintendent's direct reports are the Assistant Superintendent, Business Manager, Director of Students Services, and the Building Leaders. An organizational structure chart can be found [HERE](#).

CITATIONS

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