

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Board work key to development of mission statement, vision

The board's long-term plans for the district start with well-crafted mission and vision statements. The board should spend time on the development and maintenance of these two important guideposts. Your mission statement should be a clear declaration of where you want your school district to go.

The board of Community Consolidated School District 59 in Arlington Heights, Ill., uses the following mission and vision statements.

1. "The mission of Community Consolidated School District 59 is to provide the skill, knowledge, and experiences that will prepare students to be successful for life."

2. "Our vision is One District — One Population — One Core Purpose."

The vision and mission statements are key parts of the organizational message that drive decision-making and practice and are integral to a district's strategic plan. The board should take ownership when developing both the mission and vision because they are tools that guide the district.

The board of Community Consolidated School District 59 used work sessions that resulted in a collaborative development of the mission and vision.

Board members used the work of writer Patrick Lencioni in its mission and vision work. They spent time discussing and developing core values and beliefs statement that ultimately led to creation of the mission and vision. Following that work, the board developed the district's strategic plan.

Set aside time to perform an annual analysis of the school district's mission statement. If the board validates the mission each year, board members will stay on top of the rapidly changing educational environment. The board will ensure the specifics in its statement stay consistent in terms of its goals for the district. It will also make sure the vision still meets the district's needs. The superintendent should take part in all board discussions related to the mission and vision of the district to serve as a resource.

For more information, visit www.tablegroup.com/pat or www.ccsd59.org/superintendent. ■

Participation, attendance necessary to a positive meeting

Board members need to make an effort to attend every meeting.

A majority of the board must be at the meeting to achieve a quorum.

Attendance isn't the board member's only obligation; active participation is how a meeting becomes much more than rubber-stamping recommendations.

Participate by asking questions, listening, offering your opinion, and voting. If you don't vote on an issue before the board, you allow others to decide the issue.

If you don't vote, you can become known as either a wishy-washy board member or a political animal just worried about your own prospects. ■

Strategies that improve board performance

Want better board performance in meeting the district's mission? Try some of these strategies.

1. Understand that board members have a need for education. Even though board members may not have the background of trained administrators, by virtue of the fact that they serve the board, they prove they have an interest in serving children. Be sure your board commits itself in the budget to training dollars for board travel, conferences, and publications.

2. Have retreats. Use board retreats not only to tackle specific issues, but also to talk about members' philosophies, the district's direction, and its mission and vision. This activity helps members become better acquainted with the

views of their board colleagues and the superintendent.

3. Hold social events at which board members can get to know each other as people.

4. Attend special events being held in the school buildings. Board members should witness the district's students in action. Make it a priority for the board to request schedules for athletic events, performances of plays, and band and chorus events. Be sure to make copies of school yearbooks available to the board as well.

5. Promote the good things that your schools do. If the district undergoes an accreditation interview, a board member or two can sit in to promote the positives of the school board service experience in the schools. ■

Long meetings not 'fair' to anyone

The torture of endless school board meetings can get to anyone.

After 18 months of overly lengthy board meetings, two members of Richmond (Va.) Public Schools' board made a public call for shorter meetings, *TimesDispatch.com* reported. They met no resistance from their board colleagues, the website reported.

"I don't want to be deciding the fate of someone at 2 a.m., based on the fact that I want to go home," said board member Derik Jones, according to the website. "That's not fair to the employee, it's not fair to the public, and it's not fair to ourselves."

This sounds like a board that is badly in need of some rules for board meetings. If meetings are too long, consider these 14 rules for your board.

1. When action is required, make a motion.
2. Respect others' opinions.

3. Make no personal attacks.
4. Participate at meetings.
5. Disagree when necessary.
6. Self-monitor discussion length and repetitiveness of comments and ideas.
7. Publicly support board actions and decisions.
8. Limit side conversations, and use "time-outs" as needed.
9. Don't interrupt others.
10. Be recognized by the board president before speaking.
11. Don't serve the board with hidden agendas.
12. Remember, there are no dumb questions. But don't ask questions simply to make another board member or the superintendent look bad. That's unprofessional.
13. Encourage diversity of opinions and views.
14. Stay informed. ■

Manage controversial board meetings with this strategy

The board should never forget that although its meetings are held in public, they are not the public's meetings. The New Jersey School Boards Association in a post titled Board Meeting Magic offered a sound method for maintaining control of meetings when the board faces a hot issue: Tackle controversial issues at the beginning of the ses-

sion. "If community members are upset about an issue, having to sit in the audience and wait for hours while the board discusses seemingly more mundane items will only fuel their anger," the publication states.

For more information, visit www.njsba.org/school-leader/julyaug11.html. ■