

Board/Administration Operating Principles

Introduction

Operating principles define the beliefs, values and methods of working together. Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. In order to promote such leadership, the Board must agree on basic ways of working together. In addition, the manner in which the Board and administration conduct their business becomes a model throughout the district for students, teachers, parents and staff on how problems are resolved. The topics that follow outline the manner in which the Board agrees to conduct our business and maintain a positive relationship.

Communication

Superintendent to Board: The superintendent will inform the Board of pertinent activities of the district. The bottom line is no surprises; if it's likely to be in the newspaper, the Board should know about it. The superintendent will use e-mail to communicate routine matters to the Board. The Board can expect such communication at least weekly. During any crisis situations, the superintendent will attempt to reach Board members via telephone beginning with the Board chair.

Board to Superintendent: Board members are encouraged to inform the superintendent of any communications they receive from district patrons, whether positive or negative in nature. This can provide valuable information to the superintendent.

The superintendent takes directions from the Board as a whole; individual board members should refrain from making requests of the superintendent for information (except for minor explanations, clarifications, etc.,) and from giving direction to the superintendent regarding district business.

In order to build and maintain a culture of trust, fairness, and openness, the superintendent will inform all Board members of any substantial conversations with any other Board members that occur outside of regular school Board settings.

Effective Meetings

1. No surprises
 - a. Board: Board members should share ideas about new programs and new directions with the superintendent and key staff or other members of the Board before presenting them publicly.
 - b. Administration: Bring matters to the Board in timely fashion. Present programs and projects far enough in advance so that Board member suggestions can be addressed without upsetting activities already in progress.

2. Be prepared
 - a. Board: Read all materials and seek clarification and information as needed prior to the Board meeting. When possible, explain major concerns about a proposal to the superintendent in advance.
 - b. Administration: Develop recommendations that combine the best interests of students and the needs of the district with the focus and direction the Board generally desires. Board input during work sessions and during the “Discussion” part of Board meetings can provide such direction.

3. Handling controversy
 - a. Board: Use a variety of strategies in dealing with controversy or sensitive issues. Examples are as follows:
 - (1) The chair may call a short recess if it appears that people need to regroup or regain their composure;
 - (2) A special meeting could be called to deal with a topic that appears likely to need extended airtime;
 - (3) The chair may ask the superintendent to investigate a concern or complaint.
 - b. The Board never takes final action on a complaint during the meeting at which it is presented. While we need to respond in timely fashion, we need to allow time to give the issue the review and study it warrants.
 - c. The Board does not hear specific complaints or requests related to individual members in open session, unless the person that the complaint is about requests it be heard in open session. To protect the rights of individuals such complaints or requests are dealt with in special session.
 - d. Always maintain a courteous demeanor and demonstrate respect for people who address the Board.
 - e. Administration: Resolve complaints at appropriate administrative levels. Prepare and forewarn the Board of any concern likely to come its way.
 - f. Write follow up notes to patrons who address the board. Thank them, assure them that they were heard, and inform them about any follow up action the Board or administration may take.

4. Decision Making
 - a. Key elements of good decision making include the identification and evaluation of alternatives, an awareness of short and long-term consequences, an appreciation of the needs of the group as well as individuals, and a sensitivity toward collective action.
 - b. Board and Administration: In order to formulate and execute sound decisions, we agree to:
 - c. Resolve problems at the lowest level possible.
 - d. Clearly communicate decisions.
 - e. Build a point of reevaluation into each decision.
 - f. Provide input from all concerned.
 - g. Use a decision-making style appropriate to the situation.
 - h. Establish a rationale for each decision.
 - i. Make decisions consistent with our expressed goals.
 - j. Communicate the rationale for making a decision that has been superseded by a higher level of authority to those involved before releasing the information.

Dealing with Citizen or Staff Complaints

1. Board and Administration

The following process is recommended to administrators and board members who are contacted by a community member who has a complaint.

- a. Listen to the individual's concern. Maintain a professional demeanor.
- b. Determine if the individual has discussed the issue with the person immediately responsible. If this has not been done, tell them how to contact the appropriate person.
- c. Explain the district process for resolving concerns and conflicts. Describe the appropriate channels that should be followed if the complaint is not resolved.
- d. Explain that as a final resource a complaint can be appealed to the Board, but that the Board practice is to carefully investigate complaints before taking any action. Explain that complaints raised against individuals cannot be addressed immediately in a public meeting.
- e. Be cautious of giving the appearance of agreeing with the person; sometimes just listening makes people think that you are on "their side." Remember that anything you say might be understood as the position of the Board or the administration.

2. Possible Responses

- a. Board members can take the initiative to suggest to the chair that the superintendent or other administrative staff might best handle the issue. Be clear, however, to let people know that it is not that you're uninterested, but rather that the superintendent is the person you employ to deal with these issues.
- b. Unanticipated controversy that is a non-agenda item should not be allowed to dominate an otherwise well-planned meeting. Stating up front that there is a time limit and that the concern will be investigated and possibly placed on the next agenda is an appropriate response.
- c. When involved parties become emotional, the situation may be diffused by saying something like, "I recognize that this is a very important issue to you. We need a chance to gather more information. Our superintendent will work with you to attempt to resolve this problem. Thank you for coming to the meeting."

3. Development, Administration, and Review of Board Policy

- a. Board: Exercise final approval of all policies. Study administrative reports on the implementation of policies and the effectiveness of policies. Once the Board approves policies, support them even though you may have spoken against them initially.
- b. Administration: Advise and assist the Board in developing policy. Share concerns about ideas that may not work. Once in place, support the policies of the Board whether or not you are in full agreement. Inform the Board of the manner in which policies are being administered, and when and if they need to be revised.
- c. Use work sessions to lay the groundwork for policy development. Share information and explore issues that may benefit from policy development work. Use the "Discussion" part of the agenda to gather input from the Board regarding the general parameters they envision for various policy initiatives.

Issues That Come Before the Board

1. Agenda Development

- a. The Board chair and/or the vice-chair and the superintendent will meet a week prior to the Board meeting to prepare the agenda. Board members may contact the chair if they wish to place an item on the agenda, and the chair will make the decision as to whether to do so. However, a petition to the Board chair from three Board members will cause an item to be placed on the agenda.
- b. The superintendent and Board chair will determine which action items to include in the consent agenda section of the agenda. The consent agenda is acted on in one resolution and contains those items that are routine in nature and that all members will generally agree to approve. Typically, this includes such items as minutes of the previous meeting, personnel actions, and annual appointments. Items will be removed from the consent agenda and acted on separately at the request of any Board member.

2. Information Items

- a. Board: Inform the superintendent of significant concerns raised by district patrons. Make the superintendent aware of issues and programs on which the Board wishes to be particularly well informed.
- b. Administration: Keep the Board informed of all new developments and the progress of activities related to Board goals and major programs. Be sure to inform the Board of any complaint, concern, or issue likely to come before the Board.

3. Action Items

- a. Board: Read agenda materials, understand the issues, and be prepared to discuss them. Realize that discussion and debate inform the public as well as the Board.
- b. Administration: Provide ample time for the Board to read about, study, discuss, and debate issues prior to requesting a vote.