

Minutes for Region 4 Workshop: Roles and Responsibilities of Superintendent and Board

January 16th, 2019 Central Office

Attendees: Trish Brookhart, Jane Cavanaugh, Lori Ann Clymas, DG Fitton, Jennifer Clark, Kate Sandmann & Ruth Levy.

4 members of the public were present

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. and opened with members describing why they came on to the board and what they hoped to get out of it. Answers ranged from “for the betterment of society, to ensure a sound education, concern about the reputation of the R4 board not being open”. For the second question – an understanding of roles and responsibilities was the majority answer.

You are an agent of the state whose first duty is to maintain good public elementary and secondary school, to implement the educational interests of the state. Respecting equity and equality. To that end, maintenance of facilities support learning.

Region 4 is more independent of oversight from the towns/town Boards of finance than the elementary schools financially because we go to referendum.

Role of the board:

- is to set policy. We govern, we don't manage. We should set the policies, re: buses, not , meet over buses. Policy sets the process and expectation in schools. It is broad but can be clear about what it wants to happen. Global statement followed by expectations— ie, bullying= developmentally appropriately and consistently applied written procedures annually distributed at all members of the school community. Setting the expectation but administration is developing the procedures. Don't confuse policy with procedure.
- Board members do not have individual authority. The corporate body of the board has the authority – not individuals. Board members do not “speak for the board” unless explicitly authorized to do so.
- Board members do not have individual authority. This means that individual board members do not have the right to give directions to the SI, nor do they have the right to give directions to the principals, etc. Moreover, they should avoid *the appearance* of giving directions.
- Financial Responsibilities: The “Budget” is an itemized estimate of expenditures. We should stop using the word “budget”. There is no directive, there is an estimate. It is a spending plan. There is flexibility built in to that. We want to make sure there is adequate funding, make it happen. You have the right to transfer any uncontracted for portion of any item for any other item.
- 10-222
- You shouldn't be arguing over 7 horsepower vs 5 horsepower engines for the tractor. You shouldn't spend time talking about the kinds of lights to buy for the fields. If you have particular suggestions to make, save that for after the meeting or put it in an email.

- We should ask CAFE for policy examples on capital funds.

Role of the Superintendent:

- Operationally the superintendent is in charge. Superintendent is our employee and the only employee who answers to board—all other employees answer to the superintendent. Superintendent is evaluated by the Supervision District (since that is what hired her) annually in accordance with guidelines and criteria mutually determined and agreed to by such board and superintendent. She operationalizes the policies. i.e. we may have a policy regarding overnight field trips, domestic and international, then she carries that out. We do not need to approve every overnight field trip, as much as we like hearing about them.

Communications amongst board members:

- Individuals can talk or email one on one about board / educational concerns. They can't conduct board business or organize outside a board meeting. They shouldn't forward each other's emails and do round-robin email trails.
- Members of like political parties within the board are allowed to caucus.

Board Goals:

- Board should have goals and should evaluate how they are doing on their goals. The Superintendent has her goals, and the board's goals should support the educational process. We have board goals, on the internet?

Requests for information:

- If the information requested is something that requires work, Ruth can and should take that request to the board. The administration doesn't have employees with limitless time. Time spent on researching a question is time that could have been spent doing their regular work, which has been put to one side.

Refocus on what is important. Are our students doing well? Are our physical plants up to speed?

Board members in public:

- When approached by a member of the public with a concern or complaint, stop them in their tracks. "Let me help you understand the process." We should advise the member to communicate with the principal and/or the Superintendent and/or review the policy manual on line. Speaking with a member of the board is not effective as we have no individual authority and we do not manage the schools. If they are still dissatisfied, they can request an appeal before the board in writing.

- If a member of the public tells us too much, we may have to recuse ourselves from decision-making on that topic
- Mr. Caruso cautioned us: If there is a small vocal group, they can influence what you think. You don't know if they represent 2 or 20 or 200 people.

Effective Meetings:

- Mr. Caruso also suggested that after all votes that have been taken after lengthy discussion the board pause to summarize for themselves how they made that decision . This helps when speaking to the public. Articulate the talking points. (Is "talking points" too jingolistic? Is there a better term? Take-aways?)
- You want to be a governance board, not a management board.
- The chair can declare a recess and a member can request a recess when people yell at each other and a cooling off period is needed.
- Board members should be limited to 3 minutes as well. The chair can call out those who are repeating themselves or each other, "If you have nothing new to say, we will move on to the next item."
- You are more effective if you start your meetings on time and finish by 9 pm.

Expulsion Hearings:

- If the board does the hearing, the results may depend on who is present. With a paid hearing officer, you have an expert, plus you have consistency.

Special Meetings:

- Are for important issues that come up between meetings and cannot wait for a meeting, or an issue that is "too big" for a board meeting where you anticipate a lot of input from the public. Call a special meeting for something you can see that public is interested. Or have a formal hearing which is specifically for public input.

Board Workshops:

- Board workshops are a good way to address issues like how to structure board agenda/ improve communication with community.

The public at board meetings:

- A board meeting is a meeting in public, not a public meeting. It is your job to conduct the business of your meeting, which is on the agenda.
- Three minutes is a long time. Some boards have a 2 minute limit for individuals, some boards limit public comment to a total of 15 minutes. And you should time it on a clock or risk being not impartial. Anyone should be able to communicate what they want to communicate within 3 minutes. However, if you have 10 members of the public and they all get three minutes, now

you are starting your meeting 30 minutes late. The chair can ask members of the public to refrain from repeating each other. The board can also limit the total amount of time given over to public comment. If you have 10 members of the public wanting to speak, maybe you should vote to hold a special meeting and get that subject out of the board meeting so you can do your business.

Agenda:

- The board chair is NOT the final word on what goes on the agenda.
- The chair and the superintendent work together to write the agenda.
- For an effective meeting consider putting time limits on the agenda.
- Agendas can have FYIs.
- A 2/3 vote can add an agenda item.
- The board chair can solicit items for the next meeting at the conclusion of each meeting
- A regular agenda item could come from the chair and be a report on board goals
- Concerns raised by the public could be added to the agenda by a vote, but Mr. Caruso cautioned us not to be too reactionary. It may be better to add it to the next agenda to give the Superintendent time to research or evaluate the issue. A robust discussion and a more sound decision is more likely when supported by complete information.

Quality of teachers and professional development are the most important predictors of student achievement. Not parental involvement (!).

Make the last item on our agenda a place where members can talk about future agenda items. And don't skip it!! Also use this time for member comments.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to adjourn at approx.. 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennifer Clark, Chair