

# Board & Administrator

## FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

August 2020 Vol. 34, No. 4

## Stay focused on board's mission even during pandemic

Don't let your focus on serving your educational community during the pandemic distract you from analyzing the district's mission and vision statements at the start of the new school year. Your board's mission statement should be a clear declaration of where you want your district to go.

Set aside time to perform an annual analysis of the mission and vision statements. Be sure the entire board and the superintendent participate in the analysis. With things changing to rapidly in education, confirm that the statement is consistent in terms of the board's vision and goals.

For example, one Maryland district's mission

statement developed several years ago contains belief statements that are relevant today. Those beliefs are:

- An understanding and appreciation for learning, varied cultures, and diversity is vital to success in a global society.
- All students have the right to a safe, healthy, and nurturing school environment.
- Students, family, school, and community share in the responsibility of education.
- All students have the capacity to learn.
- A range of opportunities and a well-balanced, rigorous, and engaging curriculum will lead to an educated community. ■

## Inform stakeholders when superintendent exits post

When a superintendent decides to leave the district, it's important to communicate effectively.

The board president should be informed of the resignation first. Then, the school board and the superintendent should collectively come to a decision about how to share the news with the public.

Crafting the communication regarding the superintendent's departure and being clear about when the communication occurs is critical. The board needs to be prepared. One way to prepare for the announcement is to make a list of key stakeholders and community leaders to inform prior to the public announcement.

Next, draft the communication to the public.

The announcement typically contains the following information:

- When the superintendent tendered her resignation letter.
- The reason the superintendent is stepping down, if known.
- The length of the superintendent's tenure.
- The major accomplishments or projects completed during her tenure.
- The date of the superintendent's last day in the district.
- The name, if known, of the acting superintendent.
- Information concerning a new superintendent search. ■

## Public picks up on board's dissension

Respect for the majority's decision is one key to a harmonious school board. You can vote your conscience on a tough issue, but once the vote is taken, all board members need to support the majority decision. Here's why.

At a board meeting, the audience picks up on the lack of unity among board members. Eventu-

ally, that will start to wear on your board teammates, as well as the district's staff. In addition, the community may begin to play a dissenting board member against the board majority.

So what's the take away? Make support for the board majority's decision a part of your board's written operating principles. ■

---

## Exit interview gathers insight from departing board members

School boards typically schedule orientations for incoming members, but should they also schedule exit interviews for out-going members? An exit interview is a great way to close out a person's board service, an opportunity to show appreciation for her service, and a chance to learn as much as you can about her experience. And, you can use the information to improve board operations.

Consider developing an exit interview protocol and exit interview form. The protocol may start with a statement that an exit interview will be conducted with each member who ends her service on the board. It may conclude by stating that the information from exit interviews will be shared with the full board each year.

To encourage open and honest conversation, state that the exit interview is conducted by a non-

officer member of the board, using questions from the Exit Interview Form. The result is a conversation between colleagues designed to gather information that can make the board better.

Exit interview questions to include on the form:

- Do you have any suggestions as to how we might improve the board in any area?
- What board accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Are the expectations we have for board members realistic?
- Did you feel your talents and expertise were utilized?
- Did a long-range planning process occur during your time on the board?
- What upcoming projects or challenges do you see for the district? ■

---

## 3 steps to cool down a heated school board meeting

Many topics — a change to the boundary policy, whether to eliminate school police, teacher pay, to name a few — can lead to a contentious school board meeting. There are a few things you can do the next time your board's internal discussions at a public meeting become heated. Consider the following actions:

**1. Let the board president do his job.** The school board president is trained to chair the board meeting, even a contentious one. Let him assume the responsibility and intervene.

**2. Play the role of peacekeeper.** Consid-

er laying out the pros and cons of the various sides being debated, and stay neutral. Remain calm and watch your tone of voice. Remind all members that they want the public to have confidence in the way the school board conducts business.

**3. Ask the superintendent to speak frankly.** If the board is about to step outside of legal lines, the superintendent should be direct with the board and caution that it is about to break the law. Ask that all members pause and reflect on the superintendent's statement. ■