

BULLETIN BOARD

Preparing for Bargaining Season

If your district has collective bargaining agreements set to expire in the coming year, there are a number of things that you, as board president, should be prepared for as bargaining approaches.

Roles and Responsibilities

First and foremost, boards and their administrative team should have a clear understanding about the roles and responsibilities each person has during the negotiation process. Each district's team is different, bringing with it unique sets of skills and experiences, history and interpersonal dynamics. All of those features will shape the roles and responsibilities of board members and administrators during bargaining. The key to success is for the board and administrative team to have a common, clear understanding at the start of the process about what this looks like.

Financial Parameters: The second critical conversation that the board and administrative team must have is financial. Ultimately, the board must approve any agreement reached with employee unions. A common understanding of current district finances and projections is critical for the board to determine the financial parameters it should set for the district bargaining team.

Everyone should know:

- Current and projected fund balance
- Current and projected enrollment
- Upcoming capital expenses, especially building and transportation costs
- Current and future bonds or sinking fund plans
- How teacher compensation compares with other districts and trends over time
- Any major contractual sticking points, such as class size, paid leave, etc.

Communications: For both strategic and legal reasons, board members must be careful about how they speak about labor negotiations with employees and with the public. To avoid violations of state labor law, districts must only negotiate with the union bargaining team and present proposals to that team before sharing information about proposals with employees generally.

It makes the most sense for the board and administrative team to designate a single person as the spokesperson for the district on negotiation matters. That could be an administrator or board member, but it should be one person and everyone else should refer questions to that designated person.



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Training: As bargaining season approaches, know that the MASB Labor Relations Department offers the support your district needs to prepare for negotiations, tailored to fit your unique situation. Many districts have invited us to do a one- or two-hour training session with the full board, especially when many board members are new to their posts. And remember, we are always available for questions at 517.327.5914.