

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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School board meeting refresh

Consider new ways to conduct your school board meeting in the coming school year. The way you prepare for your meeting might need to change in light of the “new normal” post-coronavirus.

When preparing for the next school board meeting, consider the following:

- **Virtual meetings.** Appreciate that many stakeholders may continue to virtually participate in the meeting. Your agenda may need to detail the transition to in-person meetings and reflect how the meeting will be conducted to allow for both in-person and online participation. Meeting procedures and the time allotted for each agenda item may need to be adjusted to accommodate different meeting formats.

- **Public comment.** The board will need to continue to provide a means for virtual public comment on agenda items. Review district policies for collecting and meaningfully considering public comment. Be certain to document that the board considered all input from stakeholders.

- **Open meetings.** Ensure that procedures are in place to make meetings open to the public as required by law, via live streaming technology, archived recordings accessible on the district’s website, or broadcasts through cable channels, YouTube, or other platforms. Assign a board member to maintain an accurate and current events calendar

that provides the required notice to the public of open meetings according to state sunshine laws.

- **Accessibility.** Revisit your website and correspondence to ensure that board policies and procedures are accessible to all stakeholders. Don’t overlook how stakeholders may address the board, provide input, and comment.

- **Agenda items.** Expect that many of the high-priority issues at the start of the school year might involve COVID-19 health and safety protocols, recovery services due as a result of learning loss during the pandemic, accommodating continuing online learners, staffing and budgeting stressors, requests for hybrid instruction, and mask and vaccine policies. The board should prepare in advance to present a united front on these issues and navigate the “new normal” as a group. Determine what topics are of current interest and prioritize them. Include details for each meeting agenda item and delegate time parameters. Document any special meetings and agenda items that require board approval.

Your next board meeting should embrace all of the new ways to participate and collaborate. Consider the start of the 2021-22 school year a “fresh start” and an opportunity to strengthen and support the board’s working partnership with stakeholders. ■

Honor your retiring superintendent

The retirement of a superintendent can be bitter-sweet for both the superintendent and the school board, especially if board members developed a good

working relationship with the superintendent during her tenure. Before your superintendent departs, consider holding an event to honor her accomplishments.

When Jean Shumate, former superintendent for the Stanwood-Camano (Wash.) School District, retired on June 30, members of the school board spoke about her achievements during a public meeting. For example, one board member highlighted how Shumate helped the district overcome a financial crisis and rebuild its general fund.

You can do something similar for your retiring superintendent by:

- Inviting current and former board members who worked with the superintendent to her last board meeting.
- Having board members say a few remarks about the superintendent's contributions to the district.
- Presenting the superintendent a retirement gift, such as an engraved glass award or fountain pen. ■

Refine your school board's committees

The first board meeting in the new school year is probably the best time to examine the board's governance needs and determine whether your board committees need to be adjusted to align with those needs. School boards should refrain from continuing the same committees year-to-year, and target groups to focus on specific current needs.

There are essential core committees that every school board should have, such as governance, development, finance, academic excellence, director support and evaluation, audit, budget, planning, development, and public engagement committees. However, your board should consider smaller, more directed, groups to tackle special projects. Committees to handle fundraising, curriculum, or buildings and facilities might be needed. Citizen advisory committees for adult community education, career and technical education, and advanced academic programs might also prove beneficial. Also, consider a committee to review and revise the board's by laws, especially after the changes that resulted from the pandemic.

Each committee should have a "job description" and goals. While committee members might develop goals, the board should supply some direction to ensure that each committee stays focused.

Discuss whether committee chairs and vice chairs should be board members.

The board should also ensure that the board's governance manual identifies standing committees and includes procedures for meetings, conducting business, and reporting at each board meeting. The committees' work can help to facilitate the board's decision-making. They should meet regularly between board meetings, take attendance, and remain accountable to the group and to the board. Board policies and procedures should also reflect rules for committees, including tracking attendance, keeping minutes, documenting decisions, and archiving notes. The school board president, director, or chair should have a role in each committee, even if that means only sitting-in on a meeting each month to keep abreast of the committee's progress.

This year, the board's public advisory committee may face the biggest demands, having to address the transition back to in-person instruction, health and safety protocols, mask mandates, vaccination requirements, and recovery services for learning loss. Anticipate this need when organizing your committees to avoid insufficient membership on committees and committee member burnout. ■

Communicate questions, concerns before the board meeting

Communication is a two-way street. Just as board members expect the superintendent to inform them of potential issues before they show up on the board meeting agenda, board members should also relay their concerns to the superintendent in a timely manner.

If you have questions about district opera-

tions or doubts about a specific hot-button issue, communicate directly with the superintendent or board president at least a few days in advance of the next board meeting. This will allow you to air out your concerns and provides the superintendent sufficient time to research the issue and prepare a solution. ■