

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Highlight achievements of longtime, retiring board members

School board members who have served for many years can impact a board and school district in a lasting manner. When they retire, celebrating their successes can help remind the school community of the board's achievements, strengthen board morale, and even attract quality board candidates.

The board president can recognize a board member's positive impact by pointing to the member's specific achievements. By highlighting how the whole board contributed to those achievements, the board president can increase cohesion while underscoring the types of collaborative efforts the president would like to see going forward.

Some ways to celebrate include composing

a press release announcing the retirement and taking time during a board meeting to verbally recognize the retiring member's achievements.

Whatever method the president uses to sing the praises of an exiting board member, she should highlight that individual's most impressive achievements. The president should also highlight any successes that will likely impact the district in the years to come. And by providing more general observations about the personal qualities that helped make the board member successful, such as how she excelled at collaborating, the president can point out strengths desired of future board member candidates who may realize that they too might make a difference. ■

Is the board on track?

A board doesn't need to formally assess itself to learn how it is performing and where it can improve. A simple Q&A exercise can give the board basic insight into its effectiveness and accountability to stakeholders.

Consider how your board is performing by posing questions in these four areas:

1. Planning.
2. Governance.
3. Teamwork.
4. Relationship with the superintendent.

Questions for the board

Planning

- Does the board work with the superintendent

on planning?

- Does the board have a clear mission and vision for the district that it reviews, approves, and articulates?

Governance

- Does the board govern the district by setting policy instead of managing it?
- Does the board assess the superintendent's job performance?

Teamwork

- Does the board work well internally and with the superintendent so that more is accomplished as a team?

- Does the board recognize that leadership requires everyone to focus on the vision, mission, purpose, and goals of the district?

Relationship with superintendent

- Do the board members understand the rules,

ideas, and concepts that guide how they work with the superintendent?

- Do the board and superintendent have an open, positive relationship?
- Does the board support the superintendent in the administration of the district? ■

Use monthly ‘meet and greets’ to engage residents

Some members of the community may not feel comfortable attending board meetings or speaking up during the public comment period. This is especially true now that board meetings have become more contentious. To ensure your school board is able to engage and listen to all constituents, not just the vocal board meeting attendees, consider holding monthly “meet and greets” at local venues.

This is what the school board for Moses Lake (Wash.) School District did to engage its residents. According to a local news outlet, Superintendent Monty Sabin and School Board Member Shannon Hintz will have a monthly face-to-face meeting with residents at a local café. These low-key meetings will begin in February 2023 and

occur after regularly scheduled board meetings. Residents will have an opportunity to “come in and talk,” voice concerns, ask questions, or “say whatever you want to say,” Hintz told the news outlet.

Offer your constituents a similar opportunity. Consider holding “meet and greets” or “coffee talks” on a monthly or bimonthly basis. This will give residents another avenue to get to know school leadership in a more casual setting. Your board can decide when and where these meetings will happen. It should also determine whether the superintendent and one board member will be responsible for attending these events or whether that duty will rotate among all board members. ■

Keep a list of board’s main responsibilities handy

School board members, especially new ones, may not be clear on their responsibilities. Even if they go through orientation, they may sometimes forget their precise duties, and how the board’s obligations differ from that of the superintendent. Even a long-time board member could lose focus.

To keep everyone on the same page, the board president can develop a description of board member responsibilities and keep it on hand to give to board members when they begin to stray. The president might consider including the following on that list:

- Decide on a vision and goals for the district.
- Set performance standards for schools.
- Lobby elected officials for legislation favorable to the schools.

- Maintain complete records of board meetings.
- Ensure the district’s financial solvency.
- Approve contracts.
- Make sure the district complies with all legal requirements.
- Hire the superintendent.
- Delegate to the superintendent the authority to carry out the board’s policies.
- Establish the superintendent’s performance standards.
- Evaluate the superintendent’s performance annually.

The president could even meet with the board to develop its list, then distribute one to each member. But it may help also for the president to keep copies handy — just in case a board member starts to lose focus. ■