

## **Important principles for board members: Can you live up to these important board member principles?**

Being elected to your local board is a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

Here are nine principles of a successful school board member:

1. **The child comes first!** Other concerns such as negotiating contracts, the selection of building sites, construction, purchasing equipment and setting bus routes can appear to be more important. But these concerns should be viewed in light of how each affects the children of your district and their education.
2. **School boards are community members** who establish rules for how the district is run. The board hires the best administrative team available and makes that team responsible for the district's day-to-day operation.
3. **School board members function as a board; not individually.** This is, perhaps, the hardest lesson for a board member to learn and accept. Individually, you have no authority. Your vote, along with the votes of the other board members, has tremendous power. But alone, outside an official meeting (unless delegated authority by the board) you are just an ordinary citizen with no more influence than other citizens. Adhering to this principle will save you and your fellow board members many headaches.
4. **The board sets the policies.** For schools to reach the objectives the public expects, the board establishes written policies for student and staff conduct and makes sure the superintendent and staff work within the framework of those policies.  
Carrying out board policies is the responsibility of the superintendent and those under his or her authority. To ensure that there is a clear understanding of the board's policies and that the division of responsibility is clearly defined, the board and superintendent should decide together who has authority for what.
5. **Know your schools.** To vote intelligently, a board member needs to know a great deal about the schools and trends in education.  
Have the superintendent arrange opportunities for you to visit the schools

and talk with principals, teachers and other employees. Remember, you are just a citizen learning about your schools so you can function more effectively in board meetings. You are not there to find fault or to do formal evaluations.

6. **School board members are the people's representatives** in the school program. The public expects board members to have most of the answers concerning school problems. A great many people do not understand the limitations of a board member's authority.

Counsel those who come to you with complaints to use the appropriate chain of command for solving problems - teacher, principal, superintendent, board. Never promise that you will resolve their problems.

Effective boardsmanship means being able to voice the minority opinion when voting on an issue, then supporting the majority vote in the community.

7. **Being an effective board member means participating** in regional, state and national meetings. Such meetings are opportunities to meet other school board members, get a broader view of local issues, and learn about state and national concerns that will affect your district.

8. **Abiding by code of conduct and board member ethics is important.** A sure-fire way to permanently damage your own and the board's reputation is to violate your board's policies on member conduct and ethics. Refusing to disclose information that should be public makes the board appear to be hiding something. On the other hand, members who disclose confidential information about students, staff, pending legal issues and the many other confidential matters that come before the board will not only damage your reputation but expose the district to possible litigation.

Some board members have relationships with special-interest groups to the detriment of the district; playing favorites is counterproductive and debilitating. Others have been known to speak out in public in opposition to previous board action. The time to speak up and state your position is before the board votes, not after!

9. **Enjoy your work as a school board member.** While board membership does not offer economic compensation, it does challenge your creativity, your

wisdom and your courage. There is great satisfaction knowing you are providing the educational opportunities for the children of your district.

From resources provided by the Oregon School Boards Association.

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