

# Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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## Prepare new board members for success by holding a succession session

As the governing body of the school district, the school board often makes significant decisions that impact students, parents, school staff, and the local community. Accordingly, it's important for all newly elected board members to receive the training they need to work as a team, successfully oversee school operations, and collaborate with the superintendent.

Here's an idea to welcome and prepare newly elected board members. Have the board president plan and hold a Saturday work session for all board members, including new and retiring board members, to help facilitate the transition process.

This orientation activity gives the full board a role in new member orientation while allowing new members to pick the brains of veteran and outgoing board members.

During this succession session, the board president or other experienced board members can suggest and initiate strategic activities, such as reviewing the district's current goals and ongoing projects. Also, consider setting aside time during this session to review the district's mission statement. This will provide experienced board members an opportunity to teach rookie board members about the school district's vision and strategic plan. ■

## Control your communications when discussing superintendent's administrative leave

A board's decision to place a superintendent on administrative leave can have unintended consequences. To begin with, it may put the rumor-mill into over-production. Parents may feel angry or distrustful because they weren't asked for their input into the decision, or because they learned about the decision from local news or a friend. While saying nothing to the public is typically a bad idea, the best way for a board to proceed may depend on the circumstances. Districts can minimize negative outcomes by tailoring their communications to the specific situation, selecting a board member spokesperson, and running planned communications through the board's attorney.

Robert Lusk, a school attorney with Miller Johnson in Michigan, says he has seen two types of situations, each calling for its own response.

### 1. When the community does not know why the superintendent has been placed on administrative leave

In this situation, unless the superintendent "goes public," Lusk says, he prefers the board doesn't give stakeholders a specific reason for the leave. Instead, it should explain that, "generally, the board does not comment on pending personnel matters but is committed to resolving the issue fairly and in the best interests of the school community."