

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Support superintendent development efforts

Boards have the responsibility to hire and fire superintendents. That authority generally comes from the state.

The board also has an obligation to support the superintendent it hires. You made an important choice and want to see your administrator succeed. *Board & Administrator's Survey on School Boards* late last year showed that 53 percent of respondents reported five or fewer years' total experience as a superintendent.

One tangible way for the board to support a superintendent -- both new and veteran -- is to encourage him to participate in activities that improve the superintendency -- such as mentoring programs.

Support your superintendent's efforts in this area as he transitions into a new job and community or participates in efforts to help others do so.

Here are some ideas that have been used effectively to support mentoring for superintendents.

1. A mentor-mentee relationship cannot be forced to be successful. One reason for this may be the need for mentors to share certain things in common. Issues that can affect the success include: the size of district being managed, the demographics of the school district, personality type, and personal interests. Proximity is also important.

For a relationship to thrive, the participants should ideally be close geographically to facilitate face-to-face meetings and ease of interaction.

2. A book club. Superintendent book clubs allow people to bond over a third point of reference, the book. That allows them to become comfortable asking questions inside and outside of the book club gathering.

3. Contact predecessors. A new superintendent should be encouraged to contact veteran and past administrators from your district to introduce himself. This is an effective way to find a terrific mentor who is familiar with the district.

4. Support state association mentor arrangements. The Minnesota Association of School Administrators assisted in development of a regionally based mentoring program for new superintendents in the state.

Within their school district regions, a new superintendent is paired with a veteran who serves as mentor. The role of the mentor is to reach out to the new superintendent, extend a welcome to the profession, and offer assistance in answering any questions the new superintendent may have. Follow-up efforts include regular telephone contact and interaction at regional meetings. ■

Board needs 'philosophy' for superintendent performance appraisal

For the superintendent's evaluation to be a productive experience for the board, administrator, and most importantly, the school district, the board should recognize a few points regarding the work of appraisal.

They are:

- It's an important board responsibility.

- It's important to the success of the district.
- It's important to the health of the board-and-superintendent relationship.
- It gives the board a chance to tell the administrator what the board expects, and that's why setting goals and evaluating them during the process are vital. ■

Tips for creating a board expense reimbursement policy

Compensation for board members is a touchy subject. Most school board members (there are exceptions across the country) serve voluntarily and are reimbursed only for the expenses they incur in serving on the board. That brings up the need for a board expense reimbursement policy so that this issue is handled in a way that doesn't upset school stakeholders, the staff, or the board member whose expenses are being reimbursed.

Here are some tips to work through the issues surrounding a board reimbursement policy:

1. Give a clear statement of philosophy. An example: Expenses of a Board member shall be reimbursed when incurred in the performance of his/her duties or in the performance of functions authorized by the Board and then duly vouchered.

What is performance of job duties for a board member? Travel to a board conference is an example. Duly vouchered means a receipt.

2. Set forth guidelines to ensure appropriate reimbursement.

- Expenses should be reimbursed only for activities authorized by board and after receipts have been turned in.
- Mileage rates should be predetermined and ad-

hered to. Use what employees receive as your guide.

- State specifically what will be reimbursed for board-approved travel and attendance at conferences. This can be a hot-button issue with the public, so consider that airfare, fees for the conference, materials and books related to governance to be shared with board, parking, mileage, taxi, meals, and lodging should be included.

- Be sure to clarify the distinction between attending an event as a board member at a board function or a board representative and attendance at an event as a private citizen. The former expenses can be reimbursed; the latter won't.

- Prohibit expense reimbursement for purchases of alcohol or a trip for tourism or entertainment purposes.

- Submit vouchers for reimbursement to a board appointed entity. Good options here are the president, treasurer, and chair of finance committee.

- Make clear that board members should approach the president when they have questions about expense reimbursement, not a school employee. This can be uncomfortable for an employee, who may feel pressured. ■

Tough decision-making painful? Evaluate why this was the case to improve

If the board struggles before eventually making a difficult decision, assess the process once the decision has been made so that next time the board can work through a difficult issue in a more productive fashion. Answer the following questions to find answers to

your difficult decision-making processes.

The president should collect responses from all board members and lead a discussion on how the board can learn from its past experiences.

State the Issue:

1. Did other board members pay attention to your ideas as we worked through this issue?				
Very Little -- 1	Little -- 2	Some -- 3	Quite a Bit -- 4	Very Much -- 5
2. Were you frustrated by the team decision-making process?				
Very Little -- 1	Little -- 2	Some -- 3	Quite a Bit -- 4	Very Much -- 5
3. Do you feel ownership in the recently made decision? Are you committed to it? How responsible and committed do you feel for the decisions that were made?				
Very Little -- 1	Little -- 2	Some -- 3	Quite a Bit -- 4	Very Much -- 5
4. Do you listen to the input of other board members?				
Very Little -- 1	Little -- 2	Some -- 3	Quite a Bit -- 4	Very Much -- 5
5. Is our board team an effective decision-making body?				
Very Little -- 1	Little -- 2	Some -- 3	Quite a Bit -- 4	Very Much -- 5
6. What helped the board team reach consensus?				
7. What prevented the team from reaching consensus?				
8. What would you do differently as a school board next time? ■				