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How to Be Successful on the School Board



Five things every new school trustee should know

One of the first things most new board members realize about serving on the school board is that there's a lot to learn. It's almost like going back to school again. To simplify your journey toward success, we've isolated five things a new trustee should know.

1. Understanding your role as a board member is key

A good place to start figuring out your role as a member of the school board is to read the [Texas Education Agency's \(TEA\) Framework for School Board Development](#). It outlines tasks an effective board performs in its governing capacity.

All the tasks in the Framework contribute to the board's development and implementation of a vision that moves the district forward in education excellence for students.

The tasks fall under and support these five basic ideas:

- **Vision:** The board ensures creation of a shared vision that promotes enhanced student achievement.
- **Structure:** The board provides guidance and direction for accomplishing the vision.
- **Accountability:** The board measures and communicates how well the vision is being accomplished.
- **Advocacy:** The board promotes the vision.
- **Unity:** The board works with the superintendent to lead the district toward the vision.

You should also talk with your superintendent and board president about how the board functions in your district. They may mention some of the places you can learn about your role, including:

- Your local orientation
- Team operating procedures
- A board activity calendar
- The district's policy manual

Get familiar with your district's policy manual, especially the policies that outline the board's role. You can also access a variety of resources from TASB. We're here to help you understand and grow in your role as a board member. Use our [guide for new school board](#)

When you first join the school board, you need to get up to speed quickly on everything from how your local board operates to how your district's schools function, plus a mountain of educational terms and phrases, among other things.

You're a public servant now and accountable to the voters. It's not unusual to be perceived and treated differently by many people in the community once you've been elected or appointed. You might also feel a bit busier because of the time it takes to prepare for and attend board meetings and other related commitments.

Three of the best ways to prepare for these possible changes are:

- Find an experienced board member who can offer mentoring
- Attend training designed for new school board members
- Talk with new board members about how they're managing new challenges

The first few months of service can be overwhelming, so it's a good idea to ask an experienced school board member for help navigating your first year. You can rely on this mentor to help you keep your focus on learning the most important things at the appropriate times.

Building a network of peers who understand the experience of being new to the board is invaluable. TASB offers numerous events throughout the year where you can connect with others who serve on school boards across the state.

3. Don't be afraid to ask questions, but listen intently, too

During the first several months of service, you should focus your attention on learning.

- **Ask a lot of questions.** There are no bad questions. Ask your fellow board members and superintendent anything that will help you understand the role of the board and how your board and superintendent function together.
- **Listen to your fellow board members.** Rely on the experience of your peers on the board, but at the same time, build your confidence around what your skills and knowledge can bring to the table.

It's also important to understand how the board's role is different from and complementary to the role of the superintendent, as is listening to and handling concerns and complaints from your community and staff. Once you feel settled into your role, don't be afraid to question how and why things are done a certain way to help the board and the district move in a positive direction.

4. You can never be too prepared for board meetings

School board meetings are a big part of the job. Find out who prepares the agendas for your board meetings and how to get an item included. The person who prepares your board agendas might also be able to share details about when you can expect to get agenda materials from your superintendent and what to do if you need more information.

- Most boards receive a copy of the agenda and background information a few days before the meeting. This gives you time to study the issues.
- Agendas must be posted to the public at least 72 hours before a meeting, so ask for your district's deadline for submitting items.

The board needs to make decisions that align with laws and regulations. Get familiar with your school district's policy manual within the first month of your service. You'll find:

- Background information about many of the issues your board will be making decisions on in district policy
- Local policies that can help you understand where the district and community stand on a variety of issues
- Legal policies that will help you get a picture of how issues extend beyond your local district in a relatively simple way

Understanding how to access information in the policy manual will be a great time saver during your tenure on the board.

adopted *Robert's Rules of Order*, but these only apply where the law and local policy or procedure leave off.

- [Get familiar with BoardBook](#) or the board agenda preparation and meeting software your board uses to understand how to use it for board meetings and take advantage of its conveniences.
- [Visit the TASB School Law eSource to learn the basic provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act.](#) Board actions taken in violation of the Act can be voided, and some can even lead to criminal misdemeanor prosecution.

5. Your local orientation covers a lot, but probably not everything

As a new school board member, you're required to receive a local orientation within 60 days of taking office. This orientation must be at least three hours, and it must address:

- Local district practices in curriculum and instruction
- Business and finance operations
- District operations
- Superintendent evaluation
- Board member roles and responsibilities

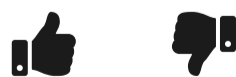
You should be prepared to learn the following within the first few months of taking office:

- District statistics, such as enrollment, demographics, performance summaries, and recent trends
- Administrative structure and names of key personnel
- District vision, mission, goals, and plan summaries
- District planning and evaluation process and calendar
- District budget summary and recent trends in revenue, appropriations, tax rates, and property values
- Budget development process and calendar
- Copy of district policy manual or access to an online policy manual
- Policy development and review process
- Overview of district curriculum objectives, standards, and instructional programs
- Superintendent evaluation process, calendar, and instrument and current performance goals
- Personnel hiring practices and salary schedule
- Preferred practices for common tasks, such as requesting information, bringing business before the board, preparing for and participating in board meetings, communicating with team members, communicating with the public and media, and visiting schools or district offices

In addition, ask if your district provides other resources for new members, such as a board handbook, team operating procedures, or mentors for new board members.

When you have a question about board service that your board president or superintendent can't answer, TASB can often help. Contact Board Development Services at 800.580.8272, extension 2452, or board.dev@tasb.org and let them know you're a new school board member.

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