



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

New School Board Member Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Foreword

Welcome aboard! The Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) welcomes you to the unique opportunity of serving your schools and community. This orientation handbook has been prepared as a service to you as a VSBA member and is presented to new board members upon notification of appointment or election. It is provided as a resource in hopes of answering many questions as it will create when you read it. This handbook has several purposes: (1) to offer resources to help you gain knowledge to become a better board member; (2) to provide sample questions to help you become familiar with your school system; and (3) to provide a summary of information presented at the VSBA New Board Member Orientation.

The VSBA endorses orientation programs for school board members in the belief that well-informed board members are better able to accept their responsibilities and to function more effectively as productive members of the board. The VSBA is here for you as your extended staff and to use as additional support as the need arises. The staff of VSBA looks forward to working with you throughout your term of office. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding your role as a school board member!

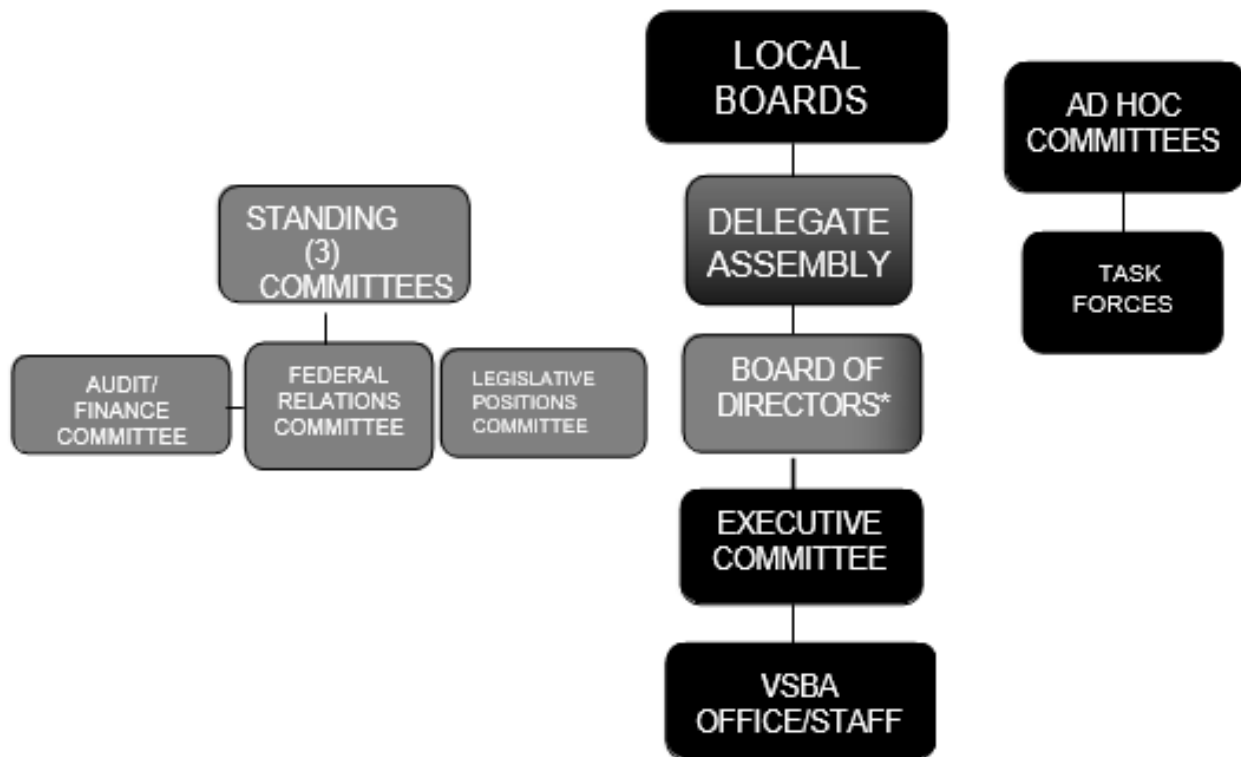
About VSBA

The Virginia School Boards Association is a nonpartisan, self-supporting organization whose primary mission is the advancement of education through the unique American tradition of local citizen control of, and accountability for, the Commonwealth's public schools. In this way, education policy is decided by local school boards, which are directly accountable to the community. VSBA promotes the quality of education through services to local school boards. It represents school boards' interests before the legislature, state agencies, Congress, and other state and national regulatory bodies.

Membership in the VSBA is voluntary and currently includes all local school boards of Virginia. Founded in 1906, VSBA represents the Commonwealth's school boards, which in turn, govern the schools attended by 100% of the public school children in Virginia.

Our Mission: Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training and services.

BIG PICTURE OF VSBA



*Consists of: a President, President-Elect, Past President and two (2) members at-large elected by the VSBA Delegate Assembly; nine (9) regional chairs elected by the VSBA regional membership; and two (2) standing committee chairs appointed by the VSBA President for a sixteen (16) member board.

2016-2023 VSBA Strategic Plan

Mission Statement

Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training and services.

Vision Statement

VSBA is recognized and respected as an innovative leader in public education.

Goals

To maximize student achievement by taking a leadership role in education reform.

To advocate effectively for Virginia's public schools and children before all levels of government and the public.

To increase engaged participation of member boards and stakeholders in all **VSBA** services and activities.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SELF-TEST

So, you're new here? On the next few pages we have given you a self-test to gauge what you already know about the work ahead of you. Complete the test on the following two (2) pages, and then compare your answers to the answer sheet. How did you do? Which areas was your knowledge strong? And those where you need improvement? Use these results to help guide you through this handbook and to help prepare you for questions you might ask of your fellow board members.

New Board Member Self-Test

1. List as many functions of a school board as you can.
2. What is the difference between the policy-making function of a school board and the administrative function of the superintendent?
3. What is board policy?
4. How might a board go about developing and adopting policy?
5. What is generally considered the single, most important decision a school board makes?
6. True or False? Board members should, whenever possible, inform the public as far in advance as possible, as to how they will vote on issues to be brought before the board.
7. True or False? If a board member is asked how and why he or she voted on an issue, he or she should only explain board action and not personal reasons.
8. The following is a recommended process for decision-making. It has been jumbled out of order. Please put the statements in order by placing the number 1 in the space for the first step and continue through the sequence until all five steps have been numbered.
 - A. _____ List all possible ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS you could take.
 - B. _____ Clearly state the DECISION to be made.
 - C. _____ List the ALTERNATIVES in priority order.
 - D. _____ Consider the DESIRABILITY of the results of each action.
 - E. _____ Gather all pertinent INFORMATION.
9. Draw a diagram that shows to whom a parent should go if he has a complaint or a compliment about his or her child's school; i.e., the channels of communication.

New Board Member Self-Test

10. When a board member is contacted by community members about concerns, outside of a regular scheduled meeting, which of the following should be followed: (Select one answer)
- A. Tell them to call the superintendent, who will direct them to the appropriate source.
 - B. Listen to the concern, refer them to the appropriate source, and call the superintendent to notify him or her about the conversation.
 - C. Listen to the concern, explain that you can do nothing as a board member until it is placed on the agenda, but you will have the appropriate staff person call them.
 - D. Listen to the concern, explain that you can do nothing as a board member until it is placed on the agenda, and refer the person through the proper channel of communication.
11. What is the school board's responsibility in the area of curriculum development and evaluation?
12. Briefly describe one way a school budget is developed.
13. True or False? The board should act only upon the recommendation of the superintendent in the hiring and non-hiring of all employees.
14. If you did not understand, or were unaware of a specified law that affected public schools, you should: (Select one answer)
- A. Call or visit the school board's attorney.
 - B. Call or email the VSBA.
 - C. Ask your superintendent.

Answer Key to New Board Member Self-Test

1. LIST AS MANY FUNCTIONS OF A BOARD AS YOU CAN.
 - *To develop policy.
 - *To develop a school budget.
 - *To approve or reject hiring recommendations of the superintendent.
 - *To keep the public informed.
 - *To evaluate the superintendent.
 - *To follow state statutes and the rules and regulations of the State School Board.
 - *To hire and retain a superintendent.

2. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE POLICY-MAKING FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL BOARD AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT?

The board is a policy-making body. Its policies set out the goals and objectives for the school division. The superintendent's responsibility is to see that these goals and objectives are implemented effectively.

If you ever wonder, as a board member, whether you are stepping into an administrative area, ask yourself, "Am I establishing a goal or am I doing something to carry one out?" The former is the board's responsibility; the latter is that of the superintendent.

3. WHAT IS A BOARD POLICY? WRITE A DEFINITION.

A school board policy is a statement of the division's philosophy and goals. The statement should include the policy is for (what), its purpose in being adopted (why), whom it will affect (how much). In other words, policy is the written expression of the board's desires for the division's children. Policies are guidelines and courses of action that tell is wanted, why, and how much. Administrative rules, set by the superintendent, include the mechanics and details of how, by whom, where, and when.

4. HOW MIGHT A BOARD GO ABOUT DEVELOPING AND ADOPTING A POLICY?

- a. Define the issue
- b. Gather necessary information
- c. Get recommendations from the superintendent
- d. Discuss and debate
- e. Draft policy
- f. Hold first meeting
- g. Make revisions desired
- h. Hold second meeting
- i. Adopt policy
- j. Disseminate to public and all affected parties

5. WHAT IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION A SCHOOL BOARD MAKES?
Hiring the superintendent

Answer Key to New Board Member Self-Test

6. BOARD MEMBERS SHOULD, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, INFORM THE PUBLIC AS FAR IN ADVANCE AS POSSIBLE, AS TO HOW THEY WILL VOTE ON ISSUES TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE BOARD.

False. A board member should always be open for input, from administrators and community members on issues coming to the board. Making up one's mind in advance on an issue effectively shuts out any information, ideas, or recommendations coming from those or other sources. Telling the community you have your mind made up would only make them believe you don't listen to them.

7. IF A BOARD MEMBER IS ASKED HOW AND WHY HE OR SHE VOTED ON AN ISSUE, HE OR SHE SHOULD ONLY EXPLAIN BOARD ACTION AND NOT PERSONAL REASONS.

False. Having made a decision and voted, the board member certainly owes the public reasons for coming to the conclusion made. As a representative of the public, he or she should be willing to explain his or her views. It is suggested to make your views known at the meeting prior to the official vote. If on the losing side of a vote, the member should acknowledge that and state their opinion but also state that they will follow the will of the board.

8. THE FOLLOWING IS A RECOMMENDED PROCESS FOR DECISION-MAKING. IT HAS BEEN JUMBLED OUT OF ORDER. PLEASE PUT THE STEPS IN ORDER BY PLACING THE NUMBER 1 IN THE SPACE FOR THE FIRST STEP AND CONTINUE THROUGH THE SEQUENCE UNTIL ALL FIVE STEPS HAVE BEEN NUMBERED.

- A. 3 List all possible ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS you could take.
- B. 1 Clearly state the DECISION to be made.
- C. 5 List the ALTERNATIVES in priority order.
- D. 4 Consider the DESIRABILITY of the results of each action.
- E. 2 Gather all pertinent INFORMATION.

9. DRAW A DIAGRAM THAT SHOWS TO WHOM A PARENT SHOULD GO IF HE OR SHE HAS A COMPLAINT OR COMPLIMENT ABOUT HIS OR HER CHILD'S SCHOOL: I.E., A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION.

Parent \Rightarrow Teacher \Rightarrow Principal \Rightarrow Superintendent \Rightarrow School Board

10. WHEN A BOARD MEMBER IS CONTACTED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT CONCERNS OUTSIDE A REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETING, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE FOLLOWED: (Select one answer)

- D. You can see, by referring back to the channels-of-communication in Question 10, that the school board is the last step. By inserting yourself into a situation prior to your proper step in the channels, you may cause problems for staff at whose level the problem should have and most probably would have been solved. In a case where the person calling is very angry, or the situation is serious, however, Answer B is a good idea. Also, make sure you understand your board norms and protocols on how to handle these situations.

Answer Key to New Board Member Self-Test

11. WHAT IS A SCHOOL BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THE AREA OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION?

The responsibilities of a school board in the area of curriculum are to approve what is to be taught, to make sure that what is supposed to be taught is being learned, and to ensure that the resources needed for learning are available and being used efficiently. The school board causes good curriculum development and evaluation to occur through board policy. The Superintendent is the one who brings these recommendations to the board for review.

12. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE HOW A SCHOOL BUDGET IS DEVELOPED.

One common method: Teaching staff, secretaries, and custodians send their recommendations covering their needs to their building principal. The principal meets with the superintendent and the finance assistant to pass on those recommendations, along with his/her own. The superintendent and the finance director make adjustments in the principal's recommendations, based on their educational judgment and monies available. The superintendent brings the information to the school board, which makes a decision on the final budget based on the recommendations received, supporting material and monies available. The budget is then presented to the local appropriating body (city council/ board of supervisors).

13. THE SCHOOL BOARD SHOULD ACT ONLY UPON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN HIRING AND NON-REHIRING OF ALL EMPLOYEES. True. The superintendent is the professional trained to evaluate needs and personnel. His/her personnel recommendations should always precede actions by the board and should not be overruled without strong and substantive reasons.

14. IF YOU DID NOT UNDERSTAND, OR WERE UNAWARE OF A SPECIFIC LAW THAT AFFECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS, YOU SHOULD: (Select one answer)

C. In the vast majority of cases, the superintendent will be able to answer your questions. Where he or she cannot, he or she will contact the board attorney for the answers. An alternative for both the superintendent and the board is to call the office of the VSBA. Your superintendent is your best source of information. The VSBA is number two!

WHAT EVERY NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL SYSTEM

Use the following pages to collect information as you get to know your division, and your board. Take notes on these pages so that you will be able to look back and reference as you settle in to your new role.

What every new board member needs to know

– about the division –

Need to know:

1. Name of school division: _____
2. School division address: _____
3. Main division phone number: _____

4. Superintendent:	Phone:	Cell Phone:	E-mail:
_____	_____	_____	_____

5. Superintendent's secretary/assistant:	Phone:	Fax:	E-mail:
_____	_____	_____	_____

6. Other board members:	Home Phone:	Work Phone:	E-mail:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Communities served by the division: _____

8. Number of employees in division: Certificated _____ Classified _____

9. Names of City Council or Board of Supervisors members:

10. Grade levels served by the division: _____

11. Number of students enrolled: _____

Pre-school _____ Elementary school _____ Middle school _____
High school _____ Continuation school _____ Adult Ed. _____

12. STUDENT POPULATION:

Ethnic groups by percentage: _____

Percentage of English language learners: _____

Primary languages spoken at home other than English: _____

Percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch: _____

What every new board member needs to know

– about the division –

13. Number of square miles the division covers: _____

14. Home to school transportation: Division operated? _____ Contracted to? _____

15. Number of schools: Total: _____

Pre-schools _____ Elementary schools _____ Middle schools _____

High schools _____ Alternative schools _____ Adult Ed. _____

16. Division office departments:	Title/name of department head:	Phone number:

17. Standing advisory committees, Panels or commissions:	Staff member responsible:	Board representation:

18. DIVISION DOCUMENTS:

Setting direction documents: _____

(Might include some or all of the following: Core values and beliefs; vision statement / mission statement; motto / logo; strategic goals / annual goals: division objectives)

Budget _____ **General Fund Budget= \$** _____

Policy book _____ **Division administrative calendar** _____

Long range facilities plan _____

What every new board member needs to know

– about the division

19. CURRENT DIVISION ISSUES: STATUS OF THE ISSUE:

20. DIVISION SCHOOLS:

Name of school:	Grade levels:	Principal:	Phone number:

What every new board member needs to know – about governance team operations –

Need to know:

1. Board meeting dates and times: _____

Board officers:	Role:
Chair:	
Vice chair:	
Clerk:	
Deputy clerk:	
Other:	

3. Order of items on the board meeting agenda:

1.	6.	11.
2.	7.	12.
3.	8.	13.
4.	9.	14.
5.	10.	15.

4. The purpose of the public comment section of the board meeting: _____

5. The purpose of the board comment section of the board meeting: _____

6. GOVERNANCE NORMS – How we behave toward members of the governance team and others:

1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

What every new board member needs to know

– about governance team operations –

7. SAMPLE GOVERNANCE PROTOCOLS – How we do business:

How the board meeting agenda is developed and reviewed and by whom:	
Placing items on the board meeting agenda:	
Obtaining additional information about board meeting agenda items before the meeting:	
Obtaining answers to questions about board meeting agenda items before the meeting:	
Alerting the board chair of the desire to speak on a particular agenda item:	
Introducing new ideas for the board's consideration:	
Responding to staff or community complaints or concerns at board meetings:	
Communications between and among the board, board members and the superintendent:	
Communications between the board and other staff:	
Responding to community or staff complaints or concerns outside of board meetings:	
How, when and whom to notify About visiting school sites or participating in division activities:	
Individual board member requests for information from staff:	
Board member participation on System committees and in division activities:	
When and how the board conducts a self-evaluation:	
When and how the board evaluates the superintendent:	

What every new board member needs to know – about governance team operations –

8. GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS:

Division policies	VSBA Code of Conduct
Division setting direction documents	Division budget development calendar
Annual governance calendar	Governance handbook

9. BOARD MEMBER BENEFITS:

Stipend:	
Health benefits:	
Attending conferences / educational meetings / community events:	
Making reservations for conferences / workshops / business trips:	
Travel Expenses and Reimbursements:	

ABOUT SCHOOL BOARDS

School Board Governance Standards

Guiding Principles of the School Board:

***Accountability | Commitment to Learning | Inclusivity
Stewardship | Transparency | Vision-Driven***

The School Board, in cooperation with the superintendent and stakeholders, establishes and commits to a vision for the school division that emphasizes high expectations for achievement of all students and quality instruction.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 1.a.** Has the School Board formally adopted a division plan that includes a concise vision statement?
- 1.b.** Were stakeholders engaged in the division strategic planning process?
- 1.c.** Does the division plan include nonnegotiable goals related to student achievement and quality instruction?
- 1.d.** Are school improvement or related turnaround efforts aligned to the division plan?
- 1.e.** Has the School Board adopted a system to monitor progress toward goals?
- 1.f.** Are resources aligned to the division plan?
- 1.g.** Does the School Board proactively address barriers to implementing the vision even when doing so may be unpopular? (Such as with budget cuts, building closures, etc.)
- 1.h.** Does the School Board establish goals for its performance based upon the division plan?
- 1.i.** Are decisions of the School Board guided by the division plan and related goals?

The School Board governs in a manner that is dignified and worthy of trust.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 2.a.** Does the School Board demonstrate a unity of purpose and articulate a common vision for the division?
- 2.b.** Is school division business conducted in an ethical, civil and responsible manner?
- 2.c.** Does the School Board demonstrate knowledge of school division governance, research-based practices in education and school finance, as well as school law?
- 2.d.** Does the School Board govern with board-adopted policies and procedures?
- 2.e.** Has the School Board adopted a budget based on realistic projections reflecting expenses that are less than income?
- 2.f.** Do the interactions and decisions of the School Board serve as examples of effective and responsible leadership for the division's students?

The School Board is accountable to the community.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 3.a.** Is the School Board knowledgeable of the students, families and community it serves including factors such as conditions that impact learning and desired outcomes?
- 3.b.** Does the School Board operate in an open and transparent manner?
- 3.c.** Prior to deliberating, does the School Board inform itself by listening to a diverse range of views from around the board table as well as across the community it serves?
- 3.d.** Is progress toward goals and student performance regularly reported to the community?
- 3.e.** Is the School Board's performance evaluated on a regular basis with the use of a valid and reliable assessment (internally, externally or both)?
- 3.f.** Has the School Board put policies in place that support successful implementation of the division plan?
- 3.g.** Does the School Board's governance of the school division demonstrate due concern with regard to financial and legal matters?

The School Board holds the superintendent accountable for creating the outcomes identified in the school division plan.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 4.a.** Does the School Board provide policies and systems for oversight of division resources, infrastructure and compliance?
- 4.b.** Does the School Board receive regular reports regarding progress toward division goals?
- 4.c.** Does the School Board monitor student academic progress based on assessments that are valid and reliable?
- 4.d.** Has the School Board established clear expectations for the superintendent, as well as the means and timeline on which the superintendent is to be evaluated?
- 4.e.** Does the School Board actively participate in the support, development and evaluation of the superintendent?
- 4.f.** Does the School Board place an emphasis on continuous improvement despite challenging circumstances?
- 4.g.** Has the School Board established quality instruction and the development of highly qualified teachers as critical division priorities to guide the superintendent's work?
- 4.h.** Does the board spend more time on policies to improve student achievement and monitoring progress and less time on operational issues?

Individual Board Member Governance Standards

Guiding Principles of the Individual School Board Member:

***Advocacy | Civility | Courage | Empathy | Inquiry |
Integrity | Regard for Authority of the Board | Selflessness***

The individual school board member is motivated by and focuses on what is in the best interest of all students.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 1.a.** Does the board member primarily concern him/herself with the goals that have been identified in the division plan?
- 1.b.** Does the board member demonstrate concern for all students in action, deed and decisions?
- 1.c.** Is the board member able to set aside personal issues and participate as a member of a board?
- 1.d.** Does the board member maintain confidentiality when expected to do so?
- 1.e.** Does the board member advocate for viable and effective PK-12 public education? (Such as by contacting legislators about PK-12 issues, legislation, state education funding, etc.; talking with parents and community members about how they can positively advocate for and participate in their division, etc.)

The individual school board member believes in the importance of and actively engages in lifelong learning.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 2.a.** Is the board member actively engaged in learning new concepts, skills or best practices?
- 2.b.** Is the board member willing and able to develop competency in matters related to school governance such as school finance and policy, as well as school law?
- 2.c.** Does the board member seek out and engage in learning opportunities to improve his/her ability to serve effectively on a School Board?

The individual school board member understands and respects both the authority and responsibilities of the School Board.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 3.a.** Does the board member act in accordance with Virginia law, which does not vest individual board members with any type of independent legal authority?
- 3.b.** Does the board member demonstrate a clear grasp of the roles and responsibilities of the School Board and the superintendent?
- 3.c.** Does the board member follow established policies and procedures?
- 3.d.** Does the board member support decisions of the School Board after a vote is taken regardless of his/her individual position prior to the vote?
- 3.e.** Is the board member able to identify, discuss and resolve conflict with respect and civility?
- 3.f.** Does the board member come to meetings having read the background materials and adequately prepared to address items on the agenda?
- 3.g.** Does the board member demonstrate understanding of and respect for school division structure and protocols?
- 3.h.** Does the board member declare and avoid engaging in conflicts of interest?

The individual school board member approaches school governance work with a spirit of inquiry.

Questions to evaluate or prompt successful adoption of this standard include:

- 4.a.** Is the board member open to discussion without prejudging issues?
- 4.b.** Does the school board member seek clarity and understanding before forming an opinion?
- 4.c.** Does the board member actively seek common ground and work to foster productive relationships with all other members of the School Board as well as the superintendent?
- 4.d.** Does the board member seek out and respect perspectives that are different than his/her own?

Customer Service is Always Right

By James Lyons

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Stick close to the customer: More and more, businesses are emphasizing this hallmark of corporate excellence. They realize that providing excellent service to clients, as Thomas J. Peter and Robert H. Waterman Jr. pointed out in their book, *In Search of Excellence*, is essential in building a positive corporate image. And that's a lesson your school board can capitalize on and benefit from too.

The "corporate image" your school system establishes, like that developed by any business, is based on direct and indirect contact with the public. When you understand just how important those human interactions are in determining public perceptions about your school system, you'll want to look closely at each and every contact; the public meetings your boards hold, the conversations teachers have with parents, and the telephone calls received at the central office.

The point is simple: No matter how hard your board works at sprucing up buildings, balancing the budget, improving programs and streamlining policies, as far as the public is concerned, the school system is your board and school staff members. **The school system is people—that** approachable principal, caring teacher, friendly aide, courteous secretary, and telephone-call-returning superintendent. Improving board and school system contacts with the public is a matter of studying where and how those contacts occur, and then taking some simple steps to ensure the resulting interactions are positive. The following guidelines and basic advice will help you do just that.

Burnishing Your Board's Image

The arena in which your board is most visible is the public meeting. How you conduct these meetings determines how the public perceives your board. Consider the following stumbling points, and how the public interprets them:

- If meetings fail to begin and end on time, your board looks like it's not serious or business-minded.
- If you get bogged down with trivial or minor items, you seem unable to distinguish between what's important and what's not. If one of your board colleagues makes off-the-cuff remarks to individuals or news reporters, board members appear to be flippant showoffs.
- If board members must be educated on agenda items during the meeting, the board seems uninformed.
- If the board fails to stick to the agenda, it comes across as lacking direction.
- If discussion drags on beyond the productive stage, your board gives the impression of being inefficient and ineffective.
- If you devote little discussion to curriculum and programs, you seem to have the wrong priorities.

Customer Service is Always Right (continued)

By James Lyons

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On the other hand, when your board, led by an effective Chair, conducts meetings in an efficient, businesslike, courteous manner, it comes across as an effective public body. This doesn't mean everyone always agrees. What is important is that your board receives members of the public in a friendly, courteous manner.

Effective public meetings can be the most important vehicle through which your board informs the community about the schools and builds trust, confidence, and support.

Handling Complaints

In the business world, complaints are a normal part of operations. Indeed, large businesses view complaints as one of their best sources of consumer feedback and they keep detailed records of complaints and review them periodically. Complaints are normal in public schools, too. Expect complaints - but demand they be handled systematically and efficiently. Why? Because people complain when they have grievances, real or imagined. Welcome complaints and take positive action or you'll end up destroying goodwill and breeding resentment.

Appearance Matters

Appearance might not be everything but it's an important part of public perception. And just as people judge your bus drivers, cafeteria workers, teachers and principals on their personal appearance, the public also evaluates the school system on the basis of appearance. Untidy, disorderly offices; broken, scarred worn furniture - these convey unmistakable messages. By contrast, clean attractive, well-kept buildings and grounds convey a sense of pride, attentiveness, and respect for the public's investment. By attending to the system's appearance then, you are helping sustain healthy community relations.

Most items on this checklist are not new or surprising. Indeed, most of these tips are based on old-fashioned common sense. First-rate service, businesslike meetings, efficient and courteous personnel attractive facilities: Your public expects all of this, and students deserve it. Providing it is your board's responsibility.

Sample: Guidelines for Addressing the Board

The Board asks that you follow the guidelines below when addressing the Board. If you wish to address the Board, please sign in with the Clerk of the School Board prior to the meeting. If you fail to sign in and if there is time available, please stand when the Chair asks for other comments to be identified. In order to give all speakers equal treatment and courtesy, the Board requests speakers follow these guidelines:

- Sign in with the Clerk prior to the meeting
- At the speaker's podium, please state your name
- Address comments to the Board as a whole
- State your position and give facts
- Debate is prohibited
- Give written statements and supporting material to the Clerk

The Board will try to hear everyone who wishes to speak on a subject but sometimes discussion has to be limited because of time. Time limitations will be set at the beginning of each meeting, based on the number of people who wish to address the Board. In most cases, no more than five minutes is allowed.

Speakers are generally allowed one appearance per meeting, although the Board can allow exceptions at its discretion. If you represent a group, you may want to have others in agreement recognized by standing. Meetings of the Board are formal proceedings and are recorded on tape. For that reason, you are requested not to speak from your seat or out of turn.

ETHICS AND POLICY

All Code of Virginia references reflects that which will be in effect as of July 1, 2022.

Ethics & Policy: The Need to Have Both The Importance of Policy

What is Policy?

POLICIES

Principles are adopted by the local school board to chart a course of action. They tell what is to be done and may also include why and how much. They indicate a broad line of action to be taken by the administration in dealing with day-to-day activities and are narrow enough to give the administration clear guidance. Policies are binding.

Who? Policies are adopted by the local school board.

The school board is the legislative body which enacts local school law. Policy making is the board's major responsibility and this function belongs solely to the school board by virtue of the powers conferred upon it by law. [Constitution of Virginia, Art VIII, Sec. 7 - Supervision of schools vested in the local school board].

REGULATIONS

Detailed directions to put policy in practice. Regulations flush out the requirements of the regulations. They are the mechanics, the administrative procedure.

Regulations are binding. They are not discretionary. Until the regulations have been changed, its requirements must be followed.

Who? Superintendents may promulgate regulations without prior school board approval unless board action is required by law or unless the board has specifically asked that certain types of regulations be given prior board approval. The board should be kept informed of all school division regulations by the administration.

GUIDELINES

Set forth best practice and procedures for implementing policy. Guidelines are not binding, they are discretionary.

Who? The administration develops guidelines unless board action is required by law or unless the board has specifically asked that certain types of guidelines be given prior board approval. The board should be kept informed of all school system guidelines issued by the administration.

Why Do We Need Policies?

Provide Guidance to the School Board, Superintendent and Staff.

Ethics & Policy: The Need to Have Both The Importance of Policy

SECURE THE BOARD'S POSITION

Without policy, the board is exposed. Written policy enables the division to function in accordance with the law. It creates a legal record.

Policies are the laws of the school division. Each school board shall maintain and follow up-to-date policies (Code of Virginia §22.1-253.13:7). In addition to providing for the general governance of the school division, Virginia law and federal law require some specific written policies.

The Virginia Standards of Quality requires each local school board to provide, as a minimum, the programs and services provided in the Standards of Quality to the extent funding is provided by the General Assembly. (Va. Code § 22.1-253.13:8). The Standards of Quality require school boards to have policies which:

- address complaints of sexual abuse of a student by a teacher or other school board employee;
- establish a system of two-way communication between employees and the local school board and its administrative staff whereby matters of concern can be discussed in an orderly and constructive manner;
- establish the selection and evaluation of all instructional materials purchased by the school division, with clear procedures for handling challenged controversial materials;
- establish the standards of student conduct and attendance and enforcement procedures designed to provide that public education be conducted in an atmosphere free of disruption and threat to persons or property and supportive of individual rights;
- provide for school-community communications and community involvement;
- establish guidelines to encourage parents to provide instructional assistance to their children in the home;
- provide information about procedures for addressing concerns with the school division and recourse available to parents pursuant to Va. Code § 22.1-87;
- establish a cooperatively developed procedure for personnel evaluation appropriate to tasks performed by those being evaluated; and
- address grievances and dismissals of teachers, and the implementation procedure prescribed by the General Assembly and the Board of Education.

Certain federal laws also require local policies, such as a school wellness policy (42 U.S.C. § 1758b).

Ethics & Policy: The Need to Have Both The Importance of Policy

CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS

- Expectations of the board members, the administration, the staff, the students, and the parents. Disarms critics.

INFORM THE PUBLIC

- Standards of Quality require that a current copy of school division policies be posted on the division's website. An annual announcement shall be made in each division, informing the public that the manual is available in such places.

ENSURE CONTINUITY

- The school board is a continuing body; however, board members and administrators change and the policy manual provides the written guidance which enables new board members and staff to carry on existing laws, programs, and standards.

Criteria for Good School Board Policy

STATED BROADLY/SHORT AND GENERAL

Long-term policies must be stated broadly with room for adjustment to fit special or emergency situations. Policy statements are short and general. When policies are detailed and list many specifics, often the one specific situation the school division is dealing with is not covered by the policy.

FLEXIBLE

Good policy must have built-in flexibility.

WRITTEN AND APPROVED

Policies should be written and approved by the school board, then placed in the school board policy manual.

COMMUNICATED

Policies should be communicated to the administration, the faculty, the parents, and the students.

NUMEROUS SOURCES OF INPUT

Many sources of input must be considered by the school board in adopting policy.

CITE LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal references should be cited. They give authority for the board's action. They set parameters of what you must do, what you may do, and what you are forbidden to do.

Ethical Considerations

Conflict of Interest

[Note: The descriptions below serve as a synopsis of the corresponding Code of Virginia citations and are not complete recitations of the Code sections. Local school board members should review these Code sections in their entirety.]

PROHIBITED CONDUCT IN GENERAL-Code of Virginia §2.2-3103

Outlines general prohibitions on accepting money or other things of value for services performed within the scope of official duties, except for salary received as a school board member.

PROHIBITED CONTRACTS- Code of Virginia §2.2-3109

Outlines prohibited interests in contracts with the school board and lists exceptions to the general rules.

PROHIBITED CONDUCT CONCERNING PERSONAL INTEREST IN A TRANSACTION- Code of Virginia §2.2-3112

Outlines requirements regarding when an officer or employee of a local governmental body having a personal interest in a transaction must disqualify himself from participating in the transaction and when he or she may participate in a transaction.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION- Code of Virginia §2.2-3115

Members of every school board of each county and city and of towns with populations in excess of 3,500 shall file, as a condition to assuming office and thereafter annually on or before February 1, a disclosure statement of their personal interests and other information as specified on the disclosure form.

RELATIVES AS EMPLOYEES- Code of Virginia §2.2-3119

Defines situations in which close family members (defined as parents, spouses, siblings, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and brothers-in law) of school board members and the superintendent may be employed by the board. Also establishes certain procedures that must be followed if a family member is hired.

BOARD MEMBERS AS EMPLOYEES- Code of Virginia §22.1-57.3

No one may serve on a school board and be employed by the board at the same time.

Freedom of Information Act

The Virginia Freedom of Information Act (better known as FOIA) addresses both meetings of public bodies and public records.

Meetings of Public Bodies

Except in limited situations, as defined by law, all meetings of public bodies, including school boards, must be open to the public. Va. Code § 2.2-3707. "Meetings" means the meetings, including work sessions, when sitting physically, or through electronic communication means pursuant to Va. Code §§ [2.2-3708.2](#), or 2.2-3708.3, as a body or entity, or as an informal assemblage of (i) as many as three members or (ii) a quorum, if less than three, of the membership of the public body, wherever held, with or without minutes being taken, whether or not votes are cast (Va. Code § 2.2-3701).

Public bodies can discuss certain topics specified in FOIA in closed session. Although FOIA lists more than over 50 topics that can be discussed in closed session, the topics most frequently discussed by school boards in closed session involve personnel issues, student matters, litigation and legal advice, and contract matters where a discussion in open session would adversely impact the bargaining position of the school board.

Notice, including the date, time, and location, of every regular meeting must be given by posting the notice on the school board's website and in the clerk's office and placing the notice in a prominent public location at which notices are regularly posted. (Va. Code § 2.2-3707).

Notice that is reasonable under the circumstances of special, emergency, or continued meetings must be given to the public at the same time it is given to members of the board.

At least one copy of the proposed agenda and all agenda packets (except exempt information) must be made available for public inspection at the same time the documents are furnished to board members.

Public Records

School board records are open to the public unless they are specifically excluded from mandatory disclosure by FOIA or other law. (Va. Code § 2.2-3700)

"Public records" means all writings and recordings that consist of letters, words, or numbers, or their equivalent, set down by handwriting, typewriting, printing, Photostatting, photography, magnetic impulse, optical or magneto-optical form, mechanical or electronic recording or other form of data compilation, however stored, and regardless of physical form or characteristics, prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. (Va. Code § 2.2-3701).

VSBA Sample Code of Conduct for School Board Members

As a member of my local school board, I will strive to be an advocate for students and to improve public education and to that end:

1. I will have integrity in all matters and support the full development of all children and the welfare of the community, Commonwealth and Nation.
2. I will attend scheduled board meetings.
3. I will come to board meetings informed concerning the issues under consideration.
4. I will make policy decisions based on the available facts and appropriate public input.
5. I will delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent and establish a process for accountability of administrators.
6. I will encourage individual board member expression of opinion and establish an open, two- way communication process with all segments of the community.
7. I will communicate, in accordance with board policies, public reaction and opinion regarding board policies and school programs to the full board and superintendent.
8. I will bring about desired changes through legal and ethical procedures, upholding and enforcing all laws, state regulations, and court orders pertaining to schools.
9. I will refrain from using the board position for personal or partisan gain and avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety.
10. I will respect the confidentiality of privileged information and make no individual decisions or commitments that might compromise the board or administration.
11. I will be informed about current educational issues through individual study and participation in appropriate programs, such as those sponsored by my state and national school boards associations.
12. I will always remember that the foremost concern of the board is to improve and enhance the teaching and learning experience for all students in the public schools of Virginia.

Therefore, I will always strive to demonstrate appropriate behavior/conduct as a public school board member. (Each member of this school board voting to adopt this Code should sign.)

Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____

Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____
 Name: _____

School Board: _____ Date: _____

Better Boardsmanship

Things “I think I think” about holding onto your integrity and ethics in an increasingly sleazy world

1. Know who you are, and hold onto that. When you lose sight of that answer, take a good look in the mirror and ask yourself again. *Wait for an answer!*
2. Losing your integrity has long-term implications, sometimes based on the actions of a single moment. When that happens, it could take you years or even longer to regain your integrity, self-respect and the respect of others.
3. Successful people know that character, integrity and a strong sense of ethics outweigh any personal skills or knowledge one might have.
4. Be true to your conscious. When you're not, it almost always breeds trouble.
5. What you say and do does not mean nearly as much as who you are. If you do not serve as the social conscious of your institution or organization, then who will? Assume that role. Others are depending on your strength.
6. Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to act or not act in a given situation. Courage is sometimes called self-respect, dignity or confidence. You do have the potential to exhibit courage.
7. Know your limits: exactly how far you will go, for whom and why. And when you've reached those limits, stop. It is possible to say “no” or “enough” and still survive personally and professionally.
8. When you believe you have been treated unfairly by others, remember that what goes around usually comes around. Don't seek revenge. The tactic frequently is self-destructive.

by Jacqueline Price, President, National School Public Relations Association

Test Your Ethics

It is enough to do what is required by law. Board members also must observe the ethics of public office. The Public entrusts school board members with a great responsibility to do what is best for the students and community. Take this test and see how you measure up with these principles of conduct for school board members.

Do you:

Resist every temptation and outside pressure to use the office to benefit yourself or any other individual or agency apart from the total interest of the school division?

Devote time, thought and study to the duties and responsibilities of school board member in order to render effective and credible service?

*Work with fellow board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation, in spite of differences of opinion?
Base your decisions upon all available facts?*

Vote your convictions in every case, un-swayed by bias of any kind?

Uphold the final majority decision of the board?

Take seriously your personal obligation to the community and your legal obligation to the state?

Give first and greatest concern to the students of your school system, without any distinction to who they are or what their background may be?

Work toward effective school board service in a spirit of teamwork and devotion in public education and all that it can mean to the citizens of this democracy?

Seek self-improvement by attending meetings and conventions of VSBA, NSBA and other education organizations?

Key: The answer to each of these questions should be yes.

Adapted from Georgia School Boards Association materials

Ethical or Unethical? That is the Question!

Read each description of behavior. Indicate ethical or unethical.

- A. You recommend that the administration hire your best friend's daughter.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- B. You are visiting schools following the division's visitation procedures.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- C. At a board meeting, you ask for more documentation from the Director of Human Resources.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- D. You commented to your spouse about a board report of a teacher's inappropriate behavior at a school function.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- E. You told the superintendent that you were disappointed in his ability to complete a division goal after several deadlines were missed.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- F. You stressed the need for a special program listed on the meeting agenda by providing additional data during the board meeting.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- G. You interviewed a parent whose child had problems with a teacher and then called the principal and recommended a class change.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- H. You had the school secretary type your personal correspondence during school hours.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- I. You failed to study the budget proposal you've had for three weeks. Tonight is the budget meeting and you are unprepared.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- J. You make recommendations to a teacher about how to manage his or her class.
Ethical____ Unethical ____
- K. You spoke to a neighborhood group as the board's designated spokesperson. Ethical____ Unethical ____

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

As the corporate entity charged by law with governing a school division, each school board sits in trust for its entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes some fundamental duties on the board:

1. The board clarifies the division's purpose

As its primary task, the board continually defines, articulates, and re-defines division ends to answer the recurring question- who gets what benefits for how much? Effective ends development requires attention to at least two key concerns: student learning and organizational effectiveness.

- **Ends** express the benefits the school division should deliver, thereby providing the entire system with clarity of purpose. A school board rarely creates division ends; rather, it most often detects them through listening and observing.
- **Ends** reflect the division's purpose, direction, priorities, and desired outcomes and are recorded in statements of core values/beliefs, mission, vision, and goals.
- In effective school divisions, every part of the organization is aligned with the **ends** articulated by the school board in written board policy.
- Well-crafted **ends** enable the school board to effectively and efficiently monitor division performance and assess organizational success (principle 5).

2. The board connects with the community

The school board engages in an ongoing two-way conversation with the entire community. This conversation enables the board to hear and understand the community's educational aspirations and desires, to serve effectively as an advocate for division improvement, and to inform the community of the division's performance.

- Community engagement, also called public engagement or civic engagement, is the process by which school boards actively involve diverse citizens in dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative thinking around common interests for their public schools.
- Effective community engagement is essential to create trust and support among the community, board, superintendent, and staff.
- A board in touch with community-wide concerns and values will serve the broad public good rather than being overly influenced by special interests.
- The school board must be aggressive in reaching out to the community- the divisions' stakeholders- to engage people in conversations about education and the public good. In contrast, people who bring concerns to board members should be appropriately directed to the superintendent and staff.

Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

3. The board employs a superintendent.

The board employs and evaluates one person- the superintendent- and holds that person accountable for division performance and compliance with written board policy.

- An effective school board develops and maintains a productive relationship with the superintendent.
- The employment relationship consists of mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This relationship should be grounded in a thoughtfully crafted employment contract and job description; procedures for communications and ongoing assessment; and reliance on written policy.
- Although the board is legally required to approve all employment contracts, the board delegates authority to the superintendent to select and evaluate all division staff within the standards established in written board policy.

4. The board delegates authority.

The board delegates authority to the superintendent to manage the division and provide leadership for staff. Such authority is communicated through written board policies that designate division ends and define operating parameters.

- Ultimately, the school board is responsible for everything, yet must recognize that everything depends upon a capable and competent staff.
- “Delegates authority to” means empowering the superintendent and staff to pursue board ends single-mindedly and without hesitation. A board that does (or re-does) staff work disempowers the staff. High levels of superintendent and staff accountability require high levels of delegation.
- Delegation is difficult for anyone accustomed to direct action. However, to appropriately stay focused on the big picture and avoid confusing the staff, members of the school board must discipline themselves to trust their superintendent and staff and not involve themselves in the day-to-day operations.

5. The board monitors performance.

The board constantly monitors progress toward division ends and compliance with written board policies using data as the basis for assessment.

- A school board that pursues its ends through the delegation of authority has a moral obligation to itself and the community to determine whether that authority is being used as intended.
- Unless the board is clear about what it wants, there is no valid way to measure progress and compliance.
- A distinction should be made between monitoring data (used by the board for accountability) and management of data (used by the staff for operations).
- The constructive use of data is a skill that must be learned. The board should have some understanding of data but will typically require guidance from the staff.

Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

6. The board takes responsibility for itself.

The board, collectively and individually, takes full responsibility for board activity and behavior- the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work. Individual board members are obligated to express their opinions and respect others' opinions; however, board members understand the importance of abiding by the majority decisions of the board.

- The school board's role as trustee for the community is unique and essential to both the division and community.
- While the board must operate within legal parameters, good governance requires the board be responsible for itself, its processes and contributions. Board deliberations and actions are limited to board work, not staff work.
- The board seeks continuity of leadership, even as it experiences turnover in membership. The board accomplishes this by using its written board policies to guide board operations, by providing thorough orientation and training for all members, and by nurturing a positive and inviting board culture.

SCHOOL BOARD DEVELOPMENT

VSBA School Board Academy

The VSBA School Board Academy is a comprehensive program of orientation and education specifically designed for local school boards. As a VSBA member, you are automatically enrolled in the Academy.

Through participation in the VSBA Academy, you have the chance to meet with fellow school board members from across the state to share ideas and solutions. You also become more knowledgeable about educational issues and learn to effectively fulfill your responsibilities as a board member by focusing on topics such as:

- * **Superintendent/School Board Roles & Responsibilities**
- * **Policy Development**
- * **School Law**
- * **Legislative Issues**
- * **Communication Skills**
- * **Media Relations**
- * **Board Operations**
- * **Strategic Planning**
- * **Budget and Finance**

Why Participate in the VSBA Academy?

- ☐ Improve your effectiveness as a board member through systematic instruction
- ☐ Increase your accountability as a school policy-maker
- ☐ Expand your knowledge of complex and constantly changing educational issues
- ☐ Enhance skills needed to tackle future educational demands
- ☐ Understand the latest developments in both state and federal legal issues
- ☐ Maximize your opportunity to take part in high-quality training sessions offered by **VSBA**
- ☐ Receive public acknowledgment for your voluntary efforts to improve your school division
- ☐ Demonstrate to your community your commitment as a school board member
- ☐ Symbolize your achievement in leadership education

Ways to Grow & Learn

- ☐ Annual board self-evaluation
- ☐ Board Governance Training
- ☐ Visiting schools on scheduled visits
- ☐ Staff "briefings" on education programs and activities
- ☐ Attending VSBA meetings and conferences.

Why Should I Spend My Time and the School Division's Money on Continuing Educational Conferences?

Today's schools are on the front lines of school reform. You probably were elected or appointed because you believe you can make a positive difference. So now it's your turn. You must advocate for students and schools, set the division's vision and provide the structure for students to succeed. You also are accountable to your community. There's not enough time or dollars for mistakes.

You will be asked to make decisions regarding:

Policy- The school board's primary function is setting policy. To accomplish this, board members must keep abreast of educational trends, as well as ever-changing federal and state statutes, regulations, and court rulings. Board members must be able to translate community and student needs into educational programs that best meet those needs.

Personnel - The school board is often the largest employer in the community. One of the board's most important decisions, therefore, is the selection of a superintendent, or chief executive officer. That person's job is to manage the school system and its personnel within the policy framework set by the school board. The selection of the superintendent, as well as approving the hiring of other staff members, requires a high degree of knowledge and skills to successfully carry out this responsibility.

Finance - Education is big business. In fact, it is the biggest business in most communities. From transportation systems to food services to education programs and facilities, school budgets run in the millions of dollars. Considerable expertise is necessary to effectively balance a community's educational needs with its available resources. Determining educational priorities through sound budgetary allocations requires a variety of continuing board development programs.

Curriculum - Providing an effective instructional program for students is a school's most important function. The content and scope of the curriculum is, therefore, a primary concern for the school board in its role as policymaker. Decisions must be made on what to teach, which instructional materials to use, including textbooks, and which methods of instruction meet acceptable community standards as well as national, state, and local mandates for school improvement. Other decisions relate to what funds are needed, what is required to comply with state and federal laws and regulations, judicial decisions or rulings, and a host of other concerns. Being well informed and up to date on such matters is essential to competent boardsmanship.

Communications - Open and continuous two-way communication between a school board and the public, and within the school system itself, is essential to fulfilling a board's mandate for accountability and responsiveness to the community in meeting the needs of the schools and their students. An informed constituency helps ensure public trust, understanding and support of the board's policies and practices. Communications training programs enable board members to discharge their policy-making responsibilities more effectively.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Working with the Media

Developing a Media Policy and a Media Relations Plan

Establish a good working relationship

Know your reporters' publications and deadlines

"Tip" the media

Treat all reporters fairly

Designate a spokesperson

- School division
- School board

Provide information and access

Building Trust

Know publications and deadlines

Read the bylines!

Recognize good work with a note or phone call

Return calls promptly

- Anticipate and prepare in advance

Provide information equally and be honest

Assisting Reporters

Basic information

- Names and titles of central office staff
- School names and addresses
- Enrollment and budget figures
- Board member names
 - Personal background
 - Photos/name cards at meetings

Meeting agendas

- Background information
- Staff recommendation and rationale

Interview Basics

Be honest – never lie or mislead!

Avoid jargon, euphemisms, "red flag" words

Keep answers simple and brief

- Yes or No
- Provide rationale or evidence for answer

Avoid "no comment"

Never speak "off the record"

Be certain of your facts

Refuse to be manipulated, e.g. the "Would you say....?" syndrome

Interviews with Newspaper Reporters

Ask questions about the story's angle: What is the story about?

Be familiar with the publication and reporter

Be prepared to answer questions!

- Who, what, when, where, why, and how
- Anticipate tough questions and your responses

Working with the Media

Television Interviews

- Stand up interviews
- Pause and think before speaking
- Keep it short
- Repeat your main point several times
- Look at the reporter
- Talk shows
- Wear solid colors, avoid flashy jewelry
- Use hand gestures
- Look attentive at all times
- Create your own Sound Byte
- State your position
- Describe supporting facts/actions
- Closing statement

Tips for Radio

- Keep statements short
- Use descriptive language
- Use reference materials if needed
- Speak in complete thoughts
- Avoid pause language: Um... Ah... Repeat your main point several times

What if...? Would you say... ? Can you comment on...?

- Deflect negative questions
- "I prefer to deal with the facts right now."
- "No, I would say... "
- "I don't agree with that statement. I think... "
- "I'm not sure what it is you're asking. Could you rephrase the question?"
- Try to give some information
- Repeat the procedure being followed
- Repeat what is already known
- Describe future action if you know it

Correcting Inaccurate Stories - Correct a story if...

- You responded accurately but information released was wrong -AND- the misinformation caused substantial damage
- A correction will not give more visibility to the opposite view
- You reach the same audience that saw the error
- You won't look petty or vindictive

Working with the Media

To Correct a Story

- Talk to the reporter Talk to the editor Request a correction
- Write a Letter to the Editor
- Avoid defensive tone
- Greater exposure than correction

Dealing with the Media in a Crisis

- Tell the bad news quickly
- Designate a reliable and accessible contact person
- If you can't reveal information, tell reporters why. As you learn more, contact reporter with updates.
- Ask yourself what the public would want to know
- Don't forget to be human

Promoting Good News

- Good news comes from good relations
- Visual stories have more appeal
- Invite press to participate in school activities, e.g., Career Day. Give them choices of topics.
- Timing is essential
- PR=Positive Response,

Local Information Source - Familiarity breeds contentment

- Neighbors and Children (21%)
- Television (17%)
- Other: School officials (12%), School newsletter (9%), Radio (5%), Other (3%), Don't Know (3%) National Information Source
- Television (43%)
- Newspapers (31%)

The Board Member: Complaint Central?

Does being on the school board sometimes feel as though you are the Director of “Complaint Central”? Things may not be as bad as they appear. No one likes complaints, and the idea would be to have a school division that runs so flawlessly that complaints are never uttered. However, such is rarely the case. Complaints are a form of conflict and conflict is both natural and, if it is well-managed, healthy. However, unjustified complaints can be bothersome and time-consuming.

If you think it’s negative that people bring their complaints to you, think again:

- People who complain care.
- People who complain are in communication with you. You can’t solve a problem or clean up a misconception until it is on the table.
- Your chances of retaining loyalty are better with the complaining taxpayer than they are with the unhappy, but silent, taxpayer. According to research findings for the White House office on Consumer Affairs:
- Only four of 100 dissatisfied customers will complain.
- For every complainer, there are 24 with the same complaint who will never say anything.
- About 13 percent of dissatisfied customers will tell 20 other people about it.
- Almost 90 percent of dissatisfied customers won’t repurchase from (or vote for, support, or become involved in) the offending company, compared to 54 to 79 percent who remain loyal when complaints are satisfactorily handled.
- Receiving the complaint with the attitude that people care about the school and are sincere in their concerns will facilitate its resolution.

Create an atmosphere that lets people know they can talk with you about school concerns by being visible, available and approachable.

Avoid thinking of responses while the person is complaining to you. Listen carefully.

Ask questions to clarify points that may not be clear to you.

Recognize that the person giving you the complaint likely cares about the division and wants it to improve.

When listening to a complaint, watch your body language. Jiggling change, tapping a pencil, avoiding eye contact, walking around, playing with papers, sighing or folding your arms will all be interpreted as a lack of concern.

The Board Member: Complaint Central?

It's easier to deal with a complainant who lacks information, has incorrect information, or simply does not agree with a course the division is taking than it is with complaints who have become emotionally involved to the point that there is some threat to their egos.

Never miss an opportunity to keep your mouth shut. When people get themselves ego-involved with a complaint, they put up barriers to cooperative communication that are only lowered by being allowed to express their relevant concerns. In other words, sometimes it helps to let people vent.

Avoid giving the impression that you can solve a problem if, in fact, you can't. Explain your role as a policy maker and communications link.

If the complaint is based on incorrect information, and you have the correct information, relay the correct information in a gentle, positive manner. Your goal is to leave the person's self-respect intact.

Accept some of the responsibility for the person not having the correct information with a comment such as, "I'm sorry our communications on this topic were not adequate."

If someone has a grievance with you, remember: No one cares why you mess up (if you did) or what the problems of your organization are. What they want to know is: What are you going to do about it?

When you get a complaint, ask the complainant to suggest a solution to the problem. Ask them, "What would you do if you were in our shoes?"

No matter how much you care about the division and/or the object of the complaint, remain objective. You represent the complainant, too.

Guide the complainant to a solution, whether it's correct information or information on whom he/she should contact in the chain of command. If you refer the person to someone else, preface it by explaining your board's policy and the reasons for it.

If the complaint is serious or repetitive, let the superintendent know about it.

Taken from VSBA CommunicationsPLUS. VSBA CommunicationsPLUS is prepared for the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) by the Washington State School Directors' Association. For additional information, contact Gina Patterson at (800) 446-8722.

GLOSSARY

Glossary of Educational Terms and Organizations

AASA	American Association of School Administrators
Accountability	Accountability is accepting responsibility for ensuring the conditions are in place for positive student outcomes and learning to occur; a process designed to determine whether schools are producing the results promised.
Achievement Test	A test that measures the extent to which a student has acquired, and can demonstrate, certain skills and proficiencies that are usually a result of instruction.
ACLD	Association for Children with Learning Disabilities
Ad Hoc	A committee formed for a specific purpose and for a limited length of time. Often made up of community members brought together to study a particular problem or issue and write a report for the School Board.
ADA	Average Daily Attendance. A formula derived by taking the sum of the days attended by each student enrolled and dividing it by the number of days school is in session, usually figured for a period of one school year.
Administrative Code	The body of rules and regulations enacted by a state School Board of the chief executive of a state system, under statutory authority, to govern the operation of the public schools in the state.
Administrative Policy	A statement adopted by a School Board or an administrative agency outlining principles to be followed with respect to a specific matter. It usually requires rules or regulations to be adopted for its implementation. It should be broad enough to provide for administrative leeway in its implementation, although the fact that it be implemented in some manner is mandatory.
Advocacy	Advocacy is actively supporting that which is in the best interest of Michigan's public school students.
AG's Opinion	Attorney General's opinion
Amicus Brief	A written document prepared by a counsel to support a position in a court case. This is often referred to as a "friend of the court" brief which is submitted to provide support to a case.
Arbitration	A method of settling disputes through resources to an impartial third party, whose decision can be binding. Arbitration is commonly resorted to in the interpretation of existing contract terms or other rules and regulations (grievance arbitration). It can also be used in jurisdictional matters when parties cannot reach agreement on a contract.
ASBO	Association of School Business Officials
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Budget Cap	The limitation on the annual increase in the net operating current expense budget allowed in each division.

Business Manager	The school division administrator directly responsible for business affairs. Sometimes the business manager is an assistant superintendent in charge of business and, as such, is responsible to the superintendent (unit control system). Sometimes the business administrator reports directly to the School Board (dual control system).
Bylaws	Collection of rules adopted by the School Board for the regulation of its own organization. They must not conflict with statute but may be more specific than statute.
Capital Outlay	Expenditures that result in the acquisition of fixed assets or additions to fixed assets, i.e.: land, existing buildings, improvement of grounds, and construction or remodeling of buildings. It may include installment or lease payments on property (except interest), which have a terminal date and result in the acquisition of property.
Caucus	A closed meeting for the members of a political party for the purpose of determining policy for the party. In negotiations, a closed meeting for members of one side in the negotiations for the purpose of discussing strategy and issues in the bargaining.
Charter School	Charter schools provide options for parents and students while allowing communities and educators to create innovative instructional programs that can be replicated elsewhere in the public school system. All charter schools in Virginia are nonsectarian alternative public schools located within a school division and under the authority of a local school board.
Civility	Civility is about more than just politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements. It is political in the sense that it is a necessary prerequisite for civic action. But it is political too in the sense that it is about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone's voice is heard, and nobody's is ignored.
Cognitive Learning	The acquisition of knowledge by the application of an intellectual process, as opposed to emotional or physical activities.
Cohort	The group of individuals, each with similar characteristics, which is the subject of a longitudinal study.
COL	Cost of Living

Collective Bargaining	Negotiations between the representatives of employers and employees to develop a contract specifying the conditions of employment. Presently collective bargaining is not legal in the state of Virginia.
Commitment to Learning	Commitment to learning describes a dedication to the belief that everyone can learn, and that lifelong learning is key to an individual's ability to create positive outcomes.
Community School	A school which is intimately involved with the life of the community around it, serving as a center for many activities outside the normal educational hours. Programs can include health clinics, athletic activities, adult schools, mental health groups, senior citizen organizations, etc.
Compensatory Education	Instruction designed to remedy or prevent the loss of basic skills by a student due to socio- economic or academic deficiencies.
Confidential	School board members become aware of information of which unauthorized disclosure could be prejudicial to the interest of the division and/or illegal.
Continuous Progress	An educational system in which the student moves through the various levels of subject matter at an individual rate rather than by arbitrary assignment with others of the same age.
Co-Op	Cooperative program. Involves vocational worktime outside of the school building, along with regular courses in the building.
CPI	Consumer Price Index
Criterion-Referenced Test	A measuring device used to determine whether a learner has achieved a pre-defined set of objectives at the specified level of proficiency. The learner's abilities are compared to the criterion and to other individuals.
Current Expense	Any expenditure in a school budget, except for those for capital outlay and debt services.
De Facto Segregation	Racial separation not directed by law, but which exists, and which is maintained by housing patterns, gerrymandered school division lines, and social class barriers.
Division Plan	At minimum, a division plan lays out the objectives a division intends to accomplish including the steps it will take to accomplish those objectives as well as the timeframe and metrics that will be used to evaluate progress. See Strategic Plan for the optimal alternative.
Due Process	Constitutional rights as defined by the 14 th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
E&O	Errors and Omissions insurance.
Eminent Domain	1) The power to take private property for public use, whether exercised by the sovereign power directly or by one to whom such power has been delegated for quasi-public purposes; 2) the right by which private property may, in certain cases, be taken or its use controlled for the public benefit without regard to the wishes of the owner.

Empathy	Empathy is the capacity to understand, be aware of, be sensitive to and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another.
Equalized Valuation	A measure of taxable property within a division using a formula designed to allow comparisons among communities, even though tax ratios may vary.
ERIC	Education Research Information Center - a computerized system of educational clearing houses providing access to educational literature.
ESEAW	Elementary and Secondary Education Act IV - an act designed to encourage divisions to develop imaginative solutions to education problems, use research findings, create, design, and make use of supplementary centers and services.
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETS	Educational Testing Service, Princeton. Runs various student tests, including the SAT's, Achievement Tests, and the Advanced Placement Tests
Federal Register	The formal record of actions, and proposed actions, by the legislative and executive branches of the federal government.
Fiscal Year	The twelve-month period used as the basis of an operating budget.
Full Valuation	The true value of real estate in a taxing division. Usually based on examinations of real estate sales in the division over a given period.
Goal Statements	Generalizations about the intended results of a curriculum. Goal statements can be expressed in two ways: outcome goals (ends) which state what a curriculum is intended to accomplish; process goals (means) which state how the ends are to be accomplished.
Grand Father Clause	A part of an agreement which exempts certain persons from provisions in the agreement which came after the start of their current employment.
Grant-in-Aid	A financial grant, frequently in the form of periodic payments, made by a government or agency to another government or agency or to an individual, for assistance in a general or specific project. (For instance, a grant by the Federal government to the states for the promotion of vocational education.) Usually, these grants require a preliminary or matching contribution and the meeting of certain stipulations.
Halo Effect	A bias in ratings arising from the tendency of the rater to be influenced by his personal impression of the person being rated.
Heterogeneous	In education, a grouping of students in a manner unrelated to their intellectual abilities.
Holistic	An approach or study which considers the subject as a single entity, rather than an interrelated system of distinct elements.

Homogenous	In education, the grouping of students according to their intellectual abilities.
IEP	Individualized Education Plan. Required by state and federal law, this is a set of prescribed instructional activities and services developed by a local child study team in conjunction with teaching staff and parents, for the identified needs of a handicapped student.
Impact Aid	Federal funds to divisions or communities to offset the loss of tax revenue from tax exempt federal facilities located within the division or community, which nonetheless draw upon locally supported services such as schools, police, and fire departments.
Inclusivity	Inclusivity is the policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized . ⁶ This includes board members, stakeholders, and students.
Individualized Instruction	A student-centered education model, which recognizes individual needs and provides opportunities for the student to proceed at his/her own rate commensurate with his/her own ability, interest, and motivation.
Inquiry	Inquiry is an approach to understanding that is constructed in the process of people working and conversing together as they pose and solve problems, making discoveries and testing new knowledge in the course of shared activity.
Integrity	Integrity is the concept of consistency of one's actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcomes.
IPLE	Institute for Political and Legal Education
Job Description	A written statement of the duties and responsibilities involved in any one position. Includes a summary of the education, experience, and training the person must possess in order to qualify for the position.
Load Factor	Any factor that is considered in determining a teacher load; for example, time required per week, diversity of subjects, size of classes, type of subject, extra duties, etc.
Local Autonomy	The power the state grants to local school divisions to make many of their own decisions, administer their own schools, etc.
Local Composite Index	<p>The Composite Index determines a school division's ability to pay education costs fundamental to the commonwealth's Standards of Quality (SOQ). The Composite Index is calculated using three indicators of a locality's ability-to-pay:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ True value of real property (weighted 50 percent) ▪ Adjusted gross income (weighted 40 percent) ▪ Taxable retail sales (weighted 10 percent) <p>Each locality's index is adjusted to maintain an overall statewide local share of 45 percent and an overall state share of 55 percent.</p>
Magnet School	A school offering special courses not available in regular school programs and attracting students, on a voluntary basis, from all parts of the school division. Often used to aid in the integration of a school system. Examples of magnet schools - Gifted and Talented, Agriculture, Arts, Vocational.

Mastery Learning	School of thought which assumes that mastery of a topic is possible for all individuals, provided that each learner is given the optimum quality of instruction which is appropriate for his/her particular makeup and that each learner is given the time he/she needs.
Median	The point in a distribution of scores below which 50% of the scores lie. It divides distribution of scores into two equal parts.
Mode	The most frequently occurring score in a distribution of scores.
NAESP	National Association of Elementary School Principals
NASBE	National Association of State Boards of Education
NASSP	National Association of Secondary School Principals
NEA	National Education Association
Needs Assessment	In education, an evaluation to determine whether the present curricula are achieving the intended results.
Norm- Referenced Test	Testing which seeks to compare an individual performance with the normal or average performance for a large group of similar individuals.
NSPRA	National School Public Relations Association
PDK	Phi Delta Kappa - an honorary education fraternity
Pedagogy	The art, practice, or profession of teaching.
PL94-142	The 142 nd law passed and signed during the 94 th Congress of the United States. The statute prescribes that a free and appropriate education be available to all children, regardless of any handicap of the student.
POB	Program Oriented Budgeting. A budget based upon the specific cost related to each element of the educational program.
Procedural Due Process	The safeguards to one's liberty and property mandated by the 14 th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. It provides specific steps for a person to be notified, be provided counsel, and other rights.
Professional Days	Days taken off by teachers and other professionals for educational meetings, seminars, or workshops. Usually provided for in a limited number in a negotiated contract.
Project Head Start	A federal preschool child development program of the Office of Economic Opportunity which provides a comprehensive program of education, medical care, social services, and nutritional help for preschool children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
PTA	Parent - Teacher Association
PTO	Parent- Teacher Organization
Pupil Resource Service	The department in a school system whose primary purpose is to help classified students receive the education best suited to their needs and abilities. It can include health services, remedial classes, and guidance.
Reading in the Content Area	An instructional approach which stresses the application of specific reading skills in relation to subject matter.

Real Property	A legal term relating to permanent or immovable things such as buildings.
Recall	The legal procedure by which qualified electors may remove from office those officials who have been elected by them.
Regard for Authority of the Board	Regard for the authority of the board is the ability of an individual board member to respect and support the vote of the School Board even if his/ her position was contrary to the decision.
Reliability	The extent to which a measurement gives results that are very consistent.
Risk Management	The planning and organization within a business which takes into account the handling of risks. This form of management is a means to protect the human and financial assets of the organization.
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test. A test taken by high school juniors and seniors for college entrance requirements.
Selflessness	Selflessness is putting the needs and concerns of others ahead of oneself.
Stakeholders	Individuals and groups who have an interest in the welfare of a community's children and public school division including but not limited to division residents, students, business owners/operators, division staff members, union leadership, etc.
Stewardship	Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of the school division's resources including finances, facilities, human resources, etc.
Strategic Plan	<p>A strategic plan is a document that empowers school divisions to plan for continuous change and is used to communicate with the entire school community the School Board's vision for the division, goals related to making that vision a reality and the actions needed to achieve those goals, as well as related support materials such as timelines and measurements.</p> <p>It is established via a process that engages stakeholders in assessing the internal and external environments, analyzes the implications or relevant trends, and identifies effective strategies for achieving the desired future state of the school division.</p>
Transparency	Transparency describes a board's obligation to share information with citizens. Information on how officials conduct the public business and spend taxpayers' money must be readily available and easily understood . ¹²
Validity	Validity of an assessment is the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure.
Vision	A vision describes in detail the desired future state of a school division. It announces to staff members, parents and students where a division is heading and why they should take the trip with you.
Vision-Driven	Vision-driven describes a board that, in partnership with the superintendent and stakeholders, establishes a shared vision and plans for the school division to attain that vision.
School Based Management	A school site council with the increased responsibility of making decisions regarding budget, personnel, and programs. The degree and latitude of responsibility assigned by a School Board to the council may vary greatly.

Standard Deviation	A measure of variation from a specific percentage used in standardized testing and statistical sampling. For example, if the standard deviation for a test were 5, then scores 5% below or 5% above the actual score would be relatively equal for the purposes of assessment.
Standard Error of Measurement	The estimate of the amount of error to be expected in a test score. It is used to indicate the number of points an obtained score may vary from its true score.
Standing Committee	A regularly constituted committee of a School Board, usually appointed by the board president for a definite period of time; for example, finance committee, building committee, policy committee.
Substantive Due Process	The Constitutional guarantee that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property by arbitrary and unreasonable action.
Tenure	A condition in which employment in a position is guaranteed upon the completion of a period of probation. Tenured employment cannot be terminated except upon the completion of a procedure of due process.
Title IV of ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The act which includes library and learning resources and educational innovations.
Title IX	Education Amendments of 1972. This amendment prohibits sex discrimination.
Tort	Any negligent or willful and wrongful act of school officers or employees by which pupils or other innocent persons are injured.
True Valuation	The market value of property, as opposed to the assessed valuation of property for taxation.
Tuition Tax Credit	An allowance against a family's annual federal income tax, for a specified amount of money, which has been spent on their child(s)' education in a private school.
VASS	Virginia Association of School Superintendents
VEA	Virginia Education Association
Virtual Learning	Employing information and communication technologies to deliver instruction. Virtual learning is a term frequently used interchangeably.
Virtual School	A virtual school or cyber-school describes an institution that teaches courses entirely or primarily through online methods.
Voucher Plan	A plan to distribute educational monies through issuance to parents directly of a voucher allocating public funds to pay the cost of their children's education in either a public or private school of their choice.
VSBA	Virginia School Boards Association
Workforce Readiness	Workforce readiness is the process of educating students and preparing them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet employers' needs.
White Paper	A government or other authoritative report giving information or proposals on an issue.



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