



MASB
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS

A School Board Member's Resource Guide: **FIRST-YEAR ORIENTATION**



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Introduction

Congratulations! There is no greater honor that can be bestowed upon a citizen than being elected to a local school board. The constituents in your district have entrusted you with the enormous responsibility of overseeing the education of their students. You have the opportunity to give back to your community, impact the quality of education in your district and strengthen our democracy and our nation by ensuring a quality public education for all students.

As a new school board member, you have much to learn about the roles and responsibilities of a board member. With the increasing demand for educational excellence and fiscal accountability, the responsibilities of school boards are far more numerous and of greater impact than at any previous time in history. Overnight, the newly initiated are expected to become skilled interpreters of school law, expert personnel managers and vigilant overseers of taxpayer's money. What's more, they are expected to function with the other board members as part of a united team, despite differences in backgrounds, political philosophies, knowledge levels and expertise.

This handbook is intended to give you an overview of your roles and responsibilities as a board member and to assist you in acquiring the knowledge necessary to be a skilled and effective board member. We hope you will find the information to be valuable as you provide leadership for your community in fulfilling its vision and mission for quality education.

Thank you for taking the bold step to become a school board member. We congratulate you for your commitment for pursuing this challenging and rewarding responsibility.



Legal Authority of School Boards

The origin of school boards occurred when the colonial legislature of Massachusetts passed a law that gave people the power to establish schools. In the 17th century, Selectmen, the elected representatives of the people, appointed townspeople to a committee to oversee schools. This was the beginning of local control of schools by lay citizens. From this beginning, school boards evolved.

The official duties of school boards have changed throughout history. One of the primary documents that governs the actions of the school district is the *Michigan Constitution* and, more specifically, the *Revised School Code*. Among other duties, the *Revised School Code* gives each board of education general powers to:

- Educate students
- Provide for the safety and welfare of students
- Acquire, maintain and dispose of school property
- Determine matters relating to school employees and contractors
- Make joint agreements and cooperative arrangements

Specific provisions in the *Revised School Code* also assign responsibilities to school boards in areas such as:

- Setting the curricula and courses taught in the schools
- Employing a superintendent
- Adopting a budget
- Deciding whether or not to furnish transportation for pupils
- Negotiating with employee unions regarding salaries and other conditions of employment

The board of education operates as a corporate body. Individual school board members have no authority to act independently, and can't commit or bind the board by their individual actions. Powers and duties of the board must be exercised by the board as a whole.

For the board of education to take action, the action must be voted on at a public meeting by a majority vote of the members elected to and serving on the board, and a proper record made of the vote. The meeting must be properly convened and comply with proper notice to the board (*Revised School Code; bylaws*) and proper notice to the public (*Open Meetings Act*).

The regulations that govern how your school board operates are determined by the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and your own school policies and the bylaws for your board of education. It's important that you are aware of the policies and bylaws that your school board has established and follow them carefully in order to avoid any fines and lawsuits for violations.

Polymaking

Good business practice and, in many instances, the law itself require the board to adopt written policies governing the operations of the schools and to make these policies easily accessible to school employees, parents and the general public.

Because policymaking is central to the board's governance and oversight responsibilities, it's imperative that adopted policy be clearly written, up-to-date and legally viable.

The board and staff have specific roles in policy development, adoption, implementation, review and evaluation.

- Policy **development** is a cooperative effort involving the board, the staff and the community.
- Policy **adoption** is the responsibility of the board.
- Policy **implementation** is the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.
- Policy **review and evaluation** is the responsibility of the board based on information received from the staff, community and other resources.

The policymaking process should result in policy that (1) reflects the board's intent and articulates a definite course of action; (2) delegates key responsibilities; and (3) declares desired outcomes. Written board policy fosters stability and continuity, establishes a legal record—and a legal basis—for many board actions, forms the core of the district's written communication system, and provides a framework for the superintendent and staff to confidently assign duties and execute those assignments.



Are You a Leader?

A local board of education has one of the most important responsibilities in our society—helping plan the education of the children in the community. Its decisions affect the lives of students and their parents, the livelihoods of those the district employs and the economic well-being of the community.

At a time when America’s schools and students face greater challenges than ever before, school boards must demonstrate their leadership by focusing on the academic skills and competencies of students that will make them successful citizens in the future. To accomplish this task, boards must be visionary and open to embracing research-based reforms that have resulted in high-performing districts. Do you have the leadership skills necessary to accomplish the enormous progress schools must make? The following characteristics can be found in the highly successful leader.

1. Leaders know and understand what it means and what it takes to be a leader

Leadership is the act of identifying important goals and then motivating and enabling others to devote themselves and all necessary resources to achievement. It includes summoning one’s self and others to learn and adapt to the new situation represented by the goal.

2. Leaders have a vision for schools that they constantly share and promote

Leaders have a vision of the ideal, can articulate this vision to any audience and work diligently to make it a reality. Leaders also know how to build upon and sustain a vision that preceded them.

3. Leaders communicate clearly and effectively

Leaders possess effective writing and presentation skills. They express themselves clearly, and are capable of responding to the hard questions in a public forum. They are also direct and precise questioners, always seeking understanding.

4. Leaders collaborate and cooperate with others

Leaders communicate high expectations and provide accurate information to foster understanding and maintain trust and confidence. Leaders reach out to others for support and assistance, build partnerships, secure resources and share credit for successes and accomplishments.

5. Leaders persevere and take the “long view”

Leaders build institutions that endure. They “stay the course,” maintain focus, anticipate and work to overcome resistance. They create capacity within the organization to achieve and sustain its vision.

6. Leaders support, develop and nurture staff

Leaders set a standard for ethical behavior. They seek diverse perspectives and alternative points of view. They encourage initiative, innovation, collaboration and a strong work ethic. Leaders expect and provide opportunities for staff to engage in continuous personal and professional growth.

7. Leaders hold themselves and others responsible and accountable

Leaders embrace and adhere to comprehensive planning that improves the organization. They use data to determine the present state of the organization, identify root-cause problems, propose solutions and validate accomplishments.

8. Leaders never stop learning and honing their skills

Leaders are introspective and reflective. Leaders ask questions and seek answers. Leaders in education are familiar with current research and best practice, not only in education, but also in related fields.

9. Leaders have the courage to take informed risks

Leaders embrace informed, planned change and recognize that everyone may not support change. Leaders work to win support and are willing to take action in support of their vision, even in the face of opposition.

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles

The National School Boards Association suggests that the four major thrusts of leadership for school boards include the following:

Vision—Creating a Shared Vision

- Board keeps students as the focus of the work of schools
- Board adopts a shared vision based on community beliefs to guide local education
- Board demonstrates its strong commitment to the shared vision and mission by using them to guide decisionmaking and communicating to others

Structure—Establishing a Structure to Achieve the Vision

- Board employs a superintendent and establishes a district management system that enables all people to contribute meaningfully to achieve the vision
- Board establishes district processes to use information and make effective decisions
- Board ensures that long- and short-term plans are developed and annually revised through a process involving extensive participation, information gathering, research and reflection
- Board makes decisions that support student learning and school renewal when it reviews and adopts policies and allocates resources
- Board sets high instructional standards based on the best available information of the knowledge and skills students will need in the future
- Board encourages an environment conducive to innovative approaches to teaching and learning and supportive of continuous renewal of education

Accountability—Developing Accountability to Measure and Communicate How Well the Vision is Being Accomplished

- Board receives regular reports on student progress and needs based on a variety of assessments in order to evaluate the quality and equity of education in the district
- Board evaluates both superintendent and board performance
- Board evaluates progress toward achievement of district long- and short-term goals and ensures that policies and allocation of resources effectively support district vision
- Board periodically reports district progress to community and parents

Advocacy—Championing the Vision

- Board seeks others who can help expand educational opportunities and meet the needs of the whole child
- Board advocates for children and families and establishes strong relationships with parents and other mentors to help support students
- Board leads in celebrating the achievements of students and others in education
- Board promotes school board service as a meaningful way to make long-term contributions to society

The role of the board of education is not to run the schools, but to see that they are well run.

Responsibilities

In order to give the best service to your local community, you will need to develop skills and knowledge in a variety of areas. These include:

Policymaking

A board's major function, and the foundation upon which the district's structure is built, is the setting of policy. Policies spell out how the district will operate. They should be based on:

- The board's vision for the district
- Boards don't carry out a policy. The responsibility for implementing policy is delegated to the superintendent.

Designating the Chief Executive Officer

The board is responsible for:

- Recruiting
- Hiring
- Evaluating the performance of the superintendent

Planning, Goal Setting and Evaluation

The shared community vision is translated into long- and short-range goals. The board establishes the structure to:

- Accomplish the vision with input from community, staff, parents and students
- Evaluation is the mechanism by which boards are held accountable to the public for the goals that are set for education in their communities

Financial Resources

The board approves and adopts the budget

- Much of the responsibility for establishing a structure for the district is affected by this budget

Staffing and Evaluation

The board is responsible for establishing policy that governs:

- Salaries and salary schedules
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Fringe benefits
- Leave
- In-service training

In most districts, the board delegates the tasks of recruiting, recommending for hire, evaluating, promoting and disciplining staff (in accordance with board policy) to the superintendent.

Instruction

The board, working with the superintendent and staff, must:

- Set clear expectations or standards
- Adopt policies based on instructional programs

*Boards don't
carry out a policy.
The responsibility for
implementing policy
is delegated to the
superintendent.*

School Facilities

The board is responsible for determining school housing needs and:

- Communicating those needs to the community
- Purchasing, disposing of or leasing school sites
- Approving building plans that will support the educational programs

Students

The board can accept, modify or reject policies recommended by the superintendent regarding school:

- Admissions
- Placement
- Promotion
- Attendance
- Expulsion
- Suspension
- Graduation
- Conduct
- Discipline
- Safety
- Health services
- Food services
- Transportation services

Communication With Various Constituencies

The board is responsible to maintain an ongoing two-way communication with:

- School staff
- Students
- Members of the community

Advocacy

Board members, both individually and collectively, need to serve as advocates for children.

Adjudication and Investigation

The board may have to hear appeals from staff members or students on issues that involve board policy implementation.

Establishing Bylaws

The board is responsible for:

- Procedures for the operation of the board
- Election of officers
- Reviewing and evaluating board operations and performances
- Establishing and maintaining effective board-superintendent relations

General

Other activities include:

- Establishing procedures for the operation of the board
- Electing board officers
- Establishing attendance zones for the school district
- Retaining an attorney or law firm for the school district
- Setting strategy and coordinating litigation decisions when the school district is involved in a lawsuit
- Establishing and maintaining effective board/superintendent relations
- Periodically reviewing and evaluating board operations and performance
- Working with (as well as authorizing the administration to work with) city, county and other government and nongovernment officials and agencies

The Board/Superintendent Team

The board and superintendent have very distinct and separate roles. Together they form the district's leadership team. Before an effective working relationship is established, a superintendent and board must develop a mutual understanding of their respective roles, then review and validate this understanding on a regular basis. An honest and candid discussion of the functions of each entity will greatly enhance the partnership between the superintendent and the board.

As CEO of the school district, the superintendent is responsible for:

- A. Implementing policy set by the board
- B. Making recommendations to the board based on his/her best educational knowledge regarding:
 - Personnel
 - Curriculum
 - Budget
- C. Informing the board of all vital matters pertaining to the school district
- D. Developing and maintaining an efficient and effective management system for the school district
- E. Delegating appropriate responsibilities and assigning duties to other employees of the district, but ultimately being accountable for their actions
- F. Recommending all candidates for employment and being directly and indirectly responsible for their administration
- G. Developing and improving instructional programming of the school including being alert to advances and improvements in educational programming
- H. Preparing and submitting a preliminary budget to the board and managing the financial operations of the school district

Research has shown that a positive working relationship between the board and the superintendent can directly impact student achievement in the district. It's fairly easy to surmise that if there is continual acrimony and disruption between the board and the superintendent, very little will be accomplished in the district and students will be negatively impacted by the lack of harmony and cohesiveness. There are several actions that boards and superintendents can take to ensure a good working relationship will exist.

Full disclosure: The cornerstone of a strong board-superintendent partnership is the frank disclosure of school problems to the board members. Complete and thorough disclosure requires the superintendent be open and receptive to inquiries from members of the board, that she/he be knowledgeable about the district's activities, and that she/he provide information as quickly as possible.

Frequent two-way communication: The superintendent should provide timely oral and written communications of pending or emergency items. Board members should reciprocate, immediately informing the superintendent of citizen concerns.

The board must be well informed to make wise decisions. The superintendent is responsible for keeping board members informed on an ongoing basis (not just at meetings). Before major decisions are made, board members should have an opportunity to read background information, examine alternatives and consider the implications of alternative actions.

Careful planning: No one enjoys surprises and careful planning will avoid most of them. The superintendent and the board should plan together. Planning begins with the board adopting yearly objectives for the district, by which the board provides direction for the superintendent. The superintendent oversees the implementation of the objectives. An excellent approach to global planning that involves the community is strategic planning.

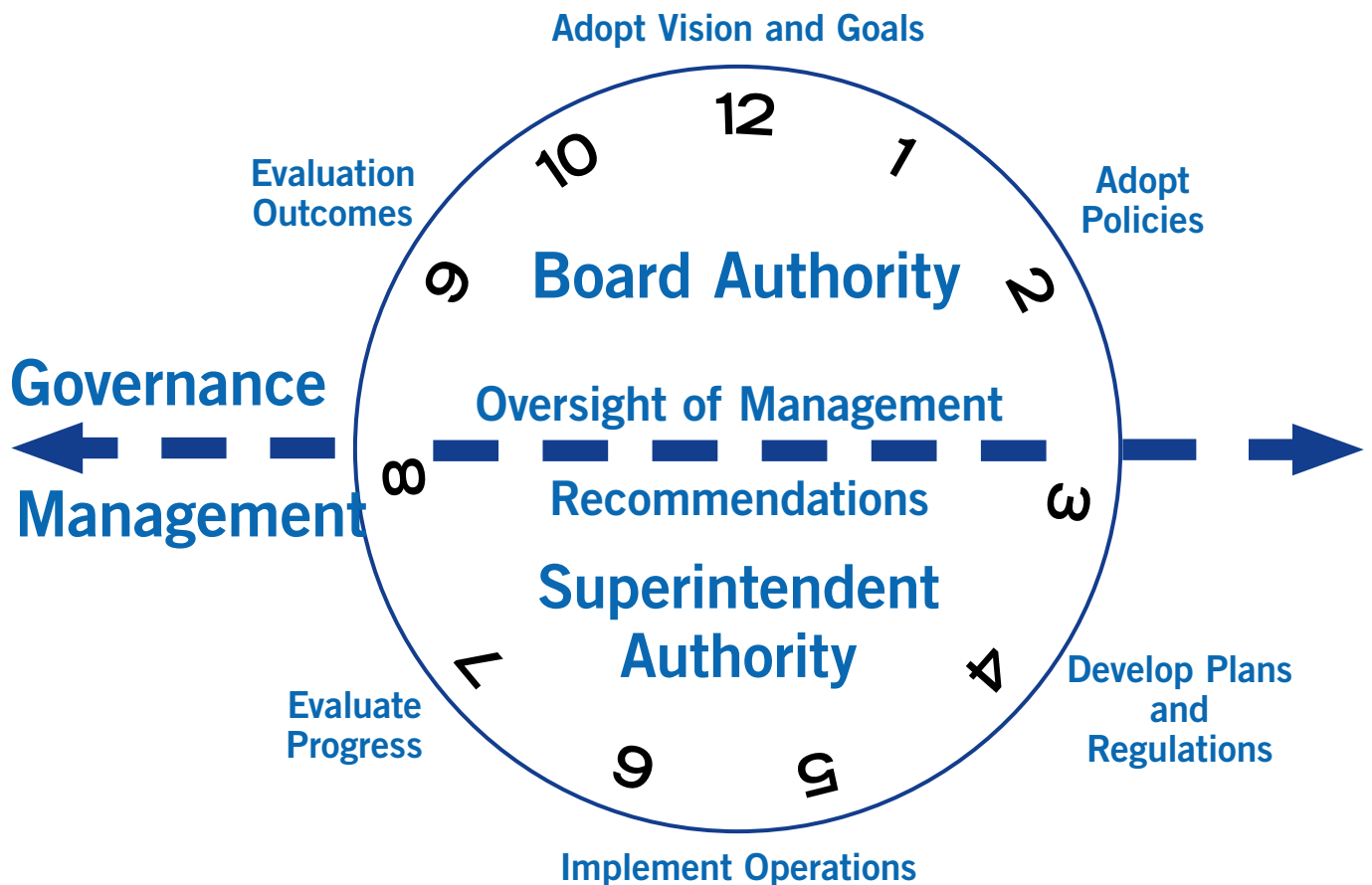
Informal interaction: The superintendent must interact regularly with board members. They should attend conferences together and participate in school activities. Through such informal interaction they become more sensitive to each other's interests and values without, of course, breaching professional relationships.

Periodic evaluation: The superintendent and the board should evaluate the work of the school district at sessions scheduled throughout the year. Periodic evaluations, in addition to the regularly scheduled formal annual evaluation, keeps the board apprised of the progress on district goals. At these meetings the board should evaluate the superintendent, discuss the relationship between the board and the superintendent and agree to any modifications necessary. For more information, go to www.masb.org/supteval.

Mutual support: Both parties need support from the other. A strong partnership is strengthened when board members support the superintendent from unjust criticism and the superintendent, in turn, defends board members from unwarranted accusations.

For further information on the effective board/superintendent team, see Appendix A.

The Governance Clock



Essential Attributes of an Effective School Board Member

Even the most experienced board members never stop learning the technical details of the job, and those that are successful learn early that being effective requires more than knowing the details of the tenure law or how to interpret the budget. Being a successful board member begins with a genuine commitment to striving for high-quality public education that supports the full development of all children. There are certain skills and attributes that are consistently present in effective board of education members. Here are some steps to consider:

1. **Be prepared to participate responsibly.** 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. It's not acceptable to have opinions and not express them.
2. **Focus on serving all children.** Ensure every deliberation, decision and action reflects the best interests of every student you serve. No child is more important than another.
3. **Remember that your identity is with the community, not the staff.** It's easy to identify with staff as you probably will have more discussions with them about issues. But you must remember that your job is to serve in trust for the community.
4. **Represent the community, not a single constituency.** You will understand and/or identify with certain constituencies (parents, neighborhoods or communities, special ed, etc.), but you **MUST** remember that being a board member means serving in trust for the entire community. There's no way seven people can provide a spokesperson for every constituency or legitimate interest, so in a moral sense you must stand for them all. You can be **FROM** a constituency, but you must not let yourself **REPRESENT** it.
5. **Be responsible for group behavior and productivity.** You are responsible for not only yourself but the group. If the group doesn't do its job, meddles in administration or breaks its own rules, you personally share that responsibility.
6. **Honor divergent opinions without being intimidated by them.** You are obligated to express your honest opinions on issues, and so are each of the other board members. Encourage your colleagues to speak their opinions and listen to them carefully and respectfully. But don't allow yourself to be intimidated by louder or more insistent board members.
7. **Use your special expertise to inform your colleagues' wisdom.** If you have special expertise (law, accounting, construction, etc.) remember that you're **NOT** personally responsible for decisions relating to that area. Use your expertise to help inform your colleagues (i.e., help them understand what fiscal health looks like versus fiscal jeopardy), but don't assume sole responsibility for those decisions. Also remember that you're not on the board to help the staff or even advise them with your special expertise. Your job as a board member is to govern. If you wish to offer your help as an expert, make sure that all parties know you are acting as a volunteer, not a board member, and remember that asking for or accepting your help is a staff prerogative, not yours.
8. **Be aware of the community and staff's perceptions of the board.** If the board is perceived as being unethical, dishonest, secretive or self-serving, whether justified or not, that will become reality for the community and staff. Consider how stakeholders might interpret your behaviors and decisions then act accordingly.
9. **Think upward and outward more than downward and inward.** There is a great temptation to focus on what goes on with management and staff instead of what difference the district should make in the larger world. This requires ignoring the minutiae or details in order to examine, question and define the big picture. The latter is a daunting and awesome task, but it's board work—governance!

10. **Don't tolerate putting off the big issues forever.** As daunting and awesome as the big decisions are, they are the board's to make. (What are our core values and beliefs about education in our community? Based on those where do we put our resources?) If you don't, you're abdicating your authority. Your inaction is a decision of sorts and if you don't make it, someone else will by default.
11. **Support the board's final choice.** No matter which way you voted, you are obligated to support the board in its decision. This doesn't mean you have to pretend to agree with it. You may maintain the integrity of your dissent. What you support is the legitimacy of the choice even though you don't agree. For example, you will support without reservation that the superintendent must follow the formal board decision, not your personal preference.
12. **Don't mistake form for substance.** Don't confuse having financial reports for having sound finances or having a public relations committee for having good public relations. Beware of the trap of having procedures rather than substance.
13. **Don't expect agendas to be built on your interests.** The board's agenda shouldn't be a laundry list of individual member interests but a plan for taking care of the governance of the district. Being a community trustee is very different from seeing the organization as your personal possession. The board job must be designed to insure that the right of the entire community is faithfully served in the determination of what the district should accomplish.
14. **Squelch your individual points of view during monitoring.** Your own values count when the board is creating policies. But when you monitor the performance of the superintendent or the success of programs, etc., you must refer to the criteria the corporate board decided, not what your opinion was about those criteria. And as you review the criteria, your monitoring shouldn't be based on whether things were done the way you would have done them, but whether they were a reasonable interpretation of the board's policy.
15. **Obsess about ends.** Keep the conversation focused on values, mission, vision and goals (Who gets which benefits for how much?). Talk with other board members, staff and the public about these matters first and foremost.
16. **Continuously ask of yourself and the board, "Is this board work?"** The deliberations of the board must add value. They must deal with fundamental, long-term issues that require the wisdom and decisionmaking of a diverse group of seven people who look at the whole—not just at pieces or the issue du jour.



The Role of Ethics in Public Service

Research shows that the public has higher ethical expectations for members of the board than any other elected body. This should come as no surprise to you if you think about the fact that your community has entrusted their most precious resource to the board of education—their children. Furthermore, especially in smaller communities, board members are often very recognizable. They attend the same church, grocery store and school and town events that the rest of the community attends. Their children are your children’s friends and your neighbors have contact with you on a regular basis.

Board members are expected to set an example that is morally admirable and free of even a hint of self-serving impropriety. At times, the ethical high road can require making very difficult decisions, especially when doing the ethically correct thing is not always clear cut. Nonetheless, public trust and credibility is essential for effective governance. Making decisions or behaving in a manner that is unethical undermines the credibility of elected board members and erodes the public’s trust.

Many boards that are intent on maintaining the public’s trust often agree to a set of guidelines or code of ethics that can be a constant reminder of ethical conduct. Below is an example of a code of ethics for boards of education.

Code for Board Member Behavior

PRINCIPLE I: COMMITMENT TO BE TRUSTWORTHY

The leadership team must be self-governing. They will confine their performance to those services that elicit trust from the individuals and society whom they serve using their knowledge, skills and competencies.

PRINCIPLE II: COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL MISSION

The leadership team has a common mission to implement educational programs and activities essential to the welfare of society.

PRINCIPLE III: COMMITMENT TO BE RESPONSIBLE

The leadership team is committed to responsible decisionmaking. The quality of decisions, actions and performance is in proportion to the contributing competence and skill of board members and administrators.

PRINCIPLE IV: COMMITMENT TO A PROFESSION

The leadership team shall strive to meet the standards of their professions. The Leadership Team will advocate, engage in and support professional development.

PRINCIPLE V: COMMITMENT TO SERVE OTHERS ABOVE SELF

The leadership team is dedicated to improving the status and conditions of humankind by serving society.

Your Personal Life

Board members admit that the most surprising discovery about board service is the great amount of time it takes to be an effective board member and the tremendous variety of concerns with which the board deals. Oftentimes the abrupt change from citizen status to board member status catches newly elected board members off guard. They are suddenly bombarded with concerns and complaints from friends, acquaintances and people they've never met before. They no longer can be out in the community without being approached by one or more citizens about concerns within the school district. And, even when you tell them that your authority to act is limited to board meetings, they'll see you as a 24/7 board member.

The board member and his/her family and possibly business will inevitably be affected by a board member's investment of time and talent in the schools. If you learn to manage the demands of public service on your private life, board service can be rewarding and enjoyable. Most boards meet once or twice each month with a typical meeting lasting between two and four hours; emergencies may prompt additional special meetings. Board members may also have to attend committee meetings that require even further preparation and time. The board member's involvement in community affairs and attendance at school programs and events accounts for even more dedicated time to the board member's schedule.

Many newly elected board members are unprepared for the huge amount of board-related paperwork they must read or for the multitude of new information they must learn in a very short time. It's not uncommon to hear board members state that it takes them several hours prior to a board meeting to review their board packet thoroughly and to get all of their questions answered.

Without question, there is a huge time commitment required to serve on a board of education. However, experienced board members often find that the tremendous satisfaction they reap from their public service greatly outweighs any negative aspects of the job or personal sacrifices they must make. Still, anyone running for the school board should be well aware that they will be dedicating many hours to fulfilling the responsibilities of their new position.

There are several ways to use your time more efficiently:

- Determine how you will manage the multitude of information you will be receiving by developing your own filing and paper routing system. Keep in mind that your administration keeps on file all the board packets and agendas from past meetings. Because everyone works differently, you will need to organize on the basis of your own most effective way of working. Don't get bogged down in paperwork and skim documents with an eye for the most important points.
- Familiarize yourself with board policies to get a feel for the many details of school operations.
- Use the minutes and agendas of past board meetings to learn about the kinds of issues that have come before the board.
- Learn to 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. 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. This requires you to establish priorities and learn to say yes to only the priorities at the top of your list. For very service-oriented board members, this may be one of the most difficult challenges for them.
- Decide how you want to handle the many concerns, questions and requests you will be receiving from community members both in person and by phone or mail. The time you spend on re-

sponding to community concerns can consume your life if you allow it to. Designate times when you will return calls or respond to letters. 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. As public officials, board members have a duty to listen to community input. However, they also have a right to protect some time solely dedicated to their personal lives. (For more information about responding to community concerns, see Chain of Command, Appendix A.)

- As a new board member, you can save time right from the start by learning as much as you can about the school system. Primarily, you need to learn what channels to go through for information that you should learn during a district orientation program. Meet with the superintendent and board president to learn more about how the board operates and key issues the district is facing.
- Attend conferences and training classes provided by MASB to learn as much as possible about your responsibilities as a board member.



A Checklist for New Board Member Orientation

Orientation to the Board: These items are generally the school board’s areas of expertise and, therefore, should be the board’s responsibility in the orientation process. Often, the board president will take the lead for this part of the orientation process with the assistance of the superintendent and other members of the board.

New board members should have access to the following items:

- Policy manual with an explanation of its use
- A copy of current district goals
- An explanation of school board organization (bylaws, officers, standing and ad hoc committees, if any)
- An explanation of any policies governing board member conduct and activities (i.e., board code of conduct, travel expenses, conflict of interest, professional development, calendar of important events)
- An explanation of how board meetings are conducted, including rules of order used, Open Meetings Act requirements, placing items on the agenda, superintendent’s informational packets
- Information about the board speaking with one voice, the authority of the board vs. the authority of any individual board member, the chain of command, etc.
- An explanation of board processes: gathering community input, monitoring district progress, self-evaluation, communication with the media
- A historical perspective of the board’s current work, including minutes from the past year’s board meetings
- An explanation of the board packet
- A list of board development opportunities throughout the year

Orientation to Board/Superintendent Roles and Relationship: These items are generally shared areas of expertise between the board and superintendent, and, therefore, should be a joint responsibility in the orientation process.

New board members should have access to the following items:

- An explanation of the authority and responsibilities of the board, superintendent, administrators and individual board members
- An explanation of how communication occurs between the board and the superintendent
- Explanation of how authority is delegated to the superintendent
- A copy of the superintendent’s job description and contract
- An organization chart of the school district’s management structure
- A copy of the superintendent’s evaluation tool
- An explanation of how communication flows between board members and the superintendent and how to use the chain of command

Orientation to the District: These items are generally the superintendent’s areas of expertise and responsibility in the orientation process.

New board members should have access to the following items:

School Finance

- A copy of the district’s budget and an explanation of how, when and by whom it is prepared
- An explanation of the state’s financial plan and what it means in terms of local district budget
- Data on district per-pupil cost and expenditures

- An explanation of the funding process for the school district
- A description of the district's student enrollment trends and projections
- Data on the existing bond indebtedness of the district
- Information on federal aid to district's education program

Facilities

- A list showing the number, location and conditions of schools and other buildings
- An explanation of construction projects contemplated and in process
- An explanation of the student transportation system
- A description of the geographic boundaries and attendance zones of the school district

School Curriculum and Instruction

- An explanation of curriculum standards required by state law
- Copies of recent state report cards
- A description of the district's overall curriculum
- An explanation of school improvement initiatives
- Student dropout statistics
- Information on recent test results and how they are utilized.
- Data on the percentages of students who go onto college or other post-high school programs
- Documents showing teacher-pupil ratio and median class size for the district and for appropriate subgroupings
- An explanation of the district's program for exceptional children
- Data on the age and condition of textbooks, technology and school equipment
- The district's technology plan
- A list of extra- and cocurricular activities in the district

Administration and Staff

- An explanation of personnel recruitment and hiring procedures
- A copy of staff salary schedules and fringe benefit programs
- A copy of the district's collective bargaining agreements
- An explanation of the district's evaluation criteria and procedures for administrators and teachers
- An explanation of the district's professional development program

Questions New Board Members Might Ask

- Who prepares the agendas for board meetings and how do I get an item included?
- What do I do if I need additional information?
- What are the guidelines of the Open Meetings Act?
- How does the board respond to controversial situations?
- When is it appropriate to raise concerns about staff?
- How do I deal with questions from the media?
- How do I respond to community members when I'm on the losing side of a close and carefully watched vote?
- What relationship should board members have with central office, principals and teachers?

School Board Member Tips

1. **Go slow in the beginning, especially if you have come to the board to “reform” it.** The chances are you will feel differently about a lot of things after six months on the board.
2. **Remember that the only authority you have lies in the corporate action of the school board.** You have no legal authority to act alone unless the board as a whole specifically delegates a task to you.
3. **Don’t let your differences of opinion degenerate into personality conflicts.** Nothing is more devastating to good board procedures than to have one member vote for a measure simply because another member votes against it.
4. **Don’t talk too much.** You may acquire a reputation for wisdom simply by not saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment. One thing is certain: you aren’t learning when you are talking; you are only hearing your own ideas.
5. **If possible, keep out of teacher/personnel problems.** The board has hired a superintendent and staff to take that responsibility.
6. **Give the superintendent and staff your public support.** Except in unusual and mitigating circumstances, the superintendent has a right to expect this. Use individual conferences with the superintendent and the official forum of legal board meetings to iron out differences of opinions.
7. **Make an effort to be informed.** School business is always important business – and big business – with budgets into the hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars. To be informed requires time and effort. Ask for briefings from staff as you feel the need. Visit each school over which the board has authority.
8. **Welcome people who come to see you about school problems.** Listen carefully, then refer them to the appropriate person according to board policy. If the problem is controversial, remember that you may be hearing only one side of the story. Don’t commit yourself to a course of action that you may regret later. The board as a whole may not support your view, and you could find yourself in an embarrassing position of having committed yourself to a stand that the board rejects.
9. **When a special interest group approaches, insist on your right to hear and review all of the facts before you act.** A vocal minority can force a school board to act before all of the facts are known and evaluated. If you are being pressed, tell them that you need more time to make a fair decision.
10. **Accept your job on the board as one of responsible leadership in the community.** You will be expected to attend and participate intelligently in many public meetings on school affairs. This is more than an opportunity; it’s an obligation to interpret school affairs to an interested public. You may clear away doubts, misconceptions and misunderstandings. You can do more than merely inform the public; you can help form public opinion and create active, intelligent support for education in your communities.

The Hardest Lessons

Experienced board members from across the nation were asked to identify the most difficult lesson or fact they had to learn about board service. Here's what they said most often.

- Learning to acknowledge publicly that you have no power and authority as an individual board member; that only the board as a whole can make policies and decisions for the school district.
- Determining what your function is on the board and how to accomplish it effectively.
- That no matter what you think you know about board service when you first come on board, you still have a lot to learn.
- Recognizing the difference between setting policy (the board's job) and administering the schools (the superintendent's job).
- That you must represent all of the students. Your decisions must be made in the interest of the total school system and not made solely for special groups or interests.
- Learning how to respond to the complaints and concerns of citizens, school administrators and other staff.
- That change comes slowly.
- That you can't solve everyone's problems by yourself.
- That you must think deeply and sometimes accept a reality that is contrary to your own beliefs.
- That effective board service means being able to hold the minority viewpoint when voting on a given issue; then openly supporting the majority vote of the board in your community.
- Discovering how the schools are funded.
- That the primary focus of all board decisions must be student achievement.



*The primary focus of
all board decisions
must be student
achievement.*

Sixteen Tenets of the Effective Board/Superintendent Leadership Team

Board Members Should:	Superintendents Should:
1. Recognize their function as being legislative and judicial, and respect the executive function of the superintendent.	1. Recognize his/her function as being executive and respect the legislative and judicial functions of the board.
2. Attend all board meetings and assure that the board doesn't meet in the absence of the superintendent except when his/her terms of employment are under discussion.	2. Attend all board meetings except when his/her terms of employment are under discussion.
3. Recognize that authority to act rests with the entire board or a legally constituted quorum of the board and that business may be transacted only in official meetings. Refrain from making commitments to individuals or groups as an individual board member.	3. Interpret official actions of the board to school employees and community groups in a faithful, accurate and objective manner, and not make any commitments to individuals or organizations outside the context of adopted school policy.
4. Support the superintendent as the executor of board policies.	4. Faithfully and objectively administer the policies of the district.
5. Listen courteously to parents with questions and complaints, referring them to an appropriate member of the school staff in accordance with policies of the school.	5. Establish a program of school-community relations leading to open, two-way communications between the district and all parties.
6. Refer personal requests and criticism by school staff directly to the appropriate administrative officer in accordance with board policies.	6. Provide written grievance procedures for school staff and assure an effective means of communication among staff, board and superintendent.
7. Keep the superintendent and fellow members of the board advised of community reaction to school policies.	7. Keep the board continuously, adequately and objectively informed concerning the school program, curriculum and problems, both current and anticipated.
8. Submit items to be placed on the board meeting agenda in ample time so the superintendent may assemble information bearing upon the subject and according to locally adopted policy.	8. Accept items to be placed on the board meeting agenda from members of the board and others, and gather pertinent information relative to the items on the agenda.

Board Members Should:	Superintendents Should:
9. Encourage and support the superintendent to consult with staff and community to seek opinions and recommendations for board consideration.	9. Formulate, when appropriate, with members of the school staff, board and community recommendations to make to the board.
10. Require that meetings of the board be conducted on the basis of a planned agenda prepared by the superintendent in accordance with board policies and be made available to board members prior to the board meetings.	10. Prepare for all board meetings, in cooperation with appropriate board officers, an agenda and supporting materials to be distributed to board members in ample time prior to board meetings.
11. Develop a clear set of policies regarding such items as size of school, class size, assigned responsibilities, budget preparation, staffing, suspension or dismissal.	11. Carry out board policies and be held accountable for them. Assist the board in maintaining focus on policy matters, and recommend and evaluate policy at all times.
12. Require that the administrative rules and regulations be in harmony with school policy.	12. Present to the board for its advice, counsel and approval administrative rules and regulations implementing the policies of the board.
13. Delegate full executive responsibility to the superintendent to make recommendations that establish and operate a total school program of acceptable standards.	13. Accept full executive responsibility for establishing and operating a total school program of acceptable standards.
14. Assume responsibility for adopting fiscal policies that will allow the superintendent to operate a total school program of acceptable standards.	14. Assume responsibility for presenting to the board responsible and detailed fiscal plans to assure the smooth operation of the school program.
15. Adopt policies that will allow the superintendent, staff and board to keep abreast of contemporary developments in education through conference attendance, in-service workshops and consultant services.	15. Advise the board of programs designed to keep the superintendent and staff abreast of contemporary developments in education through conference attendance, in-service workshops and consultant services.
16. Act on the selection, promotion, demotion or dismissal of school personnel only after submission of a specific recommendation by the superintendent.	16. Present to the board recommendations for selection, promotion, demotion or dismissal of school personnel.

Debate or Deliberation

Does your board engage in true dialogue when deliberating issues? Or is it more of a debate?

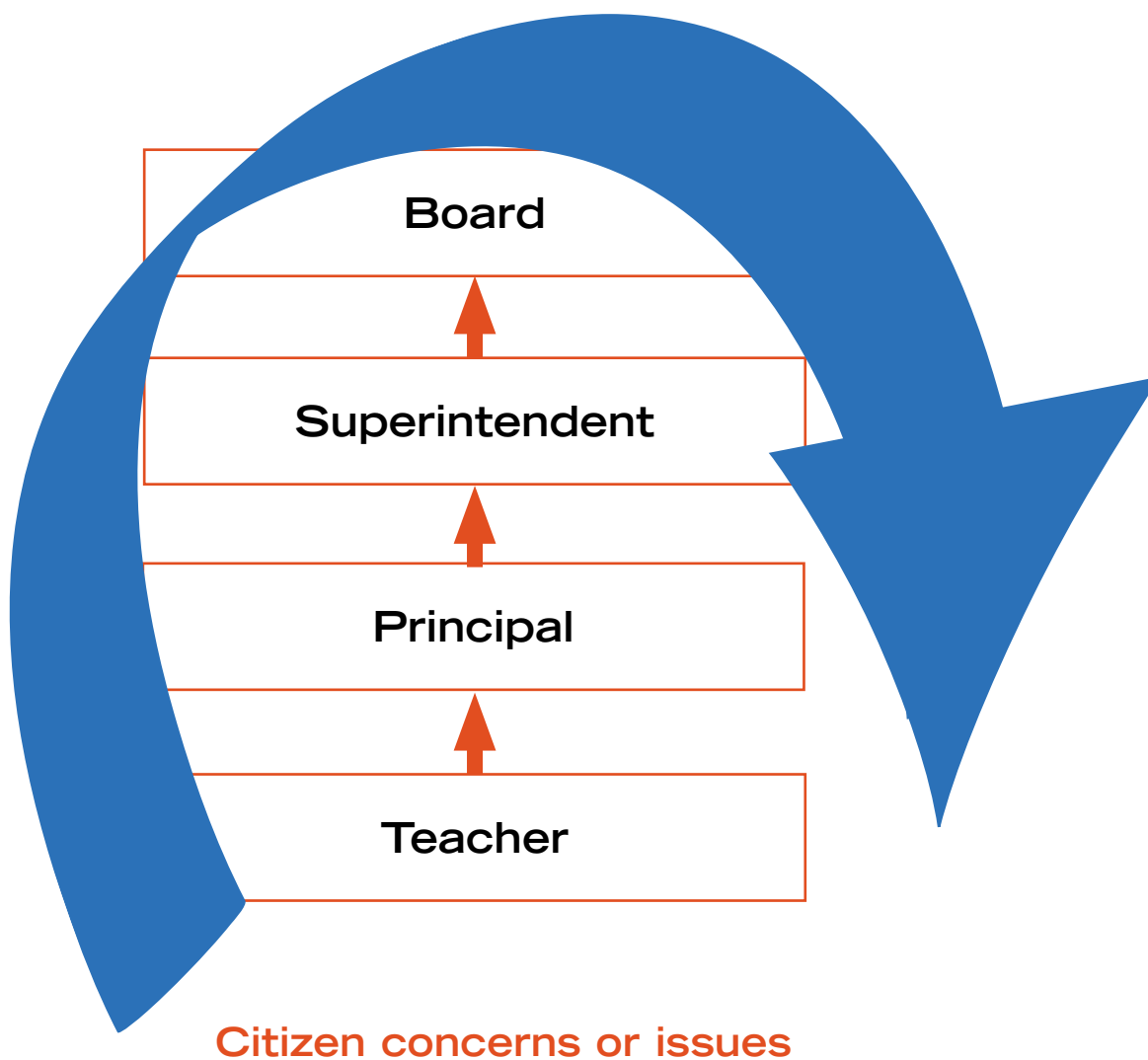
DEBATE	DELIBERATION
Assuming that there is a right answer and you have it	Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they craft a new solution
Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong	Collaborative: participants work together toward a common understanding
About winning	About exploring common ground
Listening to find flaws and make counterarguments	Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement
Defending assumptions as truth	Revealing assumptions for re-evaluation
Critiquing other side's position	Re-examining all positions
Defending one's own views against those of others	Admitting that others' thinking can improve on one's own
Searching for flaws and weaknesses in other positions	Searching for strengths and value in other positions
Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	Discovering new options, not seeking closure

Synthesized and adapted from the work of *The Public Conversations Project*, *National Study Circles Resources*, the *Common Enterprise*, and by Mark Gerzon, *Mediators Foundation*, Boulder, CO 80301

What is the Chain of Command?

The chain of command is to be used by board members and administrators to direct parents who call about concerns they have within the district. The best way to respond to parental complaints is to be a good listener, ask questions for better understanding and then redirect and guide the parent to the original source where the problem occurred. For example, if something happened in the classroom, then they should be referred back to the teacher for resolution. It's only when the issue can't be resolved at that level that the concern should move up the chain of command. The board of education should be the very last recourse for complaints. It's reasonable to assume that most complaints that follow this chain of command can be resolved by school personnel before it ever reaches the board level.

Board Member Referral



Michigan Association of School Boards

The Michigan Association of School Boards exists to provide quality educational leadership services for all Michigan boards of education and to advocate for student achievement and public education.

MASB is charged with promoting public understanding about the role of school boards and the need for citizen involvement in maintaining and improving our schools. MASB is a leading advocate for public education. Virtually every public school board in Michigan belongs to MASB—solid proof that MASB delivers what school boards need.

As a member of MASB you have access to a wealth of resources, training and services. Through classes offered year-round and statewide, MASB helps new and veteran trustees build their knowledge, sharpen their skills and enhance their leadership skills. Take advantage of conferences, Board Member Certification Classes (CBA) classes, workshops and the mentor program to increase your knowledge of your role and responsibilities.

Programs and Services Available From MASB:

- Advocacy
- Board President Workshops
- Board-Self Assessment
- Communications
- Communications and Team-Building Workshops
- Custom Workshops
- Data-Driven Strategic Planning—Goal setting
- Erin
- Executive Search
- Legal Counsel
- Labor Relations
- Online Store
- Policy Services (NEOLA)
- Superintendent Evaluation Training
- Surveys
- Video Services

How Local Schools are Funded in Michigan

Prior to 1994, public schools in Michigan were largely funded through a local property tax millage. Both the operations and infrastructure of a school district were funded when districts went to local voters and asked them for an increase or renewal of a millage. Proposal A, approved by the voters of Michigan, went into effect for the 1994-1995 school year and drastically changed the way schools are funded. While many voters still believe Proposal A was largely property tax relief, for schools it was a new funding mechanism that distributes state funds on a per pupil basis to each district—also commonly called the school’s foundation allowance.

Under Proposal A, schools still must raise local millage for building projects, but that’s one of the few local options available for schools to raise money. Public schools are now largely funded through a statewide 6-mil tax called the State Education Tax, an 18-mil local tax on nonhomestead property, and a combination of other taxes comprised of mostly the state income tax and the sales tax.

The 6-mils are collected directly by the state, while the 18-mil tax is kept locally, but must be levied or districts face a reduction in their foundation allowance. The rough breakdown for school revenues on a statewide basis is 45 percent from sales tax, 20 percent from income tax, 20 percent from SET and an additional 15 percent made up of other revenue sources including the lottery. These numbers fluctuate each year based on overall tax collections at the state level.

The foundation allowance for each school comprises approximately 90 percent of school district’s general fund revenue. The remainder is from other state and federal programs and some local revenue related to interest earned, tuition and fund transfers. The money from state and federal programs is often called categoricals, meaning they are designated for a certain category of expenditure, such as at-risk students or for districts with declining enrollment.

As mentioned above, schools are funded based on their individual pupil populations. There’s a specific formula that is a pupil enrollment blend of 10 percent of the previous year’s February student count and 90 percent of the current year’s October count. This blend has changed over the years from 50/50 to its current split.

One last provision that should be mentioned is the Headlee Amendment to the Constitution. This is not a specific school issue, but can have an impact on school funding. What Headlee does is limit the increase in the amount of money a unit of government (school district) can raise annually to whatever the rate of inflation is for that year. What this means is when a district is levying the 18-mils on nonhomestead property, and property values go up faster than the rate of inflation, there will actually be a millage reduction so that your revenue doesn’t grow at the higher rate. This actually causes a reduction in a district’s foundation allowance because the state expects you to levy the full 18-mils. This situation forces districts to go to their voters after a millage rollback to ensure the millage remains at 18-mils. This may seem problematic, but it’s a millage that regularly passes and is usually not a problem for districts.

TITLE I, PART A

School Improvement, Corrective Action and Restructuring Requirements

School Improvement Status

A Title I school is in school improvement status if it fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years.

School district requirements—buildings in the first year of school improvement status

- Must notify parents of school’s identification and improvement plan.
- Must use peer review process to assist with review of school improvement plan.
- Must spend at least 10 percent of the building’s Title I allocation each year on professional development to address lack of AYP.
- Must provide students in the identified school the option to transfer to another school in the district that has not been identified for improvement, and must provide or pay for transportation. (If space is limited, priority must be given to lowest-achieving students from low-income families).
- Funds for transportation: unless a lesser amount is needed, the district must spend 15 percent of its Title I allocation for transportation to support the transfer option.

School District Requirements

Buildings in the second year of school improvement status that haven’t made AYP for three consecutive years.

- Must continue to provide the transfer option (on a priority basis).
- Must offer supplemental educational services (priority given to lowest-achieving students—only low-income students eligible) with state-approved providers.
- Funds for transportation and supplemental services: unless a lesser amount is needed, district must spend 20 percent of its Title I allocation as follows:
 - Five percent for transportation to support transfer option
 - Five percent for supplemental services
 - Remaining 10 percent for transportation, supplemental services or both

Corrective Action Status

A Title I school is in corrective action status if it fails to make AYP for four consecutive years.

School District Requirements

- Must continue to provide transfer option and supplemental services.
- Must take at least one of following actions:
 1. Replace school staff relevant to failure to make AYP.
 2. Implement new curriculum and provide appropriate professional development.
 3. Significantly decrease management authority at school level.
 4. Appoint outside expert to advise school on school improvement plan.
 5. Extend school year or school day for school.
 6. Restructure internal organization of school.
- Must publish information on corrective action taken to public and parents of enrolled students.

Restructuring Status

*A Title I school is in restructuring status if it fails to make AYP for **five consecutive years**.*

School District Requirements

- Must continue to provide transfer option and supplemental services.
- Must take at least one of following actions:
 1. Reopen school as a charter school.
 2. Replace all or most of school staff relevant to failure to make AYP.
 3. Contract with outside entity to operate school.
 4. Turn operation of school over to state (if state agrees).
 5. Any other major restructuring of school's governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms.

School District Option to Delay Implementation of Requirements

If a school makes AYP for one year, the district may delay the transfer option, supplemental services, corrective action or restructuring for one year.

Overview of the Open Meetings Act

Prepared by Brad Banasik, MASB Legal Counsel

Open Meetings

All meetings of a public body (i.e., school board) must be open to the public.

1. A “meeting” is defined as the convening of a public body at which a quorum is present for the purpose of deliberating toward or rendering a decision on a public policy.
2. The Act does not apply to a social or chance gathering or conference where a quorum is present as long as board members in attendance do not collectively discuss matters of public policy.
3. An advisory committee composed of less than a quorum of the full board can also be a “public body” subject to the Act’s requirements.

All decisions of a public body must be made at a meeting open to the public.

All deliberations of a public body constituting a quorum of its members must take place at a meeting open to the public unless a closed meeting exception applies.



Closed Meetings

Closed meeting exceptions to the open deliberations requirement:

- Considering the dismissal, suspension or disciplining of an employee or student if a closed meeting is requested by the employee or student;
- Hearing complaints or charges brought against an employee or school board member per his or her request for a closed meeting;
- Considering a periodic personnel evaluation of an employee if he or she requests a closed session;
- Conducting strategy and negotiation sessions connected with a collective bargaining agreement;
- Considering the purchase or lease of property;
- Consulting with legal counsel regarding pending litigation;
- Reviewing applications for employment or appointment when the applicant requests confidentiality; and
- Considering material exempt from discussion or disclosure by law.

A public body can't hold a meeting without first giving public notice of the meeting at its principal office.

Minutes must be kept of all meetings, whether open or closed, and regardless of whether the meeting is identified as a regular or special meeting, study session, committee of the whole or by some other name.

Members of the public have the right to attend all open meetings and to address the board during the meeting according to rules adopted by the board.

The Board's Agenda

The Value of an Agenda

A well-planned agenda helps board members prepare for effective discussions and decisions. It assures that the concerns of board members, staff and community will be given appropriate consideration. It helps make it possible to conduct the meeting in an orderly, efficient and fair manner with a minimum of confusion, misunderstanding, dissension (even disaster) that could result from inadequate preparation. It's an avenue for communicating to the board, staff and community important matters to be discussed and actions to be taken. It's an important record—for preparing the minutes, planning future meetings and even for legal purposes.

The Agenda—Foundation of an Effective Meeting

- The steering mechanism for any meeting.
- Forces logical organization and preparation for the meeting.
- Serves the meeting leader as a guidance and disciplinary tool.
- Tells those who will participate how to prepare.
- For board members, the agenda identifies items and issues to be discussed and for which advance study may be advisable.
- For the public, it calls attention to matters in which an individual may be especially interested.
- For the staff, it indicates what supporting materials may be needed to assure that the board will have the information necessary to reach the right decision.
- For the board president, the agenda provides the guidelines necessary for conducting the meeting in an efficient, well-organized manner.
- For legal purposes, the agenda is kept on file and can be cited as the record of what transpired, also serving as the basis for preparation of the minutes.
- For the superintendent, as the chief administrative officer and advisor to the board, the agenda provides the means for assuring that items and matters to be reported and acted upon will be brought to the board's attention.

Steps in Preparing an Agenda

Typically, the superintendent and board president jointly prepare the agenda, with the superintendent responsible for gathering items and preparing the public notices while the board president is responsible for advice. Once the agenda is designed, the president is responsible for ensuring that the agenda is followed.

Prioritize Items on the Agenda

To be considerate of people who may be unable to stay until the end of the board meeting, schedule special recognitions of students and staff and presentations by speakers and presenters early in the meeting so that they may leave after their involvement in the meeting. Also schedule significant matters and items requiring concentration, analysis and deliberation by board members and staff early on. Items that are routine or have relatively little importance to the audience may be scheduled toward the end of the meeting.

Focus the Agenda on District Goals and the Big Picture

Your challenge as a board is to avoid drowning in the sea of details that surrounds you and, instead, focus your agenda on achieving district goals and looking at “big picture” trends that affect the educa-

tional well-being of the children in your district. If your meeting agenda doesn't link to district goals, you may find your board meeting time consumed by relatively insignificant items.

Limit the Number of Agenda Items

The number of items on the agenda may adversely affect the length of the meeting. The fuller your agenda, the better your meeting must be organized. The board president and the superintendent should estimate the time needed for each presentation or discussion item when planning the meeting agenda to ensure a reasonable meeting length with enough time allocated to discuss each item.

More on Preparing the Agenda

- Determine the ultimate goal(s) of the meeting and the steps to get there.
- Break down the generalized topics in the agenda into specific discussion items to promote logical meeting thought and better control of this flow.
- Organize multiple topic meetings so that related subjects are discussed in order.
- Delineate between action and information items.
- Hold separate meetings for very important topics.
- Select the people who attend, besides the board.
- Consider the possible barriers and ways to get around or through them.
- Mark each item on the agenda with policy references.
- Have the staff prepare specific, predrafted motions and resolutions where possible.

Getting on the Agenda

Every school board should have a policy that sets out procedures and conditions for persons who wish to appear before the board of education. In developing its policy the board should consider that only members of the board have a right to speak at board meetings. Board meetings are public meetings but not meetings of the public.

A prerequisite to getting on the agenda should be that a person exhausts administrative remedies before bringing the problem to the board. A board shouldn't allow a person to use a board meeting as a forum to complain about a problem until administrators have had a chance to solve the problem.

Boards should also consider the following questions during the development of a policy regarding placement on the agenda.

- May any board member submit an item for inclusion? If so, how? Are there timelines?
- May any member of the public submit an item for inclusion? If so, how? Are there timelines?
- Who are the key people involved in structuring the agenda?
- Who is responsible for collecting all of the information, suggestions and requests and actually preparing the agenda?
- Are annual agenda items reviewed to ensure annual events aren't overlooked?

Timed Agenda

A common fault is to dwell too long on trivial but urgent items, to the exclusion of subjects of fundamental importance whose significance is long-term rather than immediate. This can be remedied by putting on the agenda the time at which discussion of the issue will begin—and sticking to it.

Consent Agenda

To expedite business at a school board meeting, the board may choose to use a consent agenda. A consent agenda is an item listed on the regular agenda that groups routine items under one agenda heading. This allows your board to take a unified motion and action on all items listed under the consent agenda instead of taking separate votes on each item.

It's understood that all items listed under the consent agenda have the recommendation of your superintendent and are routine in nature. Routine items are those that occur throughout the year and are thought to be readily acceptable to all members.

If a consent agenda is used, the board president should ask if any member of your board would like to discuss or remove any item from the consent agenda to discuss and vote separately on that item.

All items on the consent agenda are approved by a single motion stated as follows: "I move to approve the items listed on the consent agenda." If the motion receives a second, the president takes the vote on the single motion.

Routine Items Listed on the Consent Agenda

- Approval of personnel changes.
- Review of monthly bills or financial report.
- Resolution to recognize Educational Secretaries Week.
- Approval of minutes.

Some boards prefer to schedule the consent agenda early on the agenda and include approval of the minutes; others prefer to schedule it later on the agenda. This is your board's decision. Remember the purpose of a consent agenda is to save time.

Summary

1. Limit the number of items on each agenda.
2. Surprises must never be permitted. A responsibility of the board president and the superintendent is to ensure that action items are placed on an agenda only after the board has sufficient information for deliberate, rational action.
3. Action items and information items require different forms of preparation and board action. Consequently, each should be distinctly marked on the agenda.
4. Item identification on an agenda should include sufficient explanation for visitors as well as board members to be able to identify the item under consideration.
5. The agenda should provide for hearing visitors.
6. Future agenda items may be requested by board members. An item at the close of each agenda can provide an opportunity to make such requests. Policies should specify other options for getting items on agendas.
7. Keep supplemental agenda items to a minimum. If the item can just as well be dealt with in a subsequent meeting, it belongs on a future agenda.
8. Consider the order in which agenda items appear:
 - Visitors early.
 - Significant matters requiring concentration, analysis and deliberation by board members and others early.
 - Controversial items arranged between noncontroversial.
 - Routine staff reports in the latter portion of the meeting.
 - Routine business last.

List of Education Acronyms

AASA — American Association of School Administrators	LD — Learning Disabled
ACT — American College Test	LEA — Local Education Agency
AFT — American Federation of Teachers	LEP — Limited English Proficiency
ADA — American With Disabilities Act	MACUL — Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning
ADD — Attention Deficit Disorder	MAISA — Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (There are 56 ISDs in Michigan)
ADHD — Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	MASA — Michigan Association of School Administrators
AP — Advanced Placement	MASB — Michigan Association of School Boards
CASBA — County Area School Board Association	MASSP — Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals
CEPI — Center for Educational Performance and Information	MCSA — Michigan Council of School Attorneys
CTE — Career and Technical Education	MDE — Michigan Department of Education
CUBE — Council of Urban Boards of Education	MEA — Michigan Education Association
DCH — Department of Community Health	MEAP — Michigan Educational Assessment Program
DK — Developmental Kindergarten	MEMPSA — Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals
EEOC — Equal Opportunity Employment Commission	MERC — Michigan Employment Relations Commission
ESA — Educational Service Agency	MESSA — Michigan Education Special Services Association (the insurance “arm” of the MEA)
ESEA — Elementary and Secondary Education Act	MHSAA — Michigan High School Athletic Association
ESSA — Every Student Succeeds Act	MIEM — Michigan Institute of Educational Management
FAPE — Free Appropriate Public Education	MILAF — Michigan School Districts Liquid Asset Fund
FERPA — Family Rights and Privacy Act	MLPP — Michigan Literacy Progress Profile
FLSA — Fair Labor Standards Act	MMBA — Michigan Municipal Bond Authority
FMLA — Family Medical Leave Act	MSBO — Michigan School Business Officials
FOIA — Freedom of Information Act	MVU — Michigan Virtual University
FTE — Full-Time Equivalent or Full-Time Equated	Mainstream — Disabled students are included with nondisabled students in the regular classroom
FY — Fiscal Year	NAEP — National Assessment of Educational Progress
GED — General Education Diploma	NCLB — No Child Left Behind
GLCE — Grade Level Content Expectation	NEA — National Education Association
HIPPA — Health and Individual Personal Privacy Act	NFHS — National Federation of High School Associations
HSCE — High School Content Expectation	NSBA — National School Boards Association
IB — International Baccalaureate	OCR — Office of Civil Rights
IDEA — Individuals With Disabilities Education Act	OMA — Open Meetings Act
IEP — Individualized Education Plan	
IEPT — Individualized Education Plan Team	
ISD — Intermediate School District (some are known as RESD, RESA or ESA)	

PA 191 of 2000 — State School Aid Act (funding for schools)	SAT — Scholastic Aptitude Test
PERA — Public Employment Relations Act	SBE — State Board of Education
PPRA — Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment	SMI — Severely Mentally Impaired
PSAT — Preliminary SAT	SRO — State Review Officer
PTA — Parent Teacher Association	SPMP — Skilled Professional Medical Personnel
PTO — Parent Teacher Organization	STEAM — Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
RESA — Regional Educational Service Agency	
RESD — Regional Educational Service District	UFLP — Unfair Labor Practice
RFP — Request for Proposal	

Glossary

Adapted from Schoolwisepress.com

accountability

The notion that people (e.g., students or teachers) or an organization (e.g., a school, school district or state department of education) should be held responsible for improving student achievement and should be rewarded or sanctioned for their success or lack of success in doing so. (Ed Source)

achievement test

A test to measure a student's knowledge and skills. (Ed Source)

ACT

A set of college admissions tests. Most colleges now accept either the SAT or the ACT for admission purposes. (Ed Source)

Adequate Yearly Progress

An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Adequate yearly progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to federal legislation. This progress is determined by a collection of performance measures that a state, its school districts and subpopulations of students within its schools are supposed to meet if the state receives Title I federal funding. (Ed Source)

Advanced Placement

A series of voluntary exams based on college-level courses taken in high school. High school students who do well on one or more of these exams have the opportunity to earn credit, advanced placement or both for college. (Ed

Source)

alignment

The degree to which assessments, curriculum, instruction, textbooks and other instructional materials, teacher preparation and professional development, and systems of accountability all reflect and reinforce the educational program's objectives and standards. (Ed Source)

alternative assessments

Ways other than standardized tests to get information about what students know and where they need help, such as oral reports, projects, performances, experiments and class participation. (Ed Source)

at-risk student

Students may be labeled at risk if they are not succeeding in school based on information gathered from test scores, attendance or discipline problems.

benchmarks

A detailed description of a specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades or developmental levels; academic goals set for each grade level. (Ed Source)

bilingual education

An in-school program for students whose first language is not English or who have limited English skills. Bilingual education provides English language development plus subject area instruction in the student's native language. The goal is for the child to gain knowledge and be literate in two languages. (Ed Source)

block scheduling

Instead of traditional 40- to 50-minute periods, block scheduling allows for periods of an hour or more so that teachers can accomplish more during a class session. It also allows for teamwork across subject areas in some schools. For example, a math and science teacher may teach a physics lesson that includes both math and physics concepts.

bond measure

A method of borrowing used by school districts to pay for construction or renovation projects. A bond measure requires a 55 percent majority to pass. The principal and interest are repaid by local property owners through an increase in property taxes.

categorical aid

Funds from the state or federal government granted to qualifying schools or districts for specific children with special needs, certain programs such as class size reduction or special purposes such as transportation. In general, schools or districts must spend the money for the specific purpose. All districts receive categorical aid in varying amounts. This aid is in addition to the funding schools received for their general education program. (Ed Source)

certificated/credentialed employees

School employees who are required by the state to hold teaching credentials, including full-time, part-time, substitute or temporary teachers and most administrators.

certificate/credential

A state-issued license certifying that the teacher has completed the necessary basic training courses and passed the teacher exam.

charter schools

Publicly funded schools that are exempt from many state laws and regulations for school districts. They are run by groups of teachers, parents and/or foundations. (Ed-data and SARC glossary)

classified employees

School employees who are not required to hold teaching credentials, such as bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, instructional aides and some management personnel. (Ed-data, Ed Source)

content standards

Standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at each grade level. (Ed Source)

cooperative learning

A teaching method in which students of differing abilities work together on an assignment. Each student has a specific responsibility within the group. Students complete assignments together and receive a common grade.

differentiated instruction

This is also referred to as “individualized” or “customized” instruction. The curriculum offers several different learning experiences within one lesson to meet students’ varied needs or learning styles. For example, different teaching methods for students with learning disabilities.

disaggregated data

The presentation of data broken into segments of the student population instead of the entire enrollment. Typical segments include students who are economically disadvantaged, from racial or ethnic minority groups, have disabilities or have limited English fluency. Disaggregated data allows parents and teachers to see how each student group is performing in a school. (Ed Source)

English as a Second Language

Classes or support programs for students whose native language is not English.

enrichment

Additional courses outside those required for graduation.

free/reduced-price meals

A federal program that provides food for students from low-income families. (Ed-data)

general fund

Accounting term used by the state and school districts to differentiate general revenues and expenditures from funds for specific uses, such as a Cafeteria Fund. (Ed-data)

Gifted and Talented Education

A program that offers supplemental, differentiated, challenging curriculum and instruction for students identified as being intellectually gifted or talented. (Ed Source)

highly qualified teacher

According to federal legislation, a teacher who has obtained full state teacher certification or has passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state; holds a minimum of a bachelor’s degree; and has demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches. (Ed Source)

immersion education

A program that teaches children to speak, read and write in a second language by surrounding them with conversation and instruction in that language. Note that English immersion may differ from other immersion programs.

inclusion

The practice of placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Also known as **mainstreaming**. (Ed Source)

independent study

Specially designed instruction in courses taught through a variety of delivery methods that complement traditional high school curricula and provide an accredited diploma.

Individual Education Program

A written plan created for a student with learning disabilities by the student's teachers, parents or guardians, the school administrator and other interested parties. The plan is tailored to the student's specific needs and abilities, and outlines goals for the student to reach. The IEP should be reviewed at least once a year.

instructional minutes

Refers to the amount of time the state requires teachers to spend providing instruction in each subject area.

integrated curriculum

Refers to the practice of using a single theme to teach a variety of subjects. It also refers to a interdisciplinary curriculum, which combines several school subjects into one project.

International Baccalaureate

A rigorous college preparation course of study that leads to examinations for highly motivated high school students. Students can earn college credit from many universities if their exam scores are high enough. (Ed Source)

job shadowing

A program that takes students into the workplace to learn about careers through one-day orientations or more extensive internships to see how the skills learned in school relate to the workplace.

least restrictive environment

Federal laws require that disabled students be educated to the maximum extent possible with nondisabled students.

magnet school

A school that focuses on a particular discipline, such as science, mathematics, arts or computer science. It is designed to recruit students from other parts of the school district.

mainstreaming

The practice of placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms; also known as **inclusion**. (Ed Source)

Peer Assistance and Review Program

A program that encourages designated consulting teachers to assist other teachers who need help in developing their subject matter knowledge, teaching strategies or both. They also help teachers to meet the standards for proficient teaching.

percentile ranks

One way to compare a given child, class, school or district to a national norm. (Ed Source)

portfolio

A collection of various samples of a student's work throughout the school year that can include writing samples, examples of math problems and results of science experiments. (Ed Source)

professional development

Programs that allow teachers or administrators to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to perform their jobs successfully. (Ed Source)

proficiency

Mastery or ability to do something at grade level. The state goal is for all students to score at "proficient" or "advanced." (Ed Source)

pull-out programs

Students receive instruction in small groups outside of the classroom.

pupil-teacher ratio

The total student enrollment divided by the number of full-time equivalent teachers. The pupil-teacher ratio is the most common statistic for comparing data across states; it is usually smaller than average class size because some teachers work outside the classroom. (Ed-data)

resource specialists

Specially credentialed teachers who work with special education students by assisting them in regular classes or pulling them out of class for extra help.

resource teacher

A teacher who instructs children with various learning differences. Most often these teachers use small group and individual instruction. Children are assigned to resource teachers after undergoing testing and receiving an IEP.

rubric

Refers to a grading or scoring system. A rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria to be met in a piece of work. A rubric also describes levels of quality for each of the criteria. These levels of performance may be written as different ratings (e.g., Excellent, Good, Needs Improvement) or as numerical scores (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1).

Standardized Achievement Test

Also known as the SAT Reasoning Test (formerly called Scholastic Aptitude Test), this test is widely used as a college entrance examination. Scores can be compared to state and national averages of seniors graduating from any public or private school. (Ed-data)

Section 504

A section of the IDEA that a student may qualify under if they don't qualify for special education services.

Sixth (6th) Circuit Court

Michigan is under the jurisdiction of this Federal Court.

staff development days

Days set aside in the school calendar for teacher training. School is not generally held on these days.

standardized test

A test that is in the same format for all who take it. It often relies on multiple-choice questions and the testing conditions—including instructions, time limits and scoring rubrics—are the same for all students, though sometimes accommodations on time limits and instructions are made for disabled students. (Ed Source)

team teaching

A teaching method in which two or more teachers teach the same subjects or theme. The teachers may alternate teaching the entire group or divide the group into sections or classes that rotate between the teachers.

tenure

A system of due process and employment guarantee for teachers. After serving a two-year probationary period, teachers are assured continued employment in the school district unless carefully defined procedures for dismissal or layoff are successfully followed. (Ed Source)

thematic units

A unit of study that has lessons focused on a specific theme, sometimes covering all core subject areas. It is often used as an alternative approach to teaching history or social studies chronologically.

Title 1

A federal program that provides funds to improve the academic achievement for educationally disadvantaged students who score below the 50th percentile on standardized tests, including the children of migrant workers. (Ed Source)

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

This provision provides that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal assistance. . .”

tracking

A common instructional practice of organizing students in groups based on their academic skills. Tracking allows a teacher to provide the same level of instruction to the entire group.

Source: edsources.org/publications/education-glossary.



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