

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

May 2014 Vol. 28, No. 1

Editor: Jeff Stratton

How should board members respond to low staff morale?

Board member question: "Over the past few months, other board members and I have heard from several district employees who think morale is low at their schools. We've always followed proper procedure and referred staff complaints and suggestions to the building administrator and superintendent, but it sounds like the problem isn't getting any better.

"Some board members are suggesting that maybe we need to step in as a board, figure out what is wrong, and improve morale if we can. Obviously, staff management is the superintendent's job, but are we justified in looking into this matter?"

Answer: It's not unusual for board members to have concerns about staff morale. But no, it's not proper for a board to get directly involved in the management of personnel in the district. There are better ways to handle the situation.

It is frustrating to have a group of people manage a crisis. School districts need one person

in charge during a period of crisis management — and you've hired that person as your superintendent.

There will probably be other occasions where your board is tempted to step in and run things, but this will only be confusing to staff (trying to figure out how to deal with seven board bosses) and can lead to worse morale.

It's a challenge serving as a board member yet not being at the day-to-day controls of the district. That, however, is the board's proper role here. Make sure your superintendent is crystal clear about the board's concerns with staff morale at that building. Ask him for reports on how the situation is being resolved. Then monitor those results.

The board-superintendent team works best when both parties respect their proper roles. Review the *Who's responsible for personnel?* chart at the top of page 2 to refresh your memory on board responsibilities in the area of staff management. ■

Support of majority decision key to teamwork

Boards can have plenty of dissent and still be a well-functioning team.

The key to effective board teamwork on contentious issues lies in understanding that all board members have their opinions and have a right to make them heard.

When you have board splits on an issue, let dissenting members voice their dissent.

After that, however, it's important for the board to move forward as if it voted 7-0 on the issue, no matter which side of the issue you are on.

The key teamwork principle at stake here is that once the board makes a decision, all board members (even the dissenters) support the majority decision. ■

Who's responsible for personnel?

Area	Board	Superintendent
Hiring staff	No role, except hiring superintendent	Approves all hiring
Staff assignment	No role	Establishes
Firing staff	No role	Makes final termination decisions
Staff grievances	May hear	Manages grievances per district policy/contract
Personnel policies	Approves	Recommends, implements
Staff salaries	Approves budget amount	Approves salaries
Staff evaluation	Evaluates superintendent only	Evaluates all other staff

No grandstanding allowed!

The Arizona School Board Association has a sample school board operating protocol that encourages board members to concentrate on the meeting agenda.

According to the association, "The board will not play to the audience. We agree to speak to

the issues on the agenda and attend to our fellow board members. Facts and information needed from the administration will be referred to the superintendent."

For information, www.azsba.org//static/index.cfm?contentID=290 ■

Filling a board vacancy

Board member question: "We have had a board member leave town for employment in another community, and that leaves us with a vacancy. What do we need to think about when appointing a new board member?"

Answer: First, you need to check your board policy and any state legal requirements. Board policy will generally point out the process that the board should use to fill its vacancy.

Boards typically follow a procedure similar to the one below to fill their vacancies.

* Seek qualified candidates from the community by using the news media, board and superintendent recommendations, and communication with appropriate organizations.

* Ask interested people to submit written notice of their interest in serving on the board to the president.

* Interview all candidates to determine their qualifications and genuine interest.

* Make the appointment by majority vote of the full board. ■

3 ways for the board to add pizzazz to the district's annual report

An annual report is a potent tool if used properly. It has the potential to return far more than the time and money it takes to produce. It gives the superintendent and board a chance to prove how the money the district spends makes a positive difference in the lives of children and can be used to suggest how the district can be improved in future years.

Below, find three ways the board can work to improve the district's annual report.

1. Include a brief letter from your board president.
 2. Include a letter of support or congratulations from a recognizable leader. Have a board member contact the individual to write the letter.

3. Sell the future. Ask the superintendent to emphasize the board's plans for the district's future and how you plan to achieve it. The community needs to know that you can picture and fashion the future. This creates trust in the board and administration. ■