

NOW THAT I'M ELECTED

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?



A brief guide for new school board members

1. Go slow in the beginning

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. The child comes first

Other things, such as employment of teachers and other school personnel, the selection of sites for buildings, building construction, purchasing equipment, setting bus routes, etc., have a way of appearing at times to be the most important things, but they are not. Your first focus should be the needs of the children in your schools. All decisions before the board should be considered in the light of how they affect the children of the district. A school board member represents ALL children in the district. Decisions must be made in the interest of the total school system and not made solely for special interest groups or attendance areas.

3. Remember that the only authority you have lies in the corporate action of the board as a whole

This is the hardest lesson for a new board member to learn and accept. A board member as an individual has no authority in the school district. A board member’s vote, along with the votes of the other board members, has tremendous power, but an individual board member alone, outside of an official meeting, is just an ordinary citizen with no more authority than other citizens, unless designated specifically some authority by a vote of the board.

4. A school board is responsible for seeing that the schools are well run, but does not run them

School boards are usually composed of lay persons and are in a position to view the operation of the district from a good perspective. The board employs the best administrative team available and places the responsibility of the day-to-day operation of the district and its schools on the team.

5. **The board sets the policies**

The board, in order that the schools shall reach the objectives desired by the public they serve, establishes written policies for the conduct of the schools and sees that the superintendent and other members of the staff work within the framework of these policies. The BOARD makes policy, while the ADMINISTRATION carries out policy. Board policies tell “WHAT TO DO”, while the administration determines “HOW TO DO IT.”

6. **The school system should operate as a team**

Each member of the team is important and should be respected. Each employee is entitled to proper consideration, opportunity to be heard, and should be given freedom in the use of initiative as long as it operates to the good of the system. Except in unusual and mitigating circumstances, the superintendent and his/her staff have the right to expect a school board’s public support. To undermine the superintendent and his/her staff is unethical.

7. **The line of authority must always be observed**

The superintendent is responsible to the board. The staff and faculty are responsible to the superintendent. Under the superintendent there will be certain subdivisions of authority. For instance, the principal is responsible to the superintendent, but the teachers and the staff members of the school are responsible to the principal.

8. **Know your schools**

To vote intelligently at know a great deal about about what goes on in a board member has no meeting, it is important and talk with school should make



talk with principals, teachers, and other school district employees.

official meetings, it is important to the current trends in education and your district and its schools. While authority outside of an official board for board members to visit schools personnel. School board members arrangements to visit schools and

A board member should read books and materials dealing with education and attend workshops and conferences offered by state and national education associations.

9. Give consideration to the superintendent's recommendations

One of the major responsibilities of the superintendent is to weigh carefully all matters that are to come before the board and to recommend appropriate actions. Good practice requires the superintendent to supply information and make recommendations on all issues, to nominate teachers and other employees for employment, and to keep board members informed. Before making any commitments, board members should consider the recommendations of the superintendent. Sometimes the superintendent may err or may not have all the facts, but generally a good superintendent's recommendations are well worth considering. His/her recommendation is due careful consideration, but of course, final action is a board member's responsibility.

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. You can do this best by representing the interests and opinions of the majority of the board, not your personal interests or opinions. Positive leadership can form public opinion and create active, intelligent support for education in your community.

11. Do your homework

Be prepared to consider an issue by studying all of its aspects before the meeting. Providing sufficient backup materials on issues should be the superintendent's responsibility. Studying those materials is responsible boardsmanship. Only then can a board member weigh all aspects of an issue.

12. Try not to surprise anyone

Everyone wins when board members and administrators avoid springing surprises on each other in public meetings. Express your concerns, ideas or questions privately to the board president or superintendent so they can be prepared to deal with them or so the topic can be included on a meeting agenda.

13. Be open minded

Be willing to consider points of view different from yours. Sharing differing viewpoints and forging agreements are how best practices are developed.

14. Try not to “zap” a fellow board member

In other words, don't embarrass or publicly criticize your colleagues. While the “zapper” might feel good about the situation, the “zappee” might seek revenge. Even if intended as humor, the “zap” can backfire.

15. Avoid “showboat” votes

These votes are for “effect.” Media reports usually mention the name of the one board member who voted against the motion. Most elected officials know the benefit of one's name in the media reports. However, “showboat” votes take away from the board unity. If even a few board members play the showboat game, the board will appear “soft” on an issue and unnecessary pressures may develop. On the other hand, do not confuse “showboat” votes with an honest opinion expressed by a “no” vote. Voting “no” because you sincerely believe it is the right way to go is perfectly fine.

16. Do not let your differences of opinion degenerate into personal conflicts

Nothing is more devastating to good board procedures than to have one member vote for a measure simply because another board member votes for it.

17. 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 are not learning when you are talking- you are only hearing your own ideas. Listen to persons who address the board at meetings, but don't enter into a dialogue with the audience. Members of the board deliberate among themselves - not with the audience.

18. If possible, keep out of teacher/coach/personnel problems

The board has hired a superintendent and staff to take care of that responsibility.

19. Make an effort to be informed

School business is always important business, and big business, with budgets in the millions of dollars. To be informed requires time and effort. Ask for briefings from the staff as you feel the need. Visit each school and department over which the board has authority.

20. Welcome people who come to see you about school problems

Listen carefully, then refer them to the appropriate person, beginning at the lowest possible level in the district's chain of command. If the problem is controversial, remember that you may be hearing only one side of the story. Do not commit yourself to a course of action that you may regret later when you have the whole story. 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 rest of the board rejects.



21. When a special interest group approaches, insist on your right to hear and review all the facts before you act

A vocal minority can force a school board to act before all the facts are known and evaluated. If you are being pressed, tell them that you need more time to make a fair decision. Often boards find that preliminary discussion, followed by action to place the topic on the agenda for the next meeting, clears their thinking and simplifies what seems complicated. If the problem could not be solved at the staff level, you time appropriate time to review it from all sides in order to make a fair and balanced decision.

22. School boards should be progressive, but careful in making changes

Changes or innovations should be initiated only after careful consideration of their ultimate effect on the school district programs. Capricious changing to correct a deficiency may result in far worse deficiencies.

23. Support decisions of the board

Even when your views do not get the support of other board members, support the majority decision to the best of your ability. If you want a decision reconsidered, approach the matter directly.

Should School Board Members Visit Schools??



- 1. Do school board members have the right to visit schools in the system?**
Absolutely
- 2. Should school board members “drop in” on schools without making an appointment?**
One may, but it is better practice to make an appointment.
- 3. May school board members talk to principals, teachers and staff members when they visit schools?**
Yes, as long as they are not interrupting the instructional process.
- 4. May school board members visit classrooms when they are in operation?**
Yes, if arrangements have been made in advance.
- 5. If a school board member has a particular concern, how can it best be addressed?**
Discuss it with the superintendent.



Remember as a school board member, you are attempting to learn as much as you can about the district and its schools. One of the best ways to find out what is happening is to visit schools, ask questions, and listen to the answers.

Some don'ts for school board members:

- 1. Don't storm into a school building unannounced with your clipboard and pencil in hand. You are there to observe, not evaluate.**
- 2. Don't wander around the building without stopping by the office to let them know you are in the building.**
- 3. Don't make personal commitments or promises when talking to staff members that you can't deliver later.**
- 4. Don't grind axes without finding out all the facts. In other words, don't jump to conclusions.**

Wyoming School Boards Association

Mission:

The mission of the Wyoming School Boards Association is **to ensure the highest levels of student achievement for all students** by providing visionary leadership and high-quality services to school districts.

Core Values

Student Achievement: Teaching: Board Governance:

Local Control: Public Education: Stewardship: Equity

High Achievement for all students is the #1 priority of the Wyoming School Boards Association.

Quality teaching is key to improving student achievement.

Quality **board governance** is key to quality teaching and to improving student achievement.

Local control of education through elected school boards is the best way to ensure that public policy reflects student and community needs.

Public education is the foundation of our democratic society and the key to successful schools and successful students.

Public education **spending** is an essential investment in Wyoming's future.

All Wyoming children deserve **school buildings** that support the delivery of the “educational basket of goods”, (including appropriate space for student activities), provide a safe and secure environment for learning, and have a positive impact on their communities.



Wyoming School Boards Association

2323 Pioneer Avenue

Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001

www.wsba-wy.org