

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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The superintendent is an essential team member

Shutting the superintendent out of any meeting of the school board is a very bad idea.

Your superintendent is a member of the board and administrator team and should be treated accordingly, as a partner and not a subordinate.

This means the superintendent should participate in all board discussions and activities.

A board should never meet without its superintendent. These meetings, called closed sessions, damage any sense of board and administrator teamwork.

Closed sessions that exclude your superintendent:

- Destroy trust. The board and its superintendent should be committed to open and honest communication. That only comes from working together and talking things out.
- Undermine. Closed sessions don't allow su-

perintendents to explain their actions. Without the superintendent's input, you have no idea why a decision or course of action is being taken. That's when you begin to undermine the superintendent's position with second-guessing.

- Lead to ill-informed board decisions. Holding closed sessions without the administrator leads to poor decision-making. Your superintendent knows the district best, and when you don't have his or her advice, you may make plans that aren't workable.

Are there any instances where a board might meet without its superintendent? For the board to meet without its superintendent, it should require serious evidence of wrongdoing such as allegations of sexual impropriety, financial malfeasance, or problems with corporate compliance issues such as retaliation against a whistleblower. ■

Seek out new skills and talents in your board service

A curious mind can help a board member serve more effectively.

The Association of Alaska School Boards writes about the individual board member's "willingness to learn" in its Clear Board and Superintendent Roles, stressing that while state law requires little in the way of qualifications for serving a board, a commitment to improving skills is necessary to do the work well.

"No one, regardless of occupation, intelligence or personal skills, comes in knowing all he or she needed upon election," AASB writes. "Those who approach their jobs with a desire to be more knowledgeable and skilled become more effective school board members."

For information, <http://aasb.org/clear-board-and-superintendent-roles>. ■

Conduct interviews for a vacated trustee seat

If a board member cannot serve out his term, what should the board do? First, it should check its local policies and state law for guidance. If the board can interview for a new board member, it then should decide which approach to use, for instance determining whether to provide interview questions in advance to those interested in the vacated position.

In its “Ask Betsy” feature, staff members of the Oregon School Boards Association provide some guidance:

“The board gets to decide the process, including the questions to use, in evaluating and selecting a replacement for a vacant board position. This includes the choice of whether or not to provide applicants the questions in advance. It is up to the board. If you provide the questions to one candidate, you should provide them to all candidates.”

For information, http://www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Ask_Betsy/Vacant_Board_position_interviews_questions.aspx. ■

Setting the example: Withdrawing from a school board election with class

In her letter to the editor of the Cedar Springs Post in Michigan in which she withdrew from the upcoming board election, Rita Reimbold set a stellar example for how to conduct yourself in the best interests of the school district:

“My name will remain on the ballot, but I ask that you choose between the other candidates,” Reimbold wrote in the Post.

“The Michigan Association of School Boards provides information for local school boards that may also guide in the selection of local board members. Their document,

“Essential Attributes of Effective School Board Member,” states that every deliberation, decision, and action must reflect the best interests of every student. Board members represent the entire community, not a single constituency or special interest.

“Please consider these essential attributes in your selection of School Board candidates.”

For information, <http://cedarspringspost.com/2016/09/09/withdrawing-from-school-board-race>. ■

Assess the board’s ‘energy’ level

The effects of negative board energy can have ripple effects throughout the school system and community in its effect on students, staff, and parents.

That’s why board members, in their relationships with fellow board members, should take pains to ensure they are not the cause of negativity through their communications. Here are some examples of what should be avoided in the board room:

- Arriving late to meetings. By doing this, the board either has to start over to bring the tardy trustee up to speed, or simply ignores the latecomer.
- Leaving before the meeting concludes. If a board member does this, the full board loses his input.
- Repeating oneself. Going on and on about a topic results in overly long board meetings.
- Taking an “Eeyore” approach to board service. Just like the character from Winnie the Pooh, be-

ing grumpy, dismissive of ideas and people, lacking enthusiasm, and putting people down takes a toll.

- Avoiding a stand. No one knows where you are on the issues, and this type of board member doesn’t contribute to achieving consensus.
- Being a poor teammate who whispers and gestures to clique mates. By doing this, the board member comes off as unprofessional, particularly to members of the public.
- Blurting out your opinions. In an effort to appear in charge or a leader, this board member simply intimidates.
- Gossiping. Hearsay at board meetings should never be an agenda topic.
- Interrupting others. This is simply unprofessional and fosters resentment on the team.
- Showing off. This type of board member brings little to the table other than a desire to seek approval. ■