

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE BOARDMANSHIP

I. A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER'S CODE OF ETHICS

The acceptance of a Code of Ethics implies the understanding of the basic organization of school boards under the laws of the State of Nebraska. The acceptance of his/her office by a school board member binds the individual member to adherence to those state laws which apply to boards of education since boards of education are agencies of the State.

The NSBA Code of Ethics for school board members is divided into three areas of responsibility: 1) responsibility to the school district community; 2) responsibility to the school administration; and 3) responsibility to fellow board members.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMUNITY

A school board member in his/her relations with his/her school district community *SHOULD*:

- Realize that his/her primary responsibility is to the students.
- Recognize that his/her basic function is policy making.
- Remember that he/she is one of a team and must abide by and support all board decisions once they are made.
- Be well informed concerning the duties of a board member on both the state and the local level.
- Remember that he/she represents the entire school district community at all times.
- Accept the office of board member as a means of unselfish service with no intent to benefit personally, in any manner, from his/her board activities.
- Recognize that a board's responsibility is not to run the schools but to see that they are well run.
- Work through the properly appointed administrative officers according to adopted board policy.
- Refer, as far as possible, all appropriate requests to the proper administrative officer.
- Familiarize himself/herself in a broad and nontechnical manner with the total school system, including its problems, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Try to interpret to the school staff through the administration the attitudes, wishes, and needs of the people of the district and try to interpret to the people the needs, problems, and progress of the schools.
- Voice opinions frankly in board meetings and vote for what seems best for the students of the district.
- Vote only for the best qualified technical and professional employees who have been properly recommended by the appropriate administrative officer.
- Visit the schools and attend extra-curricular activities to gain clearer understanding of the functions of the school, but not to interfere in the day-by-day administration of the schools.
- Support and protect school employees in the proper performance of their duties.
- Treat confidential information with utmost respect.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The school board member in his/her relations with his/her school administration

SHOULD:

- Endeavor to establish sound, clearly defined policies which will direct and support the administration.
- Recognize and support the administrative chain of command and refer all complaints to the administrative staff for solutions and discuss them at board meetings only if such attempted solutions fail.
- In all matters of employment or dismissal of school personnel, act on the recommendations of the chief administrator.
- Give the chief administrator full responsibility and authority for discharging his/her professional duties, and hold him/her responsible for acceptable results.
- Recognize fully that the chief administrative officer is entirely responsible for carrying out a particular policy in accordance with state law and local regulations.
- Help to frame policies and plans for considering the recommendations of the appropriate administrative officer together with his/her reasons for making such recommendations.
- Require oral and written reports for the purpose of keeping the board properly informed on school matters.
- Grant to the chief administrative officer power to delegate authority to all other school personnel in keeping with their responsibilities.
- Establish job descriptions for the school's administrative officers and develop criteria for evaluating their performance.
- Present personal criticisms of school employees only to the appropriate administrative officer.

RESPONSIBILITY TO FELLOW BOARD MEMBERS

A school board member in his/her relations with his/her fellow board members

SHOULD:

- Recognize that only that action taken at official meetings is binding on the board.
- Remember that he/she should not make promises about how he/she will vote on matters that will come before the board.
- Uphold the intent of executive sessions and respect the privileged communication that exists in executive sessions.
- Share pertinent information on school matters or personnel problems with members of his/her own board and the chief administrator, and with members of boards who may be seeking help and information on school problems.
- Make decisions only after all facts on a question have been presented and discussed.
- Maintain harmonious relations with other board members when harmonious relations are consistent with their obligations to the schools.

II. THE NEW MEMBER'S LEADERSHIP ROLE

Anyone aspiring to school board leadership must realize that the position of school board member plays a key role in the total affairs of his/her school district community.

Consequently, a school board member is looked upon as one of the school district community leaders. In that respect, therefore, every school board member *SHOULD*:

- Be enthusiastic and interested in maintaining a quality educational program for students of all ages.
- Remember that after he/she is elected, he/she must represent all the people of his/her district and uphold all the laws governing the activities of the office.
- Know that school laws are the result of legislation and only proper legislative action can change them.
- Be aware that school board members are individually and collectively liable for their own violations of the laws. They are not exempt from court suit.
- Know that to seek and successfully hold the office of board member requires much homework and an ability to cope with situations objectively. Decisions based on emotion lead only to chaos and discord and the students suffer the results.
- Act as a member of a team or unit. Board members have authority only when attending a legally called meeting.
- Become committed to those interests which will be of greatest benefit to the students and the school district community as a whole.
- Create lines of close communication with the school administration to develop and maintain objectivity and balance between the board and the administration.
- Be prepared to counter the comments of self-appointed authorities and critics who might be familiar with only a small part of the school district's total operation. Tactfully direct that "authority" or critic to the chief administrative officer of the school.
- Be aware that what he/she says publicly in school board matters may be taken as the opinion of the entire school board.
- Know that most programs exist because of cultural pressures from patrons, communities, legislators, etc. No program should be added to satisfy a mere whim.
- Recognize that community involvement is a necessary part of any school district's activities.
- Attend all board meetings and be willing and able to spend time to attend and participate in workshops and activities that contribute to the growth of each board member.
- Realize that, at school board meetings, there is room for neither personal biases, certain religious convictions, the assumption that rumors are truths, nor decisions based on second-hand information.

III. FOR SMOOTHER RUNNING SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

School board meetings are occasions when a school district can put its best foot forward or fall flat on its face. By law, school board meetings are required to be public meetings

specifically to keep the local citizens informed about their schools. A school board which conducts an informative meeting goes far in carrying out the spirit of the right-to-know laws.

Those boards which acknowledge the presence of local citizens at a public meeting by affording them an opportunity to address the board will build much trust and public faith with the community.

On the other hand, boards which conduct public meetings in a vacuum by failing to explain certain actions to citizens in attendance serve to build a climate of mistrust with the very persons who can help the schools.

Prior to and during the meeting of the board, members will want to check this list of *things to do* in order to see that their school board meeting is most effectively organized and conducted.

PRIOR TO THE MEETING

- Provide adequate seating for guests.
- Distribute agendas containing all the non-confidential material the board members have.
- When necessary, have legible name plates in front of every board member.
- When necessary, provide a special place for the press, preferably near the board members. Also, assign a school representative to sit with the reporters to answer any immediate question. A press table near the board will enable the reporters to cover all details of the meeting. This proximity to board action will minimize inaccurate reporting.
- Start on time.

DURING THE MEETING

- Conduct board meetings in a business-like and expeditious manner. Wandering from the subject is to be avoided.
- Explain to the public any action or discussion by the board which may need clarification.
- Give citizens an opportunity to address the board. A specific time should be set aside for this purpose. Permitting citizens to speak out at any point in a meeting encourages control of the board meeting by those citizens.
- Permit non-residents to address the board only if the content of their remarks is known and approved ahead of time. In this day and age, it is not uncommon for organized groups to send representatives to board meetings in a number of districts to espouse a cause and unwittingly or even intentionally spread alarm and aggravation.
- Be discrete with off-the-cuff remarks.
- When time permits, take the opportunity to have some phase of the school district highlighted. It is an ideal occasion to have students talk about a program, teachers

explain a new course of studies, or a non-instructional person show slides or transparencies on transportation, cafeterias, or maintenance.

- Schedule, whenever possible, any executive sessions to be held after the agenda items have been disposed of.
- Listen courteously to a citizen's remarks and respond with a polite "thank you".
Avoid argumentation.
- Spend the briefest amount of time possible on minor items. Save the majority of time for items of major importance.

Reviewed _____ Revised _____