

# Board & Administrator

## FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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### Consent agenda improves board efficiency

**B**oards that use consent agendas to handle recurring agenda items like approval of the minutes and routine business like bill payment free themselves up to focus their meetings on more pressing and strategic business facing the district.

Use of a consent agenda can save the board time and improve effectiveness, said **David O. Renz**, director of the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the Henry W. Bloch School of Business & Public Administration, University of Missouri—Kansas City.

The board and administrator should discuss parameters for what items do and don't belong on the consent agenda and then unanimously agree to its use.

Renz provides two guidelines for boards considering using a consent agenda:

1. Use consent agendas only if all board members

understand the purpose and approve the practice.

2. Accept the responsibility that comes with using a consent agenda. This means board members must put adequate time into meeting preparation.

Thoroughly reviewing consent agenda materials in advance of meetings is important. "Obviously, if members do not read the background information on the consent agenda prior to the meeting, they cannot responsibly agree to the inclusion of any particular item on the consent agenda," Renz said.

In addition, when board members approve a consent agenda item that includes a legal, financial or program item without being completely knowledgeable about it, the board can expose itself and the district to liability, Renz said. ■

### Tips for boards to tame a domineering member

**O**dds are your board will at some point add a member who is an expert on everything—and is not shy about letting the team know.

Domineering board members can intimidate others and, when they drag things out, make meetings interminable.

Here are some recommendations for controlling the domineering board member:

1. **Come at the issue from the back door.** Ask the board member to help get others more involved in the board's efforts. That will lead to more shared responsibility, rather than one dominant personality.
2. **Set meeting time limits and enforce them.** The board president needs to keep meetings on track

when any individual takes the board off on tangents or monopolizes meeting time.

3. **Orient all new board members.** When new board members understand that no single board member is more important than any other, they won't be intimidated by a domineering board member.
4. **Refer to your code of ethics.** This code should contain certain basic behavioral norms to which all board members agree to abide. The code will lay out ground rules for how board members interact with each other.  
Creating a code of ethics or set of norms as a board team activity can also resolve the problem of a board member who likes to dominate. ■

## Don't hire uncertified teachers for specialized courses

**D**on't cut corners and try to hire teachers certified in other fields to teach specialized courses. Even classes such as home economics demand specific certifications in most states. In particular, if you lay off a certified teacher and replace that teacher with someone unqualified while the former teacher remains available, your district could land in legal hot water.

Example: *In Krause v. Spencer-Van Etten Central Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, No. 15,516, 107 LRP 5466 (N.Y. SED Comm. 01/11/07), a New York district eliminated the position of a certified home economics teacher for fiscal reasons. The board then redistributed her duties among five other teachers. None was certified in family and consumer sciences. When the former home economics teacher challenged the district's plan, the state

education commissioner said the district's practice of assigning teachers who were not properly certified to teach the course circumvented both the state certification requirements and the incidental teaching regulations.

Although the certifications held by the teachers who were assigned by the district related to some elements of the course's curriculum, they did not serve as replacements for the appropriate certification, the commissioner noted. However, because the district did not create a new teaching position, the commissioner could not grant the home economics teacher's request for reinstatement with back pay and benefits. Instead, the commissioner instructed the district to cease assigning teachers who lacked appropriate certification to teach its seventh-grade home and career skills classes. ■

## Make the board accountable for planning

**Y**our district likely faces many pressing, strategic issues. Whether they concern NCLB performance, the state of the district's finances, or the need for a new school, the board should address such issues through a strategic planning process. The following checklist is a good way for a board/superintendent team to assess how well it fulfills its planning responsibilities.

Accountability checklist: board planning	Yes	No
The district has a clear mission and vision that has been reviewed and approved by the board.		
The board can articulate the mission.		
The board revisits the district's mission on an ongoing basis to keep it current.		
The board and administrator team review current planning literature.		
The board has identified and knows its constituency groups.		
The board and superintendent engage in long-range thinking to keep the district mission-focused.		
The district has a strategic plan based on the mission and vision.		
The board creates long-range goals for the district based on the strategic plan. The board has approved the goals.		
The board has approved specific strategies to accomplish each goal.		
As a means to monitor performance on strategic issues, the board incorporates performance on district goals into the superintendent's annual performance appraisal.		
The board rewards the superintendent for the accomplishment of district goals.		
The board requires a districtwide assessment of actions and objectives related to the strategic plan.		