

# Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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## Don't let split votes cause division on your board

Teacher shortages. Financial struggles. Virtual, in-person, and hybrid learning. These are just a few of the polarizing issues that your school board may need to repeatedly address during SY 2020-21.

If the board regularly splits its votes 4-3 on contentious topics, it's easy for hard feelings to emerge among members on the losing side. Don't allow conflict and disagreement to poison the boardroom atmosphere.

The board president should consider these suggestions when emotions run high:

**1. Table divisive issues.** Air the issue at one meeting by discussing its pros and cons. Then, table

the issue until the next meeting. Give all members of the board time to cool off, think through their positions, and prepare for a decision at the next meeting.

**2. Write solutions down.** If further debate leads to more conflict, ask each board member to write down several solutions anonymously and submit them to the superintendent, who can chart them. The board can then prioritize the solutions and work toward a consensus on the best one.

**3. Send a hot issue back to a committee.** Before announcing the results of the committee, have all board members agree to support the committee's work and its final recommendation. ■

## Hold virtual stakeholder meetings to foster public trust

The coronavirus pandemic caused an unprecedented upheaval in school operations. During these extraordinary times, it's important for the school board to foster public trust in its decisions and actions. So, what should the board do? Consider holding virtual meetings with your stakeholders to give the board a chance to share its views with the community. Even if your board has already begun holding in-person meetings, virtual meetings may be a convenient option for stakeholders still concerned about their health and safety.

Here are three steps to make these virtual meetings successful:

**1. Identify and invite leaders to the meetings.** As a board, create an invitation list of com-

munity opinion shapers. Consider active parents, civic leaders, and local business owners as you put together your list.

**2. Host the stakeholders' meetings.** Greet guests as they log into the videoconference platform. Turn on your video camera so attendees can see you. Answer questions. Play a visible role.

**3. Participate in the presentations.** The board president can open the meeting with a welcome and close it with a thank you. Participate and offer support.

These virtual meetings will let the board and superintendent team share accurate information about the district's issues and ensure transparency with the community. ■

# Use self-evaluation to assess your performance as a board member

Most school boards use some form of evaluation to rate the board's performance as a unit. Some may also include an individual board member evaluation component to their board evaluation. As the

school year kicks into full gear, it's important for an individual board member to take stock of her own board service and look for ways to improve.

Use the following form to conduct a self-evaluation.

## Board member self-evaluation

1. Have you reviewed board organization and procedures? Are you familiar with:
  - The district's current vision and mission statement, goals, and objectives?  Yes  No
  - The district's bylaws and board policies?  Yes  No
  - The district's organizational chart?  Yes  No
  - The board's job description?  Yes  No
  - The board committee and advisory committee job descriptions?  Yes  No
2. Do you prepare for each meeting by analyzing the supporting documentation the superintendent provides in advance of the meeting?  Yes  No
3. Rate your attendance and participation in:
  - Board meetings and discussion.  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
  - Committee meetings and discussion.  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
  - Work sessions and discussion.  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
  - Retreats and discussion.  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
  - School events.  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
4. Do you always voice your concerns about or vote against proposals with which you do not agree?  Yes  No
5. Once a vote is taken by the board, do you always support the decision even if you did not vote in the majority?  Yes  No
6. Have you suggested new or beneficial ideas in the past year for improving board performance?  Yes  No
7. Have you contributed directly to achievement of one or more of the board's objectives for the district in the past year?  Yes  No
8. Is your service on the board free of conflicts of interest and do you support the board's operating procedures and code of ethics?  Yes  No
9. What steps can you take in the coming year to increase your knowledge of and participation in board and committee activities?

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