

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Lines of communication must stay open

Board leaders (officers and committee chairs) need to set up opportunities for communication with board or committee members, and you need to encourage members to communicate among themselves.

Here's how to do these things:

How can you take the first step?

Try to keep in close, regular contact with board and committee members. Take a few minutes to call each one before scheduled meetings. Ask if they understand the meeting agenda or if they need more information about an issue.

This strategy not only keeps the lines of communication open, but it also can eliminate unnecessary discussion at meetings.

How do you get board or committee members to talk to one another?

Try inviting committee and board members to meetings 10 minutes early. This allows members and the administrator to mingle over coffee, talk about the issues you face, and get to know each other better.

How to ensure two-way communication between a board leader and board or committee members?

Meet with the superintendent and several board members for breakfast a few times each year. Schedule board members on a rotating basis so all get to participate while being wary of violating open meetings law.

The time together for breakfasts keeps issues from festering and gets them out in the open. All participants will have a better understanding of what is happening in the organization, and will get to know each other and the superintendent on a personal level. ■

Skills present in effective board members

The North Carolina School Boards Association believes there "are certain skills and attributes which are consistently present in effective board of education members." Here are two:

1. *Preparation.* "Do your homework, come prepared to work, remember that sometimes the work is to listen, agree and disagree as your values dictate, and accept that the group decision is legitimate even if it's not your personal choice."

2. *Sensitive to impact.* "Be aware of the com-

munity and staff's perceptions of the board. The community expects the board to be ethical, honest, transparent, and free from conflicts of interest. Consider how stakeholders might interpret your behaviors and decisions and then act accordingly."

For more information: <http://www.ncsba.org/news-resources/board-member-knowledge-base/essential-attributes-of-an-effective-school-board-member/>. ■

Use time wisely

The Arizona School Boards Association offers several tips to help board members be more efficient in their use of precious time:

1. Develop your own filing system. “Because everyone works differently, you will need to organize on the basis of your own most effective way of working,” writes ASBA. “Don’t get bogged down in paperwork, and skim documents with an eye for the most important points.”

2. Say “no.” “Prior to being elected to the board, you were probably very active in community and school events that required much of your time,” states ASBA. “You will have to make some

decisions about those activities you need to give up in order to make time for your new board responsibilities.”

3. Learn to handle community concerns. “Designate times when you will return calls or respond to letters,” states ASBA. “When approached out in the community, let concerned citizens know you have a limited time to talk with them, but assure them you will contact them later (at a time more convenient for you) or contact the appropriate person to handle their concern.”

For more information: <http://azsba.org/info-for-new-board-members/>. ■

Board meetings and the superintendent’s report

The superintendent’s report is like other reports the board hears at its meetings — for informational purposes. Issues the superintendent wants the board to act upon should be included on the agenda in the “new business” section.

This report should not be the superinten-

dent’s only involvement in a meeting. Administrators should be active participants throughout the meeting — recommending specific actions, providing background information on issues, and acting as a resource for the board. Superintendent input is vital to a good board meeting. ■

Board Meeting Checklist

Immediately after a board meeting, spend a few minutes as a board to evaluate how effective you were. This is an excellent way for all trustees to come up with suggestions to improve meeting efficiency. Use the following checklist to make the work easier and more focused.

Yes/No/Usually

1. Board meeting followed parliamentary procedure.
2. Board meeting stuck to the agenda and was conducted in businesslike manner.
3. Board members arrived on time.
4. Board meeting started on time.

5. Board meeting ended on time.
6. Board meeting lasted two hours or less.
7. Board members arrived prepared to discuss business.
8. Board member absences from meeting were minimal.
9. The meeting room was comfortable and conducive to discussion.
10. Discussions were polite and not dominated by one or two trustees.
11. Board members dealt with controversy properly and without acrimony. ■