

SCHOOL BOARD BASICS FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Arkansas School Boards Association





Welcome

This manual is designed just for you, a new school board member recently elected or appointed. Congratulations!

Now the work begins, and ASBA is here to help you, starting with ***School Board Basics***. We've put together the essential information to get you on track, and we've designed the manual as an expandable resource that will become your personal toolbox.

Make it your own

This basic manual is a starter kit you'll customize by adding to it during the course of your board service. We've punched three holes in each page so you can fit it into a binder of your choice.

Over time, you'll gather lots of written information. At board orientation, meetings, and training events, the handouts pile up. Board members tell us they like to punch the papers they collect and add them to their "board reference library" binder.

Board Basics

We've divided the manual into five main sections with information, explanations, examples, and questions-and-answers. In most sections, we help you practice what you've read in ***Check Your Understanding***. Throughout, we've left space for you to jot

notes. Below is a short overview of what you'll find in these start-up pages.

School boards and the law

In the first three sections, we'll explain the laws you'll need to understand right away:

- the roles and responsibilities of school boards
- the Freedom of Information Act (board meetings and sharing information)
- the ethics laws that apply to you

Growing confident

It's tough to be in the public spotlight as a board member, and the work can wear you down. So we've included a section called ***Keys to Confidence***, because it's all about how to become a confident board member by getting comfortable in your role; taking care of yourself; handling complaints; and accepting savvy tips from veteran board members.

Resources

The last section holds lists, forms, examples, and more answered questions. You'll find a glossary and website references there, too.



Roles and Responsibilities

At the urging of ASBA and our members, in 2009 the Arkansas legislature updated the law that describes the duties of school boards and the extent of their power. Below we'll look at this law and what it means to you as a board member. First, a little history.

Background

Until its revision, the decades-old school board law was out of step with modern times. The antiquated law required school board members to be so “hands on” that their duties could include patching the schoolhouse roof or chopping wood for the stove that warmed the single classroom.

Today school boards no longer directly manage school district operations. Instead, the board hires and evaluates the work of a licensed superintendent, who acts as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the district and oversees a specialized staff.

The revised law is known as Act 1180 of 2009 and codified (written out and grouped with other state statutes) as 6-13-620. It identifies important responsibilities board members must take to heart and faithfully perform.

Keep in mind that school boards are the governing unit that's closest to a community's schools, an aspect of the local control that has long characterized Arkansas schooling. For the success of your schools and our entire state, it's crucial to do your job well according to both the letter *and* spirit of the law.

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In this section, you'll sometimes see a Question & Answer superscript that looks like this: ^{Q&A} It appears next to a word or phrase to indicate that a related question is answered at the end of this section.

What Arkansas law requires

We'll cover ten sections of the law about your duties, following each one with a short discussion of what it means to you as a board member. Before we look at each requirement individually, here's an abbreviated list of them.

Your Top Ten Duties

1. Attend board meetings
2. Set mission and direction
3. Follow all laws
4. Make and follow policies
5. Hire staff and hold hearings
6. Hire the superintendent
7. Evaluate the superintendent
8. Oversee finances and budget
9. Visit schools
10. Get training

Now let's look at what it takes to carry out each area of your responsibilities. All school board members must:

- 1** Attend their board's meetings, including the regular monthly meeting and any special meetings.

Aim for perfect attendance

Legally convened^{Q&A} board meetings are the only time the board can conduct its business, so do your best to always be present. Your fellow board members – and the community – need to be able to rely on your full participation. The board can't conduct its meeting unless a **quorum** (majority of the members) is present, so every member's attendance matters.

Make up missed work

Occasionally, you may have to miss a meeting due to illness or an unavoidable schedule conflict. Catch up on what you missed by reading the meeting's minutes, reviewing the documents that were discussed, and asking the superintendent about particular points.

Why ask the superintendent about the meeting you missed instead of another board member? The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act prevents even two board members from discussing board business outside of legal meetings. We'll explain further in the **FOI** section.

Be prepared

Preparing for your meetings is just as important as showing up at them. Review the agenda,^{Q&A} study all advance materials, and make a list of any comments and questions you want to bring up at the meeting.

Meeting frequency and types

The board must meet to do business at least once during each month students are in school. Since July is usually the only month students are out of school, boards don't have to meet then. But most of them do to keep pace with the busy preparations for school start-up in August.

Arkansas school boards have two types of meetings, regular and special.

Regular meetings are those mandatory once-a-month meetings held according to a prearranged schedule. But the board can meet more often if it needs to take care of pressing business, such as an unexpected situation that comes up. These meetings are known as special meetings or sometimes referred to as **called** meetings, because the board can be called into session by its president, secretary, any three board members, or when requested by a written petition signed by 50 voters in the district.

Keeping current with calendars

It's a good idea for every school board to develop a **board calendar** for the entire school year that includes all planned meetings or related events the board schedules in advance. For example, the calendar pinpoints board meetings and the dates of conferences and other training events that some or all board members expect to attend.

Your district has a **school district calendar** of events, school holidays, and so on. It's posted on your website and probably printed and distributed to students, parents, and employees. Coordinating the board's calendar with the school district's calendar will help you prevent scheduling conflicts, like the sports tournaments that can slip your mind.

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2 Determine the mission and direction of the school district.

The board works with its superintendent as a **leadership team** to identify the overall mission of the school district and the plans that will be put in place as the “roadmap” to fulfill the mission. The terms in this part of the law can be confusing, so let’s clarify them and others that are closely related.

Sorting out terms

The **mission** of any organization is its basic purpose, what its work is all about. The **mission statement** is a concise written expression of that mission. It answers the question, “Why do we exist?” and tells the world who you are and how you go about your work. Students’ success is always at the core of a school district’s mission.

The **direction** of the school district has to do with the district’s leadership – that’s *you*, your fellow board members, and the superintendent – in relation to fulfilling the mission (the reason for being) while making progress toward an envisioned future (the long-term aims.)

What’s the difference between a mission statement and a **vision statement**? While the two are closely connected, the vision statement is about the desired *future* of your school district, *what* it seeks to achieve or to be in the long run. The mission statement is about your district’s *present*, the reason it exists at this very time, and *how* it’s working toward what it wants to achieve in the future.

Sample mission statement

In partnership with families and the community, our mission is to provide our students with the environment, resources, opportunities, and support they need to achieve to their potential, both academically and personally.

Sample vision statement

Our vision is for all students to graduate fully prepared for college, careers, and a life of continuous learning.

The mission belongs to everyone

Your school district’s vision and mission statements were developed by members of the leadership team. They probably invited input from the larger school community so everyone, both inside and outside the schools, understands the district’s purpose and where it’s headed.

Always keep the district’s mission at the heart of your board work. It’s the “yardstick” for measuring how well proposed decisions and plans align with the mission and support it. Make sure the mission

Look on your district’s website for the vision and mission statements. Hopefully you’ve seen them on the walls of the administration building and the schools. Are they each just a few words, or are they expressed in a couple of short sentences? Challenge yourself to memorize them.

statement is prominently posted on the wall of your board meeting room. Refer to it regularly during your discussions to help you keep the kids at the center of all your deliberations and decisions.

Planning for success

The steps the district takes to live up to its mission need to be detailed in a carefully designed plan. It's sometimes called a **long-range plan**, because it can cover several years. More often it's known as a **strategic plan**, because it specifies a collection of ideas and actions (strategies) that will lead to reaching certain goals.

The strategic plan lays out the overall goals for the district and the steps that lead to fulfilling them. All aspects of the plan should clearly relate to the district's focus on students. The children's achievement is always the priority.

The plan identifies all the people responsible for various actions and the money, materials, and any other resources they need to do the work. The plan shows how the budget supports it and spells out the timeline everyone will follow. It also specifies various ways to measure progress so everyone can tell how well the plan is working and make adjustments along the way.

3 Follow all the state and federal laws that govern public schools.

Rely on professional guidance

So many laws govern our schools that board members can't know them all. That's why your district uses the services of a lawyer who can advise you. Also, part of your superintendent's job is to keep the board posted on Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) requirements that affect your district.

ASBA's services to its member districts include legal consultation to supplement the guidance of your school board lawyer or other local attorney.

We have a lawyer on staff who will answer your questions about school laws and related matters. Our general counsel isn't a staff member, but can be hired by school boards for needed litigation (legal proceedings). Both lawyers have strong backgrounds in school law and present professional development seminars on school law and how to follow it.

If you or your superintendent have questions about an area of school law, contact ASBA. Your district's annual ASBA membership dues cover consultations.

4 Make, enforce, and obey school district policies.

Policy imperatives

Policy making is a serious board responsibility, because board policies ultimately affect just about every aspect of the school district. Also, the board must *always* follow its policies, 100 percent of the time. Policy and practice are two sides of the same governance coin, and they can't be separated from each other.

No one in the school system is excused from following board policy. Your board can change a policy that's not fulfilling its intent, but change the policy *before* you're tempted to violate or ignore it. In lawsuits against school boards, courts have a record of harshly judging boards that have violated their own policies.

Sorting out terms

A **policy** is a general statement the board makes, in writing, about a desired condition, direction, or belief. In simple terms, think of policies as the guidelines for how the school system is to operate.

For example, policies can cover what the board wants to happen in the district, such as the kind of public conduct expected at school events. Or policies can describe what mustn't happen, like placing limits on the superintendent's spending in a certain budget category.

A policy can include an explanation of the reasons behind it to help clarify why it's needed. Everyone is more willing to

respect a policy and abide by it when they understand the underlying need and how the policy works on behalf of students and staff.

The term **procedures** is used in connection with policies, because procedures are the methods or steps for carrying out a policy. Procedures are specific, telling how to put the basic policy into action by stating *how, by whom, where, and when* certain actions are to be carried out or limited.

A policy might outline some procedures, or administrators may develop them so they can put the policy into practice. The board should approve all formal procedures to ensure they're true to the intention of the policies they're based on.

The board's policies are organized into a **policy manual**, usually a loose-leaf notebook or in electronic format so they're easy to review and revise. The major policy categories usually include:

- organization of the school district
- school board operations
- general school administration
- financial management
- facilities
- personnel
- instructional programs
- students (discipline, grading, attendance, and graduation requirements)
- communication inside and outside the district
- parent involvement and volunteer programs
- relationships with other education agencies and organizations

ASBA's Policy Service

Does keeping your board's policies current and in tune with laws and regulations sound time consuming? Yes, it does. Overwhelming? It can be.

That's why ASBA has developed its popular Model Policy Service to guide school districts in developing local policy that stays up-to-date in relation to the continuous developments in education, especially new laws.

Every year after the legislative session, experts at ASBA publish a Model Policy Manual that contains samples of all the policies the laws require a district to have, plus others we recommend to help your district run smoothly.

Our policies are models that allow for some flexibility, so a district can customize them according to local needs and preferences. Even so, we encourage subscribers to call us with questions and to check with us *before* making major modifications to our suggested policies.

ASBA offers its Model Policy Service at a reasonable annual fee for each subscribing district. Any time court rulings or changes in state and federal laws or ADE rules create the need for new or revised local policies, ASBA send updates to subscribers.

Obeying policy

As we stressed earlier in this section, the law requires your school board to scrupulously follow its policies, making sure that policy and practice are in harmony. Board

members need to serve as positive role models for school personnel (students and staff) and the entire community, so following the rules and behaving ethically are absolute musts.

The section, ***Living Up to Ethics Laws***, explains the serious nature of Arkansas ethics law. The ***Keys to Confidence*** section has some practical personal guidance, too.

Your board keeps current through presentations, reports, statistics, and other data from the superintendent and other staff. Keeping up with data (student and staff absenteeism statistics, disciplinary infractions numbers, test scores, budget details, and so much more) will help you know how well policies are working. Your superintendent can also alert you to the need for new policies or updates.

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Enforcing policies

When it comes to enforcing policies, board members don't police the district. It's *never* your job to directly monitor a school or oversee employees – that's the job of the superintendent and his or her staff.

The *only* employee who reports to the board is the superintendent. He or she and other staff are responsible for seeing that the board's policies are followed in the day-to-day life of the district. So what does that mean for school board members?

Your job is to do board work, which is big picture and long term. The board stays focused on the school district with a wide-angle lens, not a microscope. The job of the superintendent and other employees is the ground-level work.

Here's a simple rule of thumb to remind you how to keep your duties separate from those of school district employees: *If it's anyone else's job, it's not yours.*

Making sure the buses run on time? Someone else has that job. Patrolling the high school's halls? A resource officer does it, so it's not your job. Sitting in the back of the science classroom to rate the teacher? That's the principal's job. Holding an employee grievance hearing? Yes, that's part of your job.

No one else can do the school board's job, and by the same token, a board member mustn't attempt to do the work of school system staff. You'd be annoyed if someone tried to take over your job, wouldn't you? The superintendent and all other employees feel the same way.

A Board Member's Authority

A single board member has no power. Authority resides in the board as a whole and only when it's meeting in a legally convened session.

5 Employ staff and conduct hearings.

Your role in hiring staff

It takes board action to form a contract with an employee, but the board doesn't interview or select potential employees (except for superintendent candidates). Board members rely on the superintendent and principals to select from among applicants and recommend the employees to the board.

The board's role in hiring is to make legal a decision that's actually made by a school administrator at the building or district level. Likewise, reassigning certified staff, which also legally requires board action, should be a matter of officially approving decisions made by principals and the superintendent.

Keep hearings fair

The school board serves as the "finder of fact" (judge and jury) when employees are being recommended for termination or nonrenewal; when students are recommended for expulsion; or when employees are dissatisfied with the administration's resolution of their grievance (complaint).

In all instances board members should have no previous knowledge of the circumstances that are the basis of the recommendation that's led to the hearing. That's essential for fairness. When board members have had no involvement or knowledge of the individual's situation, they're in a position to hold a fair and impartial hearing based only on what's presented at that time.

6 Employ a superintendent of schools to oversee the day-to-day operations of the school district.

Superintendents aren't forever

The time will come when the relationship between the board and the superintendent has run its course, either because the superintendent retires or takes another job, or the board dismisses him or her or doesn't renew the contract.

Hiring your next superintendent is the most important single decision you and your fellow board members ever make.

The search is on

Launching a superintendent search is a weighty, time-consuming undertaking. Many boards decide to take on the task themselves and may do it as a corporate body or appoint a search committee. Other boards, recognizing the enormity of the search work, hire a firm that specializes in finding qualified candidates that fit the needs and aspirations the board has identified.

Such firms charge for their work, and some boards economize by conducting the search themselves. That decision can prove

to be false economy, because the competition for superintendent candidates can be intense, and knowing the ins and outs of the search process takes experience.

Ask Us

ASBA can recommend reliable superintendent search firms that have a record of successful placements in Arkansas. If you decide to do the search yourselves, contact ASBA for information that can help you manage the stages of preparation, processing, and selecting.

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7 Evaluate the superintendent annually or at least before extending his or her contract.

All employees are entitled to know “How am I doing?” The superintendent is no exception. Regular feedback reinforces those aspects of your CEO’s leadership and management that are getting results. On the other hand, performance ratings also reveal deficiencies the superintendent can address as soon as he or she is aware of shortcomings.

Performance objectives are essential

The first step in the evaluation process is always to be sure the superintendent’s job description and performance objectives are clearly written and agreed upon from the get-go.

The board won’t be able to fairly assess the superintendent’s effectiveness without job objectives and performance standards to measure them against. They’re the basis of a factual assessment rather than one that reflects a hunch, personal preferences or differences, or unfounded rumors.

Evaluate at prearranged intervals, at least annually and perhaps mid-year, too. Regular feedback keeps *both* the board and superintendent fully aware of responsibilities, mutual expectations, and the pace of progress.

Support your superintendent

Go over the superintendent’s evaluation with him or her face-to-face in executive session or a private one-on-one meeting between each individual board member and the superintendent. Stress the positives while being frank about shortfalls.

Help your CEO form a plan to capitalize on strengths and turn around weaknesses.

Do all you can to support your superintendent and help him or her be successful. The position is very demanding and stressful. When you don’t agree with the superintendent, avoid revealing it publicly. You can discuss your differences in private and agree to disagree agreeably.

Helpful resources

In the ***Resources*** section of this manual is a list of websites. We’ve noted those that have information about evaluating a superintendent. You’ll also find a sample form, ***Evaluation of the Superintendent***, among the ***Resources*** pages. Keep in mind that *it’s only an example* to prompt your board to develop an evaluation instrument that’s precisely aligned with your superintendent’s performance objectives.

School boards are wise to regularly assess their own work. You can use the forms in the ***Resources*** section. ***How Do You Measure Up?*** is a tool that guides you in rating yourselves on the six areas of the ***Standards for Arkansas School Boards***, which were developed by the Delegate Assembly of board members representing all regions of the state. Form a plan of action for how to bring your ratings up.

Seriously consider asking your communities, both inside and outside the school district, for feedback about how they view your job performance as school board members. It’s a brave move, but you stand to learn what others see as your strengths and to gather their suggestions for improvement.

8 Oversee school district finances and all aspects of the budget, never permitting the district to end the fiscal year with a negative balance.

Oversight in action

Budget and finance responsibilities are huge and often troublesome. Most board members don't have expertise in managing a large budget, *but* that's not your job. Your responsibility is to make sure the superintendent and his designated staff develop a realistic, balanced budget and manage all finances according to the legal and procedural mandates of the state.

How does the board oversee finances? By applying the old adage, *trust but verify*. That includes establishing and following clear budgeting policies and procedures; being involved in the budgeting process; freely asking relevant questions of the administrators who report to the board on the budget document; and insisting on current, accurate figures and supporting data at every monthly board meeting.

Study the ***Outline of a Budgeting Process*** and learn how it compares with your district's customary approach to fiscal planning and monitoring. How can your board improve your district's budgeting process?

Outline of a Budgeting Process

Here's an outline of how to develop a school district budget step-by-step in three sequential phases. These suggestions can help the board gauge the effectiveness of the district's budgeting practices.

Phase 1 – Understand the facts of the budgeting foundation

- The superintendent is ultimately responsible for preparing, presenting, interpreting, and administering the budget document.
- The budget document should result from the cooperative efforts of staff, including those at the district and building levels.
- Preparing and modifying the budget is a continuous management process in conjunction with the strategic plan.

Phase 2 – Build and adopt the budget document in this order:

- Define the strategic plan with its goals, objectives, and timeline.
- Prepare the spending plan, which translates the strategic plan into estimated costs.
- Construct the revenue plan by itemizing all income sources.
- Compare the spending and revenue plans for balance and make necessary adjustments.
- Review the budget document to ensure it accurately reflects and supports the strategic plan.
- Adopt the budget before the new fiscal year starts so it guides spending from the beginning.

Phase 3 – Follow up

- Record the budget in the official board minutes, publish it, and send it to ADE.
- Regularly monitor the budget document, making adjustments to reflect any change in district needs or resources.
- Throughout the year, consider various alternatives in the strategic plan and the budget so the two remain aligned.

Audits

Every school district must have an annual financial audit, done either by a Certified Public Accountant, which the district chooses and pays, or by a division of the Legislative Joint Auditing Committee, which is a free state service.

You certainly don't want to be surprised by the audit's findings. So keeping tabs on district finances is crucial, because *the school board is ultimately responsible for the district's financial solvency*. Pleading ignorance will never excuse a board's lack of sufficient oversight. Stay fully informed. A district can all too quickly find itself on the brink of fiscal distress that can eventually lead to a state takeover or annexation to another school district.

Bright Idea

Some school districts hold annual budget work sessions that require every budget manager (both district and building-level administrators) to advocate for their budget in a presentation to the board. All staff explain their proposed budget, how it aligns with the district's strategic plan, and how it will help improve student achievement.

The result of this transparent process? A better informed board and a staff more invested in supporting the district's budget plan in relationship to students.

9 Visit district schools and classrooms, when students are present, at least annually and also attend some events and functions.

Go as a group

The key word here is *visit*, and we recommend the board makes that visit as a group. You'll not only all see the same things together at the same time, meaning you'll share a common experience, but you'll minimize disruptions to the school.

Make an appointment with the principal so you'll have time for a brief informal chat and enjoy a guided tour as the principal or other guide points out notable features. You can quietly look in on a classroom if invited, but refrain from disturbing the teaching and learning process.

The time you spend at the school is about getting a sense of the facility and the people who work there every school day. Your visit isn't a white-glove inspection tour or an opportunity to roam, snoop, spread gossip, give directives, or "take names." You're public officials who are obligated to behave politely, like ... visitors.

10 Take the training and professional development necessary to serve as active, informed members of the school board.

Take your training seriously

Every year, all school board members must earn at least six hours of instruction in various topics. The law requires all newly elected board members to participate in nine hours of training by the end of the year following the year in which they were elected.

So if you're a new board member elected in 2010, you must have nine hours of training under your belt by the end of 2011.

According to ADE, *if any member of a school board fails to complete annual training as required by law, the school district can be placed on probationary status based on the state's Standards of Accreditation.*

ASBA offerings

- New School Board Member Institute – every fall after the state's annual school elections in September. The one-day session is designed to help new board members get up to speed on the basics of board service.
- Fall Regional Meetings for board members – held in each of 14 state regions. These meetings are facilitated by ASBA staff and focus on a timely topic of interest to all board members. A discussion session allows everyone to ask questions and share ideas.
- Annual ASBA Conference – held each December, the conference offers numerous training sessions for school board members and superintendents.
- Joint Conference with the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA) – held each spring, the conference focuses on legislative issues and other important topics.

- Board Academy – a professional development event for school boards and their superintendents that spans a long weekend. Each board and superintendent work together as a leadership team to learn and practice team-building and leadership skills. Teams return home with a revitalized sense of commitment and optimism, along with a plan for putting new insights to work.

Other events are scheduled at various times, such as seminars on school laws and ways to improve your board meetings, for example. ASBA can customize professional development for your leadership team on just about any topic. We also encourage board members to attend seminars and conferences sponsored by the National School Boards Association and NSBA's Southern Region Conference.

ADE and your local co-op also offer professional development for school board members, as do education consultants around the state.

Check Your Understanding



1. Name the two types of Arkansas school board meetings that are designated in the law.
2. How often does your board have to meet?
3. Explain the difference between a school district calendar and a board calendar.
4. How often must your school district's financial records be audited? Who can do the audits?
5. Fill in the blanks with the right word:
 - A _____ is a guideline the board creates for how the school system is to operate.
 - Procedures tell how a _____ is to be carried out.
 - The only school district employee the board oversees is _____.
6. Decide whether these statements are true or false. If false, restate them to make them true:
 - Only school board members must follow board policies.
 - Boards only evaluate the superintendent before extending his or her contract.
 - All board members have to take nine hours of training every year.



Questions & Answers

Q What makes a school board meeting “legally convened?”

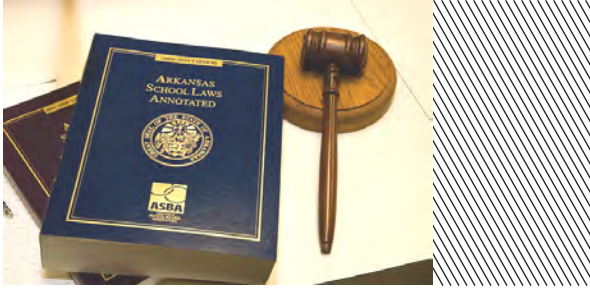
A Any of your county’s print and broadcast media that have requested to be notified of a board meeting must be given at least two hours notice, along with the meeting location and general purpose. Usually a designated school district employee notifies the media. Meetings that involve personnel matters must be held at 5:00 p.m. or later, a time that’s after most workers’ close of daily business.

Q Who’s responsible for preparing the board’s meeting agenda?

A Many boards delegate that duty to the board president and the superintendent, and they can accept input from other board members. An effective and inclusive way to approach preparing the agenda is by holding an **agenda meeting**, usually about a week before the regular meeting. This work session is conducted in an organized manner, but it’s more informal than a regular meeting. Board members can talk over district business and cooperate in planning the agenda around it. Like all board meetings, two-hour notification is required.

Q Our district has had a losing football season for several years, and my constituents expect me to oust the coach. How do I go about it?

A You don’t, because that’s not your job. The superintendent is in charge of decisions about school personnel. He or she can discuss job performance with an employee or the employee’s supervisor, but you can’t. To remain fair and unbiased, you’re obligated to turn away from complaints or gossip about any district employee. Also, as a board member, you don’t represent any single group; your immediate allegiance is to the *entire* school district and community.



Freedom of Information

Today we often hear the terms **accountability** (taking responsibility) and **transparency** (being open and understandable) in connection with the operations of businesses, organizations, and particularly government. That includes our school districts, too.

In our democratic society, citizens have a right to know how officials are conducting the public's business. We also have the right to expect our public officials to carry out their duties responsibly, openly, and legally. Protecting those rights is the concept underlying *freedom of information*, and the law is the force behind it.

The Arkansas Freedom of Information Act (FOIA or FOI) is one of the strongest and most comprehensive such laws in the nation. The law was passed in 1967 and has been updated several times since.

Overall, FOI applies to any agency or government unit, including a school district, that's supported by public funds or spends them. But certain aspects of the law apply to school boards and school districts in a specific way. So this section covers the information you're obligated to make public and the FOI requirements for board meetings and executive sessions.

The *Arkansas Freedom of Information Handbook* is a handy reference last revised in late 2009. ASBA furnishes the booklet to all new board members, and its scope is eye-opening. Until you have a chance to read it for yourself, the basics in the section will get you started.

In this section, you'll sometimes see a Question & Answer superscript that looks like this: Q&A It appears next to a word or phrase to indicate that a related question is answered at the end of this section.

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Sharing information

Part of the FOI law deals with the public's right to view documents or data. In school districts, sharing written or electronic information and data with the public is primarily the responsibility of the superintendent and other staff.

Certain school district documents aren't subject to FOI, such as student records and the particulars of personnel records that would constitute an invasion of privacy.

Portions of an employee's personnel records can be disclosed, but some parts can't, such as social security number, medical and social background, and other personal information, like marital status. According to laws that protect personal privacy, such parts of personnel records would have to be left out if the file were shared under an FOI request.

But it's a different matter when it comes to your board business. What you and your fellow board members put into writing in relation to school board business is subject to FOI, including electronic communication, such as e-mail and texting.

As a matter of fact, any data records relating to school business are subject to FOI, including written communication between the superintendent and board members. But communication (in person or otherwise) between a *single* board member and the superintendent doesn't qualify, because that exchange isn't classified as a "meeting" under FOI. Why? Because only one board member is involved. You'll learn more about such meetings next.

When a superintendent search is underway, call ASBA for specific instructions on handling FOI requests.

Open meetings

A major portion of FOI addresses open public meetings and regulates when you can and can't move into executive session, why you can go into executive session, and who you can include in executive session.

When it comes to meetings, six aspects of FOI guide you:

1 Board meetings must be held in public.

The public, employees, students, and reporters have the right to attend your meeting as observers, so the date, time, and place of all regular meetings have to be posted on the district's website.

A special meeting requires at least two hours advance notice to the local media (newspapers, radio, and TV stations) that have a standing request with the district to be notified of such meetings. When a meeting has anything to do with personnel matters, such as hiring decisions or personnel policies for example, the meeting can't start before 5:00 p.m., including week-ends and holidays. Typically, the superintendent assumes responsibility for proper notification.

A board meeting is a *public meeting* in the sense that it's *a meeting held in public*. Everyone has a right to sit in the audience and an obligation to behave appropriately.

But they don't have a right to address the board or otherwise participate in the meeting unless the board has made such a request. For instance, the board might ask to listen to a citizens' committee report, accept or bestow honors, or watch a group of students perform.

Managing Public Comments

Boards that opt to include a period of unsolicited public comment during their meetings are wise to adopt a policy and spell out procedures to effectively manage that process.

For example, a board can set aside time for public comments at the beginning or end of a regular board meeting. The length of time a person speaks can be limited to, say, three minutes or so. A timer with a loud bell keeps everyone on track. Post a sign-up sheet outside the meeting room or on the district website so speakers can list their name and the topic they want to talk about.

Be clear (on your website, on the sign-up sheet, and in a statement a board member reads aloud before the comment period begins) that the time limit is firm, comments about school personnel are off limits, and board members won't respond to statements or questions.

2 A "board meeting" situation can exist even if a board quorum isn't present.

No, a board can't legally take a binding vote unless a quorum (majority) is present. However, if two or more board members

discuss school business with each other (face-to-face conversation, phone, e-mail, other electronic communication, or sign language) *outside of a legal board meeting or executive session* in either a private or public place, that "meeting" of two board members violates FOI law.^{Q&A} Keep in mind that proper public notice must be made at least two hours in advance for *any* type of board meeting.

3 Executive session is a limited exception to open public meetings.

School boards can go into executive session for any of five reasons, and *only* these five: to consider the employment, appointment, promotion, demotion, or resignation of an employee. *The law recognizes no other valid reasons for a school board to go into executive session.*

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FOI allows other government agencies these five reasons for going into executive session, *plus* a sixth: disciplining employees. But school boards don't discipline employees; that's the superintendent's job.

Student matters don't qualify for executive session. A parent can ask for a closed expulsion hearing, but a hearing isn't the same as an executive session. The federal laws that protect a student's privacy are very specific and allow little latitude. In uncertain situations, consult your lawyer.

4 The board must state the reason for an executive session up front.

Before the executive session, a board member (usually the president) *must* state which one of the five reasons is the subject of executive session. For example, "We're going into executive session to discuss the promotion of a district employee."

What other school district topic can you discuss in an executive meeting? None. Can you vote in executive session? Never. You can't take any action at all, and no one can take minutes either. Any decisions you reach in executive session must be formally voted on in public when the board reconvenes in open session.

Here's another non-negotiable point: What's discussed in executive session *stays* in executive session. No exceptions. If you were to repeat the confidences of executive session, you'd quickly lose standing, respect, and trust. Violating the privacy of executive session is a serious breach of the law – and personal ethics.

5 Don't vote to go into executive session.

The board can't vote inside executive session, so if you vote yourselves in, you can't vote yourselves out. By mutual agreement among board members, just announce that you're going into executive session and state the reason (one of the valid five).

6 Executive session is only for the board and those it invites.

An executive session can't include a member of the public, a patron, a parent, or a reporter. But the board has the option of inviting certain people to join them in executive session.

The board can invite the superintendent into the executive meeting. In particular instances, like reassigning an employee (which is an employment matter), that person's direct supervisor, such as a principal, might be included.

The executive session "belongs" to the board, so the superintendent doesn't automatically join in. Even if he or she customarily attends executive session, the board can "uninvite" the superintendent, usually to discuss his or her job performance.



1. When the your local newspaper and broadcast media have a standing request to be notified of a special school board meeting, how much advance notice of any meeting must the school district give them?

2. List the five reasons a school board can go into executive session.

3. Explain why your board should never vote to go into executive session.

4. Name the job titles of those the board can ask into executive session. Who *can't* join you in executive session?

NOTES

Questions & Answers



Q Does FOI mean I can only talk to another member of my board during our meetings?

A You *can* talk to another board member outside of your meetings, just not about board business, and that includes school employees. FOI law is all about safeguarding the interests of the public and promoting transparency.

The time to talk over school business is during a legal board meeting or in a training session or other event announced to the public and media according to FOI rules. You can also talk to your board colleagues in executive session, but *only* about the five permitted topics: an employee's employment, appointment, promotion, demotion, or resignation.

Keep in mind that at some point in your board service, you and your board colleagues may have to be both judge and jury in a student or employee hearing. You're duty bound to be impartial and fair. Your objectivity could be seriously compromised if you had advance or private knowledge.

Individual board members can ask the superintendent for information, but it needs to be made available to *all* board members equally. Exclusive information or cutting private deals on any level is *never* acceptable. You'll earn trust and respect by always doing your board job honestly and openly.

Q Our board doesn't allow public comments at our meetings. Is that wise?

A The law doesn't require you to listen to public comments at a board meeting. But many school boards have found that their relationship with the community is strengthened with a *structured* process for citizens to address the board respectfully. Structuring the public period means establishing guidelines in a policy, such as defining the acceptable time and topics.

When it comes to dealing with parents, patrons, and staff, only the superintendent is the *executive* member of the leadership team. The board has delegated its CEO the responsibility for carrying out policy, overseeing day-to-day administration, and addressing problems that crop up.

Q What can I say when someone corners me after church to complain about her son's teacher?

A Many parents don't know how the school system works or understand the "chain of command." Others know it very well, but want to bypass the process using you as their shortcut.

When a parent approaches you with a complaint about a child's teacher, quickly turn the conversation around with the question, "When did you talk over your concerns with the teacher?" Explain that the next step is a conference with the principal and, if necessary, a meeting with the superintendent will be in order.

Tell the parent that a school board member doesn't have the power to address her concerns, so you're directing her to the school personnel who can.

*Look to the **Keys to Confidence** section for more discussion about handling complaints.*

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Living Up to Ethics Laws

The Arkansas legislature first passed ethics laws specific to school districts in 2001 and enacted anti-nepotism laws in 2005. This section will increase your “ethical awareness” by helping you understand the state’s ethics laws that concern your school district and you as a board member.

We’ll cover four areas of the law that most often come up:

1. A school district doing business with a school employee outside of the employment relationship (“on the side”).
2. Hiring a family member of a school administrator as *disbursing officer* (such as a bookkeeper or business manager).
3. A school district doing business with school board members or family members of school board members.
4. Promoting or hiring a school board member’s family members as school district employees.

Sorting out terms

Ethics refers to moral standards or values in relation to the actions of an individual or group. People often think of ethics as what society generally accepts as *right* or *wrong* or *good* or *bad*. Simply speaking, ethics laws concern the actions and relationships that are unacceptable, and therefore illegal, in certain situations.

Nepotism means showing favoritism to your relatives, particularly in connection with a job in an organization in which you have power or influence.

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Give yourself some practice in applying your understanding of the law and its terms in *Check Your Understanding*. When in any doubt about what's legally ethical, always consult your school district's lawyer or contact ASBA.

Consequences of ethics violations

Behaving ethically is a serious obligation. Not only does your community expect you to be impeccably ethical, so does the law: knowingly violating ethics laws is a felony offense. Those convicted of ethics violations face felony criminal penalties and fines. School board members lose their seat on the board, and educators could lose their professional license.

ASBA's School Board Member Code of Ethics

- Lists the actions and limitations a board member can pledge to accept “to promote the best interests of the school district as a whole.”
- Can be found in the *Resources* section.

Sorting out terms

The ethics laws define a number of key terms that you need to know, including these four:

An **administrator** is any superintendent, assistant superintendent, school district treasurer, business manager, or other person directly responsible for *entity-wide* purchasing (purchases that will affect or be distributed across the entire organization, not just a single department, for example).

In relation to the law, this type of administrator isn't a matter of professional licensure, but whether the district employee does some

sort of purchasing for the whole district. This kind of administrator might include classified employees and exclude some principals, for example.

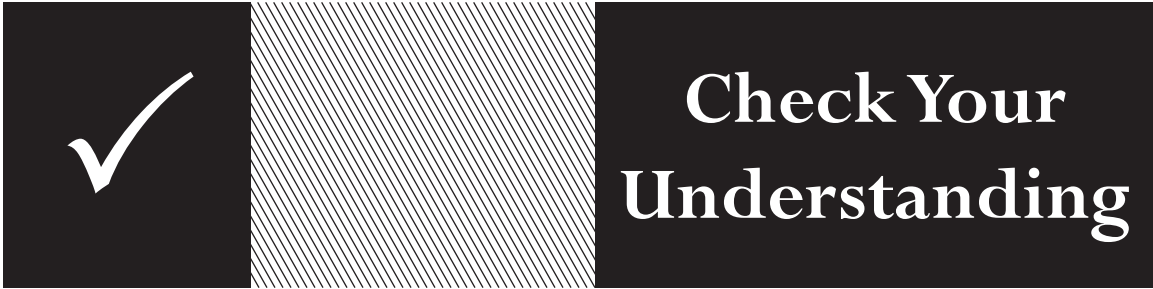
A **contract** is an agreement or transaction for buying, leasing, transferring, or using real property (such as a building or parcel of land), personal property (like a car), or various services (like mowing grass).

Family is your spouse, children, step-children, parents, parents-in-law; your brothers and sisters, and those of your spouse. Anyone living in your household or your spouse's household is also considered part of your family, and so is anyone acting as your agent or your spouse's agent. (An **agent** is a person acting on your behalf, like a real estate agent who acts on your behalf to find a buyer for your house.)

Nieces or nephews, whether by blood or marriage, aren't considered “family” in this law. But your brothers- or sisters-in-law are family *only* if you're related by blood. For example, your spouse's sister is your family member because she's related by blood to your spouse. But that sister's *spouse* isn't your family member because he has no blood relationship to your own spouse. In a nutshell, the spouse of your spouse's sibling is excluded from this law's definition of family. Yes, it's confusing!

Financial interest in a business or other entity means owning more than 5% of it; or serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or top-level manager; or getting compensation based partly or completely on doing business with the school district.

However, the law doesn't view owning stock in a publicly traded company as a financial interest, nor does it include the wages earned by lower-level employees, such as clerical workers or non-decision making employees.



Practice applying the key terms in the ethics laws by considering these four potential situations, the questions they raise, and the answers we've supplied.

1. Jim is a school board member in the Sunshine School District and works as a driver for the Apex Uniform Company. The district rents uniforms for its maintenance workers from Apex, and Jim delivers them every week. Apex pays Jim an hourly wage and sends him a fruit basket on his birthday.

Does Jim have a financial interest in the contract between the school district and his employer?

Jim has no financial interest. He's simply a front-line employee of a company that does business with the district.

2. Coach Johnson is the boys' head basketball coach in the Sunshine School District and is also the district's Athletic Director. As part of his job, he places orders for all athletic supplies and the uniforms the district's sports teams wear.

Is the coach an "administrator" for the purposes of Arkansas ethics laws?

Yes. Because the coach makes purchases for the entire district, he's considered an administrator in relation to the ethics laws.

3. Mary has been a long-time school board member in the district. Recently widowed, she's having trouble making ends meet. She's considering renting a spare bedroom in her home to Amy, a computer science student at the local community college.

Would Amy be considered a member of Mary's family under Arkansas ethics laws?

If Amy rents the room and moves in, she becomes one of Mary's family members for the purposes of Arkansas ethics laws.

4. It was a cold winter day, and the middle school principal phoned Hometown Heat and Air to ask for a speedy service call to fix the heating unit in the school media center. The Hometown folks immediately sent a service technician, who quickly repaired the unit.

Did a contract form between the school district and Hometown Heat and Air?

Yes, even though no formal document was written, a contract was formed when the principal asked for service and Hometown provided it.

1 Can a school district do “extra” business with school district employees?

As a general rule, school districts need to avoid “insider deals” with their employees, permitting them only in unusual and limited circumstances (as the law allows) and in the best interest of the school district.

Let’s look at an example: A school janitor owns a stump-grinding machine. Can the district hire the janitor to grind a row of stumps?

Ask yourself what problem will be created if the janitor is *not* the one who grinds the stump. Is sealing the deal in the overwhelming interest of the school district, or does someone want to do an employee a favor by throwing them some business?

The school district isn’t allowed to be “nice” or “charitable” to employees with public money. Considering the best financial interest of the school district is always key in making a decision about doing business with an employee.

The **best financial interest** means what makes the best business sense under particular circumstances. If the janitor is the only person in town who owns a stump grinder, then it’s reasonable to have him

do the job and probably the cheaper solution. The district would likely spend more money buying a grinder or hiring someone in another town.

Reasons for a Resolution

If a transaction with a school employee truly is in the best interest of the school district, it can be approved by means of a resolution.

An **ethics resolution** is basically a written list of facts and reasons that explain why it’s in the best interest of the school district to approve an otherwise forbidden-by-law transaction or business relationship. Look at the sample resolution and follow the step-by-step facts and reasoning. (The “whereases” and “therefores” are customary and give an official air to the document.)

If the amount of money involved is under \$5,000, the board creates the appropriate resolution, votes to approve it, and keeps it on file where it’s subject to audit. If the amount is over \$5,000, the board creates the resolution, votes to approve it, and then sends it to ADE for approval.

In any uncertain instance, regardless of the amount of money involved, it’s wise to get permission.

Example of an Ethics Resolution

The Sunshine School District is located in a small rural community. The district needs to buy auto parts, but the town has only one parts shop and it's owned by a school board member. Here's how the district can word a resolution to overcome the potential ethics conflict.

WHEREAS, Arkansas law provides that, in limited and unusual circumstances, a school board may do business with a local business owned by a school board member, provided that the school board passes an appropriate resolution at a legally held school board meeting, with the interested party, Marie Jones, not present and not voting, and these circumstances and conditions exist and have been met;

WHEREAS, Jones Auto Parts is owned by school board member, Marie Jones, who was elected in the 2009 school election;

WHEREAS, Jones Auto Parts is the only auto parts store located in Rural County, Arkansas;

WHEREAS, the next closest auto parts store is 30 miles away;

WHEREAS, it is a better use of school personnel time and resources to purchase urgently needed parts for buses and school vehicles locally than to drive 60 miles round trip;

WHEREAS, historically, the district has made annual purchases of between \$3,000 and \$4,000 a year with Jones Auto parts prior to Ms. Jones's election;

THEREFORE, let it be so resolved by the Sunshine School District that the district may continue to do business as usual with Jones Auto Parts, provided that total annual expenditures do not exceed \$4,999.99.

Ruth Jackson, Board President

Mitchell Smith, Board Secretary

Date

What about hiring a family member of an employee to do work in the district, such as painting a school? It's permissible to hire the employee's family member unless your employee has a **direct interest** in the contract for that painting. An example of direct interest is a district employee who is an officer or stockholder in the spouse's incorporated painting business.

Here's another example. The district needs to hire an electrician who has special qualifications for a small but tricky electrical job. The school secretary's husband is a self-employed electrician with years of experience. He's a one-person business, not a corporation, so the district can hire the secretary's spouse to do the job.

2 Can the district do business with school board members or the family members of school board members?

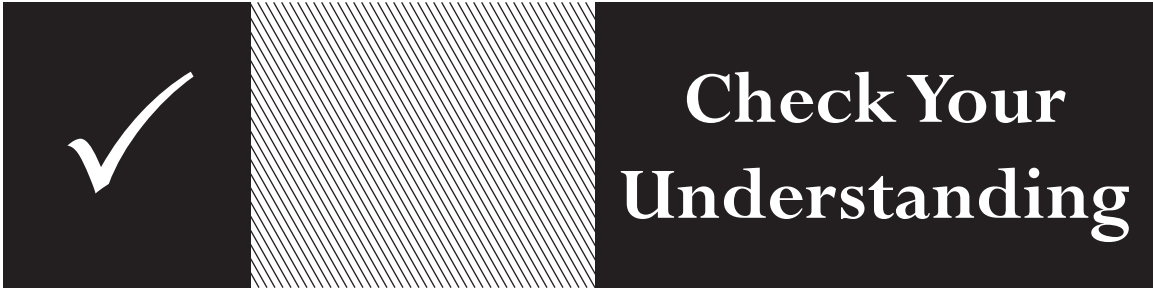
The answer to the question isn't cut and dried. That's because this situation involves the intersection of two complex definitions, that of *family member* and *financial interest*.

The short answer is that you may be able to make such a hire, but you have to create a strong ethics resolution for it. Getting ADE's stamp of approval on the resolution will assure you've made the decision properly.

Review the short definitions of family members and financial interest below. Then read through the examples featured in ***Check Your Understanding*** and see how your answers line up with ours.

Family: your spouse; children; step-children; parent; parents-in-law; your siblings; siblings of your spouse – *but not siblings-in-law by marriage or nieces or nephews by blood or marriage*; anyone living in your household or your spouse's household; your agent or your spouse's agent.

Financial interest: 5% or greater ownership *or* serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or top level manager *or* compensation based partly or completely on transactions with the school district.



1. Bill is a school board member. His brother, Tom, is one of six vice presidents of the hometown branch of First State Bank, and he's worked there for six months.

Can the school district open a checking account with First State Bank?

Probably. Banks have lots of vice presidents who usually aren't tellers who directly handle money. Check to be sure Bill doesn't own bank stock or get paid extra if the bank gets the school's account. If he does, take your business elsewhere.

2. Betty Harris owns Betty's Catering. Betty is Kevin Morgan's niece, the daughter of his sister, and Kevin is a school board member. The school district is hosting the regional FBLA conference at the high school.

Can the district buy box lunches from Betty's Catering for the conference?

Go ahead. Nieces and nephews aren't classified as "family members" for the purposes of ethics laws.

3. School board member Sue Rice has a sister, Alice, who's married to an electrician named Joe, who just went into business for himself. Joe's work van has *Joe's Electrical, Inc.* painted on its side. Alice is listed on the incorporation papers as vice president and owns 40% of the corporation's stock. Alice does Joe's books and answers the phone for the business, which they operate out of their home.

Can Joe bid on the electrical work for the district's new concession stand? If so, and he's the low bidder at \$4,000, what will the board have to do to award him the contract?

Alice has a 40% ownership share and is a corporate officer. Alice is Sue's sister, so she's a family member for the purposes of ethics laws. If Joe were just a sole proprietor, no problem. But his business is incorporated and Alice is a corporate officer, which does create an ethics conflict. Joe can bid, but to be awarded the contract if he's low bidder, an ethics resolution would have to be created before the district could enter into a binding contract with Joe's company.

3 Can the district hire the family member of school administrator as a disbursing officer?

The answer to this question is no, it's not a good idea. Let's see why.

First of all, a **disbursing officer** is someone who handles money (takes it in or distributes it, as in paying for a purchase) or keeps track of it, like a bookkeeper or business manager. Remember who's a *family member* and that the definition of *administrator* is an employee who makes some type of district-wide purchases.

Hiring a member of an administrator's family to handle district money and buy things with it opens the door to suspicion, even if only for appearances sake. The ethics concern here is that such a hiring decision risks defeating the purpose of the checks and balances needed in your district's financial dealings to protect the public's money.

Ideally the superintendent's principles prevent misbehavior on the part of bookkeeper, and the bookkeeper's principles create a level of oversight for the superintendent. But if those two are married to each other or closely related, their principles might more easily slip on the banana peel of temptation.

If your board wanted to agree on such a hire, you'd have to adopt an ethics resolution and ask ADE for permission, which you'd be unlikely to get.

Other than for the disbursing officer's position, the district can hire the family

member of a school administrator or any other employee for any other job in the district. Yes, the new superintendent's wife can be hired as a classroom teacher. But hiring or doing business with the family member of a school board member is more complicated, as we'll see next.

4 What about hiring or promoting family members of school board members as school district employees?

As a general rule, the district won't get the state's permission to hire the family members of school board members except in the most unusual circumstances.

A few districts have gotten approval when the family of a board member was licensed in a hard-to-find area, and the district could document its intense effort to recruit a non-family member applicant. Approval has also been granted when a family member had unique or hard-to-find skills, such as sign-language interpreter. These examples are the exception, not the rule.

Certain situations with board members' families aren't an ethics issue. For example:

- Having relatives employed in the school district doesn't prevent someone from running for a board seat, nor do the family members lose their job if their relative is elected.
- An employed family member can make the usual move on the district's salary schedule.
- A family member can act as a substitute for a teacher or other district personnel for up to 30 days of employment.

Other situations fall under certain restrictions:

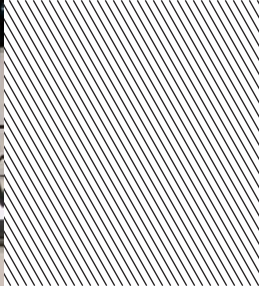
- The school board can't make a school board member's family member a new hire at an annual salary of \$5,000 or more.
- In the instance of a family member who was already working for the district when his or her relative joined the school board, the board can't give that family member a substantial raise, a promotion, a change in salary, or a change in the terms or conditions of employment (such as extending the length of a contract) that amounts to more than \$2,500.

Wanting to do a fellow board member a favor by hiring his family member over other qualified applicants for the job isn't fair. That's why it violates ethics laws.

Some other violations of Arkansas ethics laws:

- Board members, administrators, or employees who use or try to use their official position to get special privileges or treatment.
- Revealing confidential information gained due to status as a board member, administrator, or employee, or using information for personal gain.
- A non-employee who seeks to influence a board member, administrator, or employee to violate ethics laws.
- A board member, administrator, or employee who accepts a gratuity or kickback.

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Keys to Confidence

Finding your comfort zone

Starting out on a new job venture can be just as daunting as it is exciting.

Think about the first few days on your first job as a youngster. Did you find yourself wishing you could magically transport yourself six months out so the steep learning curve and your newbie mistakes were behind you? We've probably all had that feeling more than once.

Now you're beginning another new job, this time as an elected official. Once again, you've got a lot to learn, and you may make mistakes. You'll get the hang of it, and we're here to help.

And now for something completely different

This part of your manual isn't about getting you up to speed on any more school laws. It's all about suggestions for ways you can become comfortable and confident in your new job as a board member.

This is what we're going to cover:

- settling in through an orientation
- the role of board norms
- taking care of the whole you
- six sidesteps around complaints
- practical tips for new board members

Getting your bearings

Orientation is a procedure that helps put people at ease by introducing them to a new role, different surroundings, unfamiliar people, or unaccustomed procedures. Through orientation people begin to get the sense of comfort and connectedness that comes with familiarity.

A thorough local orientation will significantly shorten the time you need to function fully and effectively in board business. The superintendent and seasoned board members need to take the initiative to design and carry out your orientation to the district and the board.

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Ask your board president how to arrange for your orientation. If your board doesn't have an established orientation process, insist that someone show you around and help you learn the ropes. That individual can be the superintendent, a secretary, or another staff member.

If your mentor is another board member, that constitutes a "meeting." You'll have to be sure the media are notified, but that's fine if they want to follow you around.

Your orientation should include at least the following:

- **introductions** to the other board members, the system's administrators, and other staff.
- **a guided tour** of district facilities, at least the main ones in larger systems.
- **an overview of the instructional program** in chats with district personnel.
- **documents to review**, such as the policy manual, school board minutes, budgets, various reports, school surveys, student and parent handbooks, calendars, and any other pertinent documents, data, and records.
- **a wide-ranging conversation with the superintendent** with adequate time for an exchange of information and ideas.

We've prepared a sample orientation form (see *Resources*) you can use in case your district doesn't have one of its own.

Board norms

Norms are the guidelines a group creates and agrees to follow when they gather for discussion or activities.

When a group decides on the norms it wants to follow, during a board meeting for instance, the members talk over how they intend to treat one another and agree on the behaviors they're all willing to abide by. For example, one of the norms might be that one person will speak at a time, or that sarcastic remarks are banned.

Your school board may already have an established set of norms that have become ingrained. During your orientation, ask for a written list of them so you'll know what's acceptable and what isn't. You'll fit in sooner and feel more at ease when you know what's expected and can join in with the rest according to the norms.

Remember that board norms aren't a secret. We advise your board to proudly announce them to the public and keep a copy in sight of every board member (and the superintendent) during your meetings. Agree that when a member forgets to honor a norm, a colleague can gently point out the slip so the violator can correct it.

If norms aren't a part of your board's culture, suggest that you work together to define them. Below you'll see examples of the norms two Arkansas school boards have developed.

A New Day

TEAM NORMS

(How we collectively agree to work with one another)

- We will listen to one another other and treat one another respectfully.
- We will adhere to Robert's Rules of Order.
- We will ignore gossip and refuse to participate in spreading rumors and gossip.
- We will work to ensure that all board members receive the same information at the same time.
- We will limit side conversations during our meetings.

OUR TEAM NORMS

- We will act as one body, not as individuals.
- We will respect each other's values and views.
- We will stay focused on agenda topics and limit personal anecdotes.
- All school board members will receive equal access to information.

Taking care of your “selfs”

The right stuff

As a board member, you’ve been entrusted with serving your community and its children. That’s a big job. You’ll often be under a spotlight and sometimes *in* a spot over your district’s challenges. To stay fit for the job, taking care of the “whole you” means you must take care of:

- your physical health, because you’re living in the only body you’ll ever have.
- your mental health, because of all the things you ever lose, you’ll miss your mind the most.
- your moral and spiritual health, because what really matters isn’t power, position, money, or stuff. It’s the honorable way you build relationships with others and the difference you make in their lives that count.

So find ways to take care of your body, mind, and spirit. Eat healthfully, exercise, get plenty of sleep, meditate, laugh, play, and pray. Don’t take yourself too seriously, walk on the sunny side, and look for silver linings.

And one more thing to take good care of: your reputation, because it will follow you wherever you go—and often precede you.

Your personal board legacy

Here’s a quick exercise to help you think about this point. Grab a pen or pencil and, in the space below, complete this sentence: *As a school board member, I want to have a reputation for being someone who always:*

Now list the words you hope will *describe* the reputation you’re going to build for yourself as a board member:

Maybe you listed somewhere between three to six words or more. Words like *honest, smart, knowledgeable, caring, competent, thoughtful, committed, open-minded*. Those are all fine words, and living up to them is a commendable aim.

We want you to be sure this word is on your list, too: *fair*. Fair in the sense of equitable, and fair in the sense of impartial.

The board is obligated to be *equitable*, ensuring the district serves children whose needs and strengths are broadly diverse. That’s what equity is about, fairly meeting the needs of *all* students, mindful that one size doesn’t fit all.

The board is obligated to be *unbiased*, because someday you’ll sit in judgment at a hearing about an employee grievance or student expulsion. Your job is to make a fair, unbiased decision about the people sitting before you.

If you've loaded up on private information, rumors, or gossip, your ability to be impartial will be compromised. You're too likely to make an unfair and unwise decision based on such advance information. Not only would such action be unfair and damaging to your reputation, it would be illegal.

How can you work to stay untainted by "tales out of school" that make the rumor rounds? We have some suggestions. Read on.

Sidestepping the 3 Cs: complaints, criticism, and conflicts

Inevitably, in the course of human events and life as a board member, you'll face complaints, criticism, differences of opinion, and some level of conflict (hopefully, only verbal, never physical). Many times we find ourselves listening to complaints and being drawn into conflict only because we don't know what to say or do to avoid or minimize the situation.

Let's dig deeper into this topic by defining some terms, using an example from the home front.

Sorting out terms

Complaints are negative news reports: "John, the trash *still* needs to go to the curb."

Criticism can be positive and constructive, but for our purposes here, criticism is negative news with a personal barb or attack thrown in: "The trash *STILL* needs to go out, John. Can't you ever remember?" Notice the negative tone.

Conflict is disagreement that involves differing opinions and judgment, and in our example it goes like this: "John, it's your job to take out the trash and you *always* need me to remind you!" "That's just not true, Sue! I get it done, but at my own pace. I'm tired of your constant nagging." "Reminding isn't nagging, John!"

Conflict can include the unspoken (or spoken) message that: *Your facts are wrong, or I disagree or object to your claims or actions, or I find your style, your work, your words – you! – deficient.*

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Operate in prevention mode

As a board member, you're inevitably going to be approached by a complainer or a gossip or someone determined to drag you into his conflict over a school matter. But you can learn to prevent getting caught up in complaints, criticism, and conflict. Mom always said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and she was right.

It takes just six steps to keep your ethics out of a squeeze. It also takes about six lines of script to educate a complainer about the proper course of action. All the while, you're protecting your ethical obligation to remain above and beyond negative stories about the people in your schools.

The sidestep six

When a complainer, Mr. Parent, phones you or bumps into you at WalMart, at church, or the grocery store, here are the six steps of what to do and what to say to prevent your ethics from slipping.

- 1. Be nice.** This is Arkansas and we're friendly folks. You're glad to hear about the success of the Booster Club's fundraiser or sympathize that the game was rained out. You're happy to chat about the district's long-term vision. Keep the conversation in safe territory.
- 2. Listen no longer** when Mr. Parent turns the talk to district personnel in connection with complaints or criticism. Listening isn't a neutral act. When we listen, we're perceived as affirming what we hear. Listening can give you way too much information, and you've got your ethics and reputation to protect. A "teachable" moment has arrived, and you're about to have the opportunity to educate a voter. If necessary, interrupt politely but firmly: "I'm sorry, I won't be able to hear any more of the story, because ethics laws don't permit me to." Avoid words, tone, or facial expressions that are hurtful, embarrassing, or likely to provoke anger.
- 3. Acknowledge the person's feelings,** not the complaint or criticism, without expressing agreement or disagreement: "I can tell you're really concerned," or "I see the worry on your face," or "I understand you're upset."
- 4. Explain why** you can't discuss or listen to the issue: "Every issue has two sides, and board members have to be fair and objective about any personnel matters that might eventually come before the board." People tend to understand and cooperate when you tell them the reasons behind your refusal to go into complaints, criticism, or a conflict situation.
- 5. Give the name of the person who can help,** because you can't. It's someone else's job to address the situation, not yours. One board member we know says, "You can use my name and say I urged you to explain your concerns so you can work together to resolve them."
- 6. Outline the authority ladder** (teacher, then supervisor or principal, superintendent last) and suggest starting the problem-solving process where the problem starts: "I've always found the best place to start solving a problem is at the point the problem shows up."

Below is the much-abbreviated list of the six sidesteps so you can more easily remember them in order. The first letter of each step spells “**BLAMNO**,” which you might remember as **blame none** or **blame no one**. Silly, but it might help.

1. **B**e nice
2. **L**isten no longer
3. **A**cknowledge feelings
4. **M**ake the explanation
5. **N**ame who can help
6. **O**utline authority

Practice using these steps and the accompanying script in your own words and you’ll earn a reputation as a caring, helpful, and fair board member.

NOTES	

Twenty tips for new board members

A school boards association in another state recently asked local veteran school board members, “What tips and advice would you give to new school board members?” Below are some of their responses along with advice from board vets here at home. They’re solid suggestions for new and seasoned school board members everywhere.

1. Learn to be a patient listener. Listen and then listen some more.
 2. Recognize that it’s normal to feel overwhelmed at first, but work hard to learn your job and it will get easier.
 3. No one expects you to know everything, so ask questions whenever you need clarification or information.
 4. Insist on a complete orientation to board and district operations so you’ll get your bearings faster.
 5. Forget your personal agenda. You’re a member of a leadership team, not the Lone Ranger.
 6. Your top priority is always to work with your fellow board members to make the best possible decisions for all students.
 7. Ask yourself, “How will this affect the students?” before casting your vote on any issue.
 8. Be on time and thoroughly prepared for board meetings.
 9. Know your policy manual from front to back.
 10. Show respect for your fellow board members and their opinions, even when you don’t agree.
 11. Keep an open mind, consider all perspectives, study the data, and withhold judgment until the facts are known.
 12. Do your best to be open, honest, fair, and impartial in all matters.
 13. Show yourself trustworthy by obeying the law, following policies, and keeping private matters confidential.
 14. Don’t repeat rumors, but it’s best not to listen to them in the first place.
 15. You’re a board member, not a district administrator, so your power is limited to the votes you cast during board meetings.
 16. Learn the district’s chain of command so you can refer patrons to the proper employee when they need help with a school problem.
 17. Visit a school with the other board members so you go as a group. Individual visits take up too much of the school’s time and can be disruptive. Just “dropping in” is never appropriate.
 18. Board membership is a volunteer job, so keep accurate records of the miles you drive to and from board events. Come tax time, it may be deductible on your returns.
 19. Use ASBA as a resource for information and guidance as often as you need to.
- And our favorite local tip:*
20. Think first and speak second: a closed mouth gathers no feet.
-

This list includes some tips from Steve Robinson’s May 2010 article, *Tips for New School Board Members*, published in the *School Leader News* by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Used with permission.



1. Name at least five things you should learn during your orientation to the board and school district.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Explain how norms can help you adjust faster to working with your board colleagues.

3. See if you can list the six short two-and-three sentences that correspond with “**BLAMe NOne.**”

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. Practice the six sidesteps by role playing the script with a fellow board member, one as the complainer and one as the board member. Then switch.

Questions & Answers

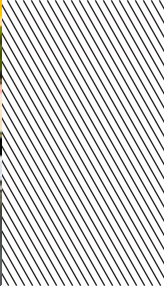


Q Your neighbor, Sally, rushes to your door to complain about the way her daughter Ashley's fifth grade teacher, Mr. Miller, applies his classroom rules. How will you respond?

A Remember "BLAME NO one." Be gracious to Sally, of course, and acknowledge that you understand she's concerned. But explain that, as a school board member, you can't delve into classroom matters. Kindly remind her of the district's authority ladder (teacher, principal, superintendent). Encourage Sally to address her concerns by following the established process, beginning with Mr. Miller.

Q You're about to leave for work when an irate father phones. Apparently, for the second time in two weeks, the school bus driver has left his fourth grader at the bus stop. What will you do?

A You, too, are disturbed at the vision of a child waiting in vain at a bus stop. But don't be tempted to intervene or take sides. That's not a board member's responsibility. Instead, refer the parent to the person in charge of the district's transportation system. Provide the phone number if you have it handy. This response indicates your respect for the district's chain of command, and it also helps to empower the parent.



Resources

This section contains the following resources that may be useful in your role as a school board member.

Begins on page

Resources 2	Glossary of Terms
Resources 17	Online Resources
Resources 21	Getting Oriented
Resources 22	Beyond Basic Orientation
Resources 25	The Board and Superintendent Relationship
Resources 26	Evaluation of the Superintendent
Resources 29	School Board Member's Code of Ethics
Resources 30	Standards for Arkansas School Boards
Resources 32	How Do You Measure Up?
Resources 34	Statute 6-13-620: Powers and Duties

Glossary



Here's a list of terms you'll hear at one time or another. Acronyms (the initial letters of the words in a title) can make for an especially confusing alphabet soup. Keep this glossary handy and add to it as you learn new terms.

AAIMS or **Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science** – A coordinating organization that plans, implements, and creates incentives to promote the study of math and science in the state's schools. See APTIP and STEM.

ABC program or **Arkansas Better Chance for School Success** – A developmentally appropriate program for young children, birth through five years of age, approved by the Department of Human Services and ADE according to the relevant law.

academic content standards – The written documents that outline what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level. The state testing system is based on (aligned with) these content standards.

academic distress – A classification assigned to any Arkansas public school district in which 75% or more of its students perform at the “below basic” performance level on the state's criterion-referenced tests, the Benchmark Exams.

accountability – Being held responsible for one's commitments and actions.

ACSIP or **Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan** – A plan of action developed by a local school team, based on testing and other data, to address areas in which students are not scoring well on state tests. The team includes teachers, parents, and community members. The plan identifies the professional development, technology, materials, and resources needed to implement it. This plan determines how federal funds will be used at the school.

ACTAAP or **Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program** – A comprehensive blueprint for education in Arkansas that focuses on high academic standards, professional development, student assessment, and accountability for schools. ACTAAP includes the Smart Start Initiative (for grades K-4), Smart Step Initiative (grades 5-8), and education programs for grades 9-12.

ADE or Arkansas Department of Education – The administrative agency that carries out the state’s education laws and the policies of the State Board of Education.

adjourned board meeting – A continuation of either a regular or special meeting that the school board had previously adjourned to a later time or day.

advocacy – The process of trying to influence the thinking and action of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause, bill, or action. Advocacy also may be referred to as *lobbying*.

agenda meeting – A board session, sometimes called a *planning meeting*, during which the agenda of an upcoming regular board meeting is agreed upon.

AIP or Academic Improvement Plan – A plan detailing supplemental or intervention and remedial instruction, or both, in the deficient academic areas of any student who isn’t proficient on a portion or portions of the state-mandated testing program.

alignment – Parts or elements that are closely and reasonably related, connected, or in cooperation with one another, such as tests being *aligned* with the curriculum students have been taught.

alternative education – Schools or classrooms that are designed to serve students who aren’t succeeding in the traditional school or classroom environment. Students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities or behavioral problems may need a different setting. Alternative schools or classrooms may have more flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, counseling support, and modified curricula.

annexation – Joining a school district or parts of a district with a receiving district.

AP or Advanced Placement – The designation of the College Board for college-preparatory courses that high school students can take to earn college credit. Students must master a generally higher level of coursework and pass an accompanying test to earn college credit.

appropriation bill – A legislative motion that authorizes the government to spend money that the bill designates for a particular purpose.

APSCN or Arkansas Public School Computer Network – The statewide computer system for collecting and organizing certain school-based data throughout the state, linking all public school systems with ADE. (See **SIS**.)

APTIP or Advanced Placement Training and Incentive Program – Aims to increase the number of students taking and passing math, science, English, and other AP tests and also to raise the number of college graduates. APTIP is a focus of the Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science (See **AAIMS**.)

assessments – Tests or other tools that measure students’ skills and knowledge. They can be used to indicate the extent to which students are meeting learning standards. **Formative** assessments are used by teachers and students during a course of study so instruction can be adjusted as needed to improve learning. **Summative** assessments are given at or near the end of a course to assess the student’s overall mastery of the subject matter.

Augmented CRT or Augmented NRT assessment – A test that has both criterion- and norm-referenced questions. This is the current model Arkansas uses for the annual Benchmark exams.

AYP or Adequate Yearly Progress – The minimum level of academic performance school districts must achieve each year in reading, math, and science on the state-mandated criterion-reference tests (Benchmark Exam). Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), each state sets the AYP gains every school must meet to reach 100% proficiency by 2014. Parents are notified if their child’s school is not meeting AYP requirements.

benchmark – In education, a detailed measure of what students should know and be able to do at particular ages, grades, or developmental levels.

Benchmark Exams – The assessments given near the end of the year to students in grades 3-8 to gauge their achievement for the year.

benchmarking – A way to identify which standards are needed by searching for exemplary practices and programs that can serve as models or inspiration for appropriate standards.

BMI or Body Mass Index – A method used to gauge whether or not an individual is overweight. BMI is calculated by dividing a person’s weight (in kilograms) by his or her height (in meters, squared). Schools are required to measure student’s BMI on a state-mandated schedule as part of an annual health report to parents.

boardmanship – A term to describe the skills school board members need in order to work together effectively and ensure competent governance of a local school district.

certified staff – Within a school district these are employees who, by law, must hold certain Arkansas credentials as a condition of employment. This level of personnel, sometimes referred to as *non-classified* or *licensed* staff, includes teachers, counselors, principals, and others.

charter school – These consist of both *open enrollment* and *conversion* charters. Both kinds are freed from certain constraints to allow them to creatively meet their students’ needs and promote academic achievement. Open enrollment charters operate separately from traditional public schools and have their own board of education. Conversion charters are part of a traditional public school and are under the control of the local board of education.

climate – The atmosphere in a school or other place that is created by the combination of behaviors, attitudes, and surroundings.

closed hearing – A session of the school board that is closed to the public. The session may be convened upon the request of a student’s parent or guardian or by a board motion when the board is considering that student’s suspension or expulsion.

compensatory damages – An award, usually of money, intended to make up for harm or losses.

concurrent credit – Courses or study that satisfy both high school and college credit hours.

consolidation – Joining two or more school districts or parts of districts to create a single new school district.

content standards – The information, ideas, and facts students are expected to know and be able to demonstrate at each grade level.

CSH and WCI or Coordinated School Health and the Wellness Center Initiative – Twin thrusts to promote integrated health, wellness, and academic achievement in our public schools and their communities. The eight components of CSH are health education; physical education; health services; nutritional services; counseling, psychological, and social services; healthy school environment; health promotion for staff; family and community involvement.

core curriculum – The minimum course of study recommended for students.

CRT or criterion-referenced test – An instrument to assess students’ knowledge related to a specific set of standards and measured only in relation to those standards.

culture – The prevailing pattern of behavior, relationships, and expectations that characterize an organization.

curriculum – The subject matter, skills, and processes that are taught so students will achieve identified standards of knowledge and skill. *Curriculum* is singular and *curricula* is plural.

curriculum frameworks – Lists of what students should learn, by grade level, that guide curriculum development and instruction.

CVM or Certified Volunteer Manager – A designation awarded by the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium (APAC, representing several Arkansas colleges and universities) to those who successfully complete APAC’s curriculum for managing volunteer programs in either the public or private sector.

DDDM or data-driven decision-making – The process of using reliable data as the basis for making decisions of all sorts.

deliberative dialogue – An organized process for facilitating conversations within groups of people who share their perspectives and viewpoints with one another so they can more thoughtfully consider issues, problems, and options. Study Circles is one model of deliberative dialogue.

desegregation – The process of eliminating the traces of segregation (separation of races) to compensate for past discriminatory acts and to ensure that racial barriers no longer restrict any citizens from equitable access to their constitutional rights.

disaggregated data – Information that has been sorted according to certain criteria or subdivisions. For example, test results can be sorted by groups of students who have similar characteristics, such as economic disadvantage, race or ethnicity, disabilities, or limited English proficiency. Teachers and parents can then determine how each group is performing.

drop-out rate – The proportion and time at which students leave school before graduating for reasons that may include failing grades, suspension or expulsion, lack of interest, economic hardship, pregnancy, marriage, peer conflict, incarceration, lack of attendance, and use of alcohol or drugs.

due process – An orderly procedure that protects a person’s legal rights. Due process gives an individual a meaningful hearing and opportunity to defend himself or herself before the person or body that has the authority to limit or withdraw that individual’s rights.

early intervention – Focused, individualized instruction developed from continuing assessment while a child is in the early stages of learning, generally pre-school or kindergarten through the first grade.

EAST or Environmental and Spatial Technology Initiative – Started in Arkansas in 1996 and is now in hundreds of schools across the nation. An EAST lab is a classroom outfitted with state-of-the-art electronic hardware, software, and sophisticated accessories as a catalyst for learning. An EAST-trained teacher facilitates the students’ inquiries into problems in their local communities and then supports their search for solutions using the EAST technology tools.

education philosophy – A blend of basic beliefs and principles that gives meaning and direction to the overall education program.

end-of-course exam – A test taken at the end of a course to measure whether a student has the knowledge and skills necessary for proficiency in that course.

engrossed bill – A legislative bill that has been amended by adding, deleting, or otherwise changing the bill’s original or previous language.

equity – The right to treatment without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, sex, handicap, sexual orientation, lifestyle, or age. Within the educational arena, equity means that children are to be treated fairly by receiving services according to their individual needs and strengths.

ESL or English as a Second Language – Several programs or approaches used to teach English to those who don’t speak English as their first language.

essential elements of early reading – Five basic aspects of reading proficiency, which are:

- comprehension: understanding and remembering what is read.
- decoding and word recognition to recognize words accurately, fluently, and independently.
- fluency: the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with expression.
- phonemic awareness: the ability to hear and manipulate the sound structure of language.
- vocabulary: words that must be known in order to communicate effectively.

evaluation – The process of measuring the actual result of certain actions and resources, such as programs and materials, in relation to the desired results.

Even Start – A grant-funded literacy program to improve the educational opportunities of low income families by combining early childhood education, adult literacy, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

executive session – A private meeting of a school board or other governing body that can be held only for purposes specified by law and from which the general public and press are excluded.

ex officio – Literally meaning “by virtue of one’s office,” the term refers to the practice that allows a member of an official group, such as a school board, to designate someone to fill a certain role at the group’s request.

fiduciary – The concept of stewardship, referring to a person or persons having duties, on behalf of others, that require good faith, trust, and special confidence. Fiduciary duty is to act for someone else’s benefit, while subordinating one’s personal interests. The term is often used in conjunction with managing money or property for another, using a very high standard of care. For example, a school board acts as the community’s trustee of public funds for the schools and therefore has a *fiduciary* responsibility for using those funds for the benefit of the community.

fiscal year – All financial accounts are to be completed by the end of the 12-month period known as the fiscal year, which begins July 1 and ends June 30.

FOI or FOIA or Freedom of Information Act – This law requires that public business be performed in an open and public manner. The law applies to any agency, including a school district, that's supported by public funds or spends them.

Free-and-Reduced Lunch Program – See National School Lunch Program.

GED or General Education Development Test – A nationally recognized measure of high school-level knowledge and skills. Those passing the test earn the GED credential.

goals – Broad statements of overarching aims that flow from an educational philosophy and toward which an organization or group directs its efforts.

good faith – The duty to act in a fair and equitable manner, without coercion, intimidation, or threats of coercion or intimidation.

Governor's Afterschool Task Force – Closely allied with Coordinated School Health (see CSH) to promote quality afterschool programs. To ensure children's health and safety, the task force and its allies are establishing licensure standards for afterschool programs.

grievance – a formal, written complaint from an employee regarding working conditions or treatment.

Head Start – A federally sponsored comprehensive child development program that serves children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

HIPPY or Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters – A parent involvement, school readiness program that helps parents prepare their three- and four-year-old children for success in school and beyond.

Hive – A computer data portal (Website) initiated and supported by the state that is open to educators and the public as a tool that allows users to explore data (test scores, for example) at state, district, school, and classroom levels. Hive features many innovative analytical and colorful visualization capabilities.

home school – A school conducted primarily by parents or legal guardians for their own children.

HQT or Highly Qualified Teacher – A teacher who demonstrates that he or she knows the subjects he or she is teaching, has a college degree, and is licensed by the state. No Child Left Behind requires all core academic courses to be taught by a Highly Qualified Teacher.

IB or International Baccalaureate – The designation of a school or a program within a school that conforms to the high-quality standards and challenging curriculum of the International Baccalaureate Organization, founded in 1968 in Switzerland and presently serving 122 countries. IB curriculum, which is blended from that of many different countries rather than any one nation, focuses on international mindedness. For example, all IB students learn a second language and are taught critical-thinking skills. The high school diplomas of students who successfully complete the IB program carry the IB seal of achievement.

IDEA or The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – A federal law that requires states to provide all eligible children who have disabilities with a *free, appropriate public education (FAPE)* from infancy through age 21 years, consistent with a state’s legal provisions for making education available.

IEP or Individualized Education Plan – A written instructional plan for students with disabilities who are designated as special education students under federal law (IDEA).

inclusion – Also known as mainstreaming, the practice of placing students who have disabilities in regular classrooms.

initiated act – A method of legislating that requires a vote of the people instead of a vote of the legislature for a proposed measure to become law.

inservice training – Instruction conducted by qualified trainers and offered during a person’s employment or period of elected or voluntary service. Also known as *professional development*.

IRI or Intensive Reading Improvement Plan – An intervention program for any K-2 student who has substantial reading difficulties.

lawsuit – A legal action between persons or organizations in a court of law where one party seeks justice from the other as determined by a judge or jury.

LEA or Local Education Agency – A board of education or other governmental authority within a state that maintains an administrative relationship with public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, school district, or other political subdivision of a state.

LEP or Limited English Proficient – A student who doesn’t speak English as his or her native language and is in the process of learning English.

liability – Legal responsibility for the consequences of an action or situation.

litigation – A lawsuit is commonly referred to as litigation.

LD – Can stand for **learning disability, learning disorder, learning difficulty** or **learning disabled**, referring to students who have difficulty learning in a regular classroom and need special methods or assistance to learn effectively. See **IEP** and **IDEA**.

longitudinal tracking – A system that uses test scores to keep up with the progress of the same student from year to year and from grade to grade, regardless of whether the student moves from one school to another or one district to another.

mandatory statutes – Laws that school boards or other governing agencies or officials are required to carry out.

merit pay – A monetary bonus or salary increase for personnel based on criteria that are related to job performance. In schools, merit pay is usually related to the extent to which a teacher raises students’ test scores or other measures of academic progress. (See **value added**.)

modeling – Teaching by showing the student how to do a task with the expectation that the student will copy the action. Teachers and other educators can also “model” good teaching techniques to one another.

monitoring – The intentional process of remaining aware of actions and resources as they are currently being applied toward goals and objectives.

multiple choice – A test question that asks the test-taker to select the correct answer from a list of options.

NAEP or **National Assessment of Educational Progress** – Often referred to as the Nation’s Report Card, NAEP is a standards-based test that is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education as a means for measuring student achievement so that student performance in one state can be compared with that of another. NAEP exams are given to a representative sample of the student population in grades 4, 8, and 12 in every state.

National School Lunch Program – Formerly known as the federal Free- or Reduced-Lunch Program, meals that are provided free or at a low cost to children who are determined eligible according to federal guidelines based on family income. The income eligibility levels are commonly used in determining the “poverty” status of a school or district, which in Arkansas is also associated with special funding, known as NSLA categorical funds.

NCLB or **No Child Left Behind** – A federal law requiring states to give tests in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 every year. According to the NCLB website, the law is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works, based on scientific research.

non-certified staff – Also called *classified* staff, these are school district employees who aren't required to have Arkansas teaching credentials as a condition of employment. Bus drivers, janitors, and cafeteria workers are some members of classified staff.

NRT or norm-referenced test – A standardized examination, based upon a student's broad-based exposure to a variety of topics, that is used to measure and compare student performance and progress against a national sample of students at the same grade level. The NRT currently used in Arkansas is the Iowa Basic Skills Test, which replaced the Stanford Achievement Test that had been used in the state for many years.

NSBA or National School Boards Association – The national organization that is a federation of state school boards associations. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education through school board leadership, providing resources and services that support the work of local school board members throughout the nation.

objectives – The specific steps taken to achieve a certain goal. Objectives identify necessary actions, the people and resources for carrying them out, and the schedule for starting and completing the actions.

open response – A test question that asks students to develop their own written answer, rather than selecting one from a list of potential answers.

orientation – The process that prepares people for involvement in a new situation, providing the background and overview needed for them to understand new roles, surroundings, and procedures.

parent and community involvement – Refers to several different ways in which parents and community members or organizations take part in all aspects and levels of the educational process on behalf of children. Participation is both formalized (such as parent-teacher associations, school-business partnerships, parent-teacher conferences, school volunteer programs, and so on) and informal (reading to children in the home, parental supervision of homework, supporting millage elections, and the like).

parent-school compact – A written agreement of shared responsibility that defines the goals and expectations of schools and parents as partners in improving student achievement.

parliamentary procedure – The patterns and rules that guide a group in an orderly, efficient manner of conducting a meeting and transacting business.

partnership program – A mutually supportive arrangement between parents, businesses, or community organizations and a school or school district, often in the form of a written contract, in which the partners commit themselves to specific goals and activities intended to benefit students.

pass rate – A level of performance on student assessments that is determined by the standard-setting process, which establishes the level below which students are required to have an Academic Improvement Plan and must participate in remediation.

performance standards – Skills and knowledge that a student is supposed to be able to demonstrate by the end of a particular grade or course of study.

permissive statutes – Laws on which school boards or other governing authorities may choose to take certain action or not, depending upon local needs and goals.

personnel policies – Guidelines to be followed by employees in carrying out their work.

policy – A general statement a school board or other governing authority adopts to indicate a desired condition, direction, or belief.

portfolio assessments – A purposeful, systematic collection of selected work and self-assessments developed over time that have been gathered to demonstrate and evaluate a student's progress and achievement.

poverty rate – The economic level of a school's student enrollment, which is generally determined by the percentage of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-cost meals.

PPC or Personnel Policies Committee – State law requires that certified (or licensed) employees and non-certified employees each be represented by a personnel policies committee in those districts in which these employee groups aren't represented by an officially recognized group, such as a union. The PPCs focus on personnel policies and can communicate their positions on proposed and existing personnel policies and suggest changes in them to the school board. PPCs have no veto power.

procedure – In relation to education policy, procedures are the methods or steps for carrying out a policy in accordance with its letter and spirit. Procedures are specific and designate how, by whom, where, and when certain actions are to be carried out or limited.

professional development – Ongoing, systemic learning activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators to achieve specific objectives toward the goal of increasing student achievement. Also known as **inservice training**.

prohibitive statutes – Laws that specifically forbid a certain course of action.

proprietary functions – In a school district, they include such activities as hosting athletic contests, leasing or renting school-owned facilities to some group, or engaging in any similar revenue-yielding activity

public engagement or **public involvement** – The sustained, active interest and participation of parents, community members, and other taxpayers in supporting and improving schools.

punitive damages – An award intended to punish rather than to compensate for damages, such as with a monetary award.

quorum – Defined by statute or in the bylaws of a board or other governing body as the number or proportion of members that must be present in order to conduct business. Commonly, a majority of members constitutes a quorum.

Reading First – A part of the No Child Left Behind initiative that is dedicated to ensuring that all children learn to read on grade level by the third grade. Reading First provides money to states and school districts to support high-quality reading programs based on scientific research.

refrigerator curriculum – Easy-to-read, downloadable documents on the ADE website that are suitable for hanging on a refrigerator door and show what students will be taught and expected to learn at each grade level. They contain curriculum samples for parents to use in helping their children learn.

regular board meeting – A scheduled board meeting that is held at least monthly during the school year, but may also be held when school is not in session.

regulations – See rules.

remediation – The process of providing extra instruction to help a student improve in a particular subject area identified in the student’s academic improvement plan (AIP).

resources – Sources of supply or support, such as people, materials, equipment, or money.

retention – Keeping a student in the same grade or subject to repeat it in order to master the curriculum. Retention can also refer to keeping personnel employed within the organization, rather than losing them to other employers or activities outside the organization.

rigor – The degree of difficulty or challenge within a subject, course, or activity. In schools the goal of a rigorous curriculum is to help students develop the capacity to understand content that may be sophisticated, vague, complex, or otherwise challenging.

rules – Mandates issued by ADE to guide, require, or limit school district operations. Rules stem from state statutes or federal law and may identify procedures for carrying out the requirement. Rules used to be called *regulations*.

school board – The local legislative unit of school district governance charged with operating the district according to the mandates of laws and regulations.

school-community partnership – A voluntary relationship between a school and a community group or business that meets the needs and uses the resources of both partners for their mutual benefit.

school district – A defined geographic and governmental area, overseen by a locally elected school board and managed by a superintendent, in which the public schools serve students who either live within the area’s borders or enroll through school choice or a legal transfer from a different school district.

school in need of improvement – This is the term No Child Left Behind uses to refer to schools receiving Title I funds that have not met state reading and math goals (AYP) for at least two years. In some instances, a school labeled as needing improvement may receive extra financial, staffing, or programmatic assistance. Students in the school may be eligible for such services as extra tutoring or may transfer to another public school in their district, within certain guidelines.

School Report Cards – The Annual School Performance Report Card, commonly referred to as the Report Card, is mandated by law and produced annually by ADE. The Report Card displays a variety of statistical data about schools and school districts.

school volunteer program – The organized and managed voluntary participation of people in the schools. Volunteers, such as parents, retirees, business persons, and students, serve under the direction of a school district employee or authorized volunteer to perform all manner of services directed at helping schools improve student achievement.

school-wide programs – Comprehensive school improvement programs accessible to all students, particularly those who are low achievers and at risk of failure. The programs are funded by a school’s Title I programs, which are based on an enrollment of at least 40% low income.

scope and sequence – Pertaining to curricula, scope refers to what and how much is covered in the content of certain subject areas or courses. Sequence is the order in which content or courses are presented to students, so that learning builds from the basic to the more complex.

self insurance – A system in which an organization, such as a school district, sets aside an amount of its funds to cover any type of losses that would ordinarily be protected by an insurance program.

service learning – Supervised classes or programs in which students serve other students as tutors, provide them other assistance, or perform various services to the community.

SES or Supplemental Educational Services – A term used in No Child Left Behind to refer to extra help low-income children may be eligible to receive, such as tutoring. The assistance is paid for by the school, is free to the student, and usually takes place after school or during the summer.

SIS or Statewide Information System – ADE’s statewide computer system developed for sharing information collected through the APSCN computer network, along with additional information collected throughout the school year, such as students’ enrollment levels, daily attendance, demographics, and their courses of study. (See **APSCN**.)

slander – A false and malicious spoken statement.

Smart Core Curriculum – The rigorous course of study recommended by the state for students to be successful in post high school levels of education.

special board meeting – An irregularly held board meeting, sometimes referred to as a *called* meeting, convened by the proper procedures to decide a specific item of business.

staff development – See **professional development**.

standard – A degree or level of requirement or achievement, based on something that is valued and against which progress is measured. Standards measure quantitative or qualitative value. In education, **content standards** describe what students need to know and be able to do. **Performance standards** describe how well students need to demonstrate various skills and knowledge to be considered proficient.

standards-based test – An assessment that tells how a student’s performance compares to some standard of knowledge or skill. A criterion-referenced test (CRT) is a standards-based test.

State Board of Education – The regulatory body for public elementary and secondary education throughout Arkansas. The board has nine members appointed by the governor for a single seven-year term.

statutes – Laws created by state or federal legislation.

STEM or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math – Throughout the U.S., school leaders and educators are being challenged to offer students a rigorous course of study in STEM content and to promote competencies toward careers in STEM fields to ensure that our nation stays strong and competitive in the global economy.

Study Circles – A deliberative dialogue model in which trained organizers and facilitators convene groups of citizens to address various issues through constructive conversation.

system – A group of interrelated and interdependent elements that form a complex whole, such as a school *system*.

thematic units – Portions of study built around a particular theme or topic that draws from two or more subject areas.

Title I – The largest federal aid program for elementary and secondary schools. Funding is based on the number of low-income students enrolled in a school. Title I money pays for extra educational services for children who are behind or at risk of falling behind in school.

tort liability – Legal responsibility for harm brought to someone.

training – Short-term sequential instruction for building skills or proficiency in a certain area.

USR or Uniform Readiness Screening – A state-mandated, developmentally appropriate assessment used to determine if a student has substantial difficulty reading.

value added – This term, which originated in the business world, has come to mean the increase in learning that occurs over the time a student participates in a grade level, subject, or program under a particular teacher. For example, the difference between a student's proficiency at the beginning of a certain program to the end of it can be considered the value-added result. The term is often linked with the concept of extra pay for educators based on their students' progress. (See **merit pay**.)

vision – A statement that looks beyond the present toward a desired future.

Use the space below to jot down more terms as you run across them.



Online Resources

The Internet is a handy source of information about education and related topics, both here in Arkansas and around the nation. Listed below are several sites that are storehouses of data, ideas, models, suggestions, and inspiration.

American Association of School Administrators www.aasa.org

A source of publications, online features, and toolkits about various issues, including evaluating superintendents.

Arkansans for Education Reform Foundation www.educatearkansas.com

Parents and business leaders have joined to promote student achievement and accountability through this foundation.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families www.aradvocates.org

Research and resources about all manner of issues that affect children and families.

Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators www.aaea.ws

A variety of information, including an overview of the most recent Arkansas legislative session.

Arkansas Department of Education www.arkansased.org

Covers all aspects of ADE's organization and operations.

Arkansas Education Association www.aeaonline.org

A membership organization for school employees, the AEA site has a variety of education news and resources.

Arkansas General Assembly www.arkleg.state.ar.us

Access to information about the Arkansas Legislature's activities and legislation.

Arkansas Leadership Academy www.arkansasleadershipacademy.org

Explains the mission and training programs of the ALA.

Arkansas Out of School Network www.AOSN.org

A coalition of partners who work to promote quality summer and before- and after-school programs.

Arkansas PTA Association www.arkansaspta.org

A variety of information on Arkansas' parent-teacher association, including upcoming events.

Arkansas School Boards Association www.arsba.org

The site has current information on ASBA resources, hot topics, upcoming events, and much more.

ARKids First www.arkidsfirst.com

The website explains the state's health insurance program for low-income children.

ASPIRA Association www.aspira.org

A nonprofit organization devoted solely to the education and leadership development of Latino youth.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development www.ascd.org

This nonprofit, nonpartisan organization provides resources and innovative ideas related to professional development and education leadership.

Center for Effective Parenting www.parenting-ed.org

A source for a variety of information on improving the development of children and improving academic achievement.

Coalition of Essential Schools www.essentialschools.org

A national network focused on restructuring schools to improve student achievement.

Communities in Schools www.cisnet.org

This community-building organization works for children's benefit in partnership with public schools.

Do Something www.dosomething.org

A lively site that supports young people who are working to make a positive difference in their communities.

Hive <http://hive.arkansas.gov/>

An online community for sharing and discussing student achievement data collected by ADE.

Illinois Association of School Boards www.iasb.com

The site is rich with various school board governance resources.

International Baccalaureate Organization www.ibo.org

Complete information on the challenging IB program.

Learning Disabilities Association of Arkansas www.ldarkansas.org

A nonprofit organization devoted to educational support programs for anyone associated with children who have learning disabilities.

National Alliance of Black School Educators www.nabse.org

Dedicated to improving the education accomplishments of African-American youth.

National Center for Educational Achievement www.nc4ea.org

A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a mission to help k-12 students reach college and career readiness.

National Center for Education Statistics www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

The center provides complete data on the condition of education in the United States.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education www.ncpie.org

The coalition advocates for involving parents and families in their children's education.

National Community Education Association www.ncea.com

A resource for establishing and maintaining school and community partnerships to promote life-long learning opportunities.

National Dropout Prevention Center www.dropoutprevention.org

Resources on the importance of education for at-risk youth and strategies for encouraging students to stay in school.

National Institute for Early Education Research www.nieer.org

A resource that offers research-based advice and technical assistance related to early childhood education.

National Rural Education Association www.nrea.net

The organization focuses on maintaining the quality and viability of rural education.

National School Boards Association www.nsba.org

The site has all manner of information on NSBA, current education issues, and links to all 50 state school board associations.

National School Public Relations Association www.NSPRA.org

A wealth of ideas and resources for fostering positive public relations fills this site.

National Staff Development Council www.nsd.org

Standards and resources for the professional development of school staff.

North Carolina State Board of Education www.ncpublicschools.org/profdev/training/superintendent/

The site has a booklet describing a superintendent evaluation process.

Oregon School Boards Association www.osba.org

The website has a downloadable superintendent evaluation workbook.

Parents as Teachers National Center www.PATNC.org

Resources to help organizations and early childhood professionals work with parents during the critical early years of their children's lives to nurture school readiness.

Parliamentary Procedure www.jimslaughter.com

Jim Slaughter is a professional parliamentarian who has trained for ASBA. Jim's website features reference charts, handouts, and articles related to parliamentary procedure and techniques for conducting effective board meetings.

Public Agenda www.publicagenda.org

A nonpartisan, nonprofit public opinion research organization that bridges the gap between American leaders and what the public thinks about issues ranging from education to foreign policy.

Quality Education for Minorities Network <http://qem.org>

A nonprofit dedicated to improving education for minorities. The website features workshop information, a database, and links to related sites.

Southern Regional Education Board www.sreb.org

A nonprofit, nonpartisan 16-state consortium, including Arkansas, devoted to improving K-12 and higher education through providing various resources, research, and training.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory www.sedl.org

A nonprofit education research and development organization that serves the region in which Arkansas is located.

The Mentoring Center www.mentor.org

The organization advocates for quality mentoring programs designed to transform the lives of the most highly at-risk youth.

University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy www.uark.edu/ua/oep

A wide-ranging site that is a resource for education research, publications, and data.

U.S. Department of Education www.ed.gov

Access to all sorts of topics and data about education.

Getting oriented

As a newcomer to the school board, you'll begin to get your bearings through an orientation to your home board and school district. The questions and answers below will explain the why and how of orientation, and the attached form can help you record information during your orientation.

What is it?

It's a process to help people get acquainted with new roles, people, places, and procedures.

Is it the same as training?

No. Training is a focused, sequential instructional process designed to develop learners' skills or proficiency in specific topics or areas of knowledge. In contrast, orientation is more introductory and casual in nature. It's less intensive and not as in-depth as most training.

Why is local orientation important?

Getting up to speed as a board member is challenging, and orientation accelerates that process in an organized but informal way. On-site orientation will familiarize you with your role and the customary procedures, the people

with whom you'll work, and the environment in which you'll operate. You'll feel more relaxed, confident, and connected to your co-workers and district after orientation.

Who conducts the orientation?

Usually the superintendent or veteran board members plan and conduct the basic orientation, but others, such as administrators, might participate by explaining certain programs or leading a tour.

How long does orientation take?

As long as is necessary. The timeframe and sequence of orientation will depend on the scope of information to be shared and the availability of the people involved. An initial session to lay the groundwork might take two hours or so, depending on what's covered. A follow-up discussion could clarify information or answer questions that have cropped up and include tours or conversations with program leaders, for example. Subsequent sessions could focus on more comprehensive information, such as that suggested in ASBA's outline, *Beyond Basic Orientation*.

What does orientation include?

Orientation should be tailored to your school district, so it can entail whatever your fellow board members and superintendent think is pertinent *and* whatever you want to know at the time. Generally, initial orientation for new board members includes such basics as:

- **Introductions** to the other board members, the central office staff, and school personnel so you can begin to associate names and faces.
- Key **phone numbers and addresses**.
- Procedures for obtaining the **board agenda** and phone, electronic, and paper **messages**.
- **Calendars**, including the school year and the dates of all scheduled board meetings.
- A **guided tour of school facilities** or a tour of representative schools in larger systems.
- An overview of the district's **goals and programs**. Remember to make notes about program titles (including nicknames or acronyms), their purpose, and the names of the people who lead them. If possible, spend some time with those who work most closely with the programs so you can chat about particulars and ask questions.
- A review of **district documents**, such as the policy manual, school board minutes, the budget, the strategic plan, various reports, school surveys, student and parent handbooks, and any other pertinent documents, data, and records.
- A **conversation with the superintendent** to exchange information and ideas.

Beyond Basic Orientation

Starting newly elected board members off with an introductory orientation to their local board and school district helps the newcomers get their bearings to the basics. But what about the breadth of information that lies beyond those basics and requires more in-depth knowledge and understanding?

For example, the board must ensure the district is financially sound, so the budget document requires much more than a casual familiarity. Each board member must fully

understand how the budget is constructed and overseen, how it aligns with student achievement, and how it reflects the district's present *and* anticipates its future.

Organized in categories below are seven topics that are among the major areas of the board's oversight responsibilities. Listed below each topic title is key information all board members need to know. The lists aren't exhaustive but will lead you to further exploration of these and other topics.

Planning

Board members need to know . . .

	what our board policy says about planning.
	the district's vision, mission, and goals.
	when and how our strategic plan was developed and who participated in the planning.
	how the plan reflects our goals for student achievement and which roadblocks to student achievement have been identified and incorporated into our planning.
	how we use the plan in relation to reviewing data and making decisions.
	trends in our district's enrollment and rates of discipline, truancies, dropouts, graduation, and staff turnover, and how we're addressing these trends.
	which indicators show progress toward our goals and plan objectives.
	that our calendar reflects state reporting and action deadlines and our own planning and action cycle.

Finance

Board members need to know . . .

	our policies on all aspects of budgeting and how we carry out our financial oversight responsibility.
	the budget planning process, revenue sources, fund balances, and how expenditures are prioritized, tracked, and reported throughout the year.
	how the budget is aimed at student achievement through its alignment with the district's goals, curriculum, programs, and services.
	how student assessment data, program evaluations, and other data drive the budgeting process.
	how we're using funds from NSLA, Title I, grants, and similar sources to address students' needs.
	when and how we're audited, and the strengths and weaknesses our annual audits have noted.

Staffing and salaries

Board members need to know . . .

	our policies on staffing, salaries, and other staff-related areas.
	how district staffing levels and salaries align with state requirements and how they compare to those of other districts, especially our neighbors and districts similar to us.
	how the district's salary schedules have been adjusted in recent years.
	how we track the number of staff lost to other districts and the reasons they left.
	the nature of requests and suggestions from our personnel policies committees or unions, and how we have responded to them.
	the history of the rate at which we use substitute staff, the annual cost for subs, and strategies being used to reduce staff absenteeism.

Facilities

Board members need to know . . .

	the status of our Academic Facilities Master Plan, how closely we're following it, and how well it's meeting our needs.
	how we evaluate our operations and maintenance program to determine adequacy and efficiency and to plan for improvements.

School curriculum, programs, and services

Board members need to know . . .

	our policies about all areas of the curriculum and school programs and services.
	what we expect our students to be able to know and do at each organizational level.
	how the curriculum flows between the elementary, middle, and high schools.
	what data we collect on students and how that data is used.
	how each school is progressing in relation to AYP and other measures of progress.
	which schools are in School Improvement and the strategies in place to remedy deficiencies.
	the types of assistance the district provides students who have academic deficits.
	the population and demographic makeup of our schools, and the average class size in each school.
	the population and demographic makeup of all special programs, such as gifted and talented, special education, extracurricular activities, and so on.
	how we ensure equitable access to programs, services, and activities.
	how we measure the success of individual programs, which are getting the best results, and the process used to modify those that aren't as successful.
	how our schools compare to those in nearby districts and in other areas of the state and nation.

Professional development

Board members need to know . . .

	our policies on professional development.
	how training is designed to help staff broaden their skills and develop strategies to promote students' success.
	how the district evaluates professional development and measures the extent to which it boosts student achievement.
	how professional development funds were used last year and their planned use this year.
	the linkage between professional development, teacher performance, and any incentive programs.

Public relations

Board members need to know . . .

	the board's policies about public relations, parent and community involvement, volunteers in the schools, and partnerships with local organizations.
	the messages we're intending to communicate to our parents and other publics, which avenues we're using, and how we know our messages are getting through.
	the community's concerns about our schools and how we're responding to them.
	about each of the programs that engages our parents and other citizens in our schools and the extent to which the programs are promoting student success and customer satisfaction.
	how we measure the degree to which our relationships with our publics—both inside and outside the schools—are positive and foster support of our students and schools.
	how we gauge the climate in our schools and the morale of our students and staff.

The Board and Superintendent Relationship
Be cautious of crossing the center line

School Board		Superintendent	
Focus	End Results	Means	Focus
Sequence	First	Second	Sequence
Questions to be Addressed	What? Why? How much? How well?	How? When? Where? By whom?	Questions to be Addressed
Tools	Mission Goals Policies Standards	Strategies Procedures Regulations Assignments Documentation	Tools
Methods	Vote	Recommend	Methods

SAMPLE
Evaluation of the Superintendent

This sample form is the type of assessment the school board can customize to fit local needs and circumstances. Such a form gives you, the elected officials of your school district, a guide by which to evaluate the system's chief executive officer. Your feedback will help the superintendent become more aware of his or her designated responsibilities, your perceptions of his or her work, and ways to improve performance.

Performance Scale:

1 - Performs exceptionally well. 2 - Performs adequately. 3 - Needs improvement.

A. RELATIONS WITH THE BOARD

1. Keeps the board well informed of the school system's progress, issues, and needs. (____)
2. Offers professional advice to the board on items requiring board action, with sound recommendations based on sufficient data, analysis, and study of options. (____)
3. Develops procedures to achieve the intent of board policy. (____)
4. Seeks and accepts constructive criticism of his or her work. (____)
5. Supports the board's policies and actions with the public and staff. (____)
6. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

B. BUSINESS AND FINANCE

1. Keeps current on the district's physical needs, including facilities, maintenance, equipment, supplies, etc. (____)
2. Supervises operations, insisting on competent, efficient performance. (____)
3. Ensures that the budget is correlated with the district's goals and educational plan. (____)
4. Evaluates financial needs and explores sources of new income, including grants and other resources. (____)
5. Determines that funds are spent wisely, with adequate controls, accounting, and auditing. (____)
6. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

C. STAFF AND PERSONNEL RELATIONSHIPS

1. Develops and executes sound personnel procedures. (____)
2. Promotes positive staff morale and loyalty to the organization. (____)
3. Spends quality time in the schools getting to know staff, students, and parents. (____)
4. Treats all personnel fairly, without favoritism or discrimination, while insisting on high performance. (____)
5. Delegates authority and responsibility to staff members commensurate with their position. (____)
6. Recruits and assigns the best available personnel. (____)
7. Encourages appropriate staff and groups to participate in planning and in instituting procedures to carry out board policy. (____)
8. Evaluates staff performance, commending good work and offering constructive suggestions for improvement. (____)
9. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

D. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Understands and keeps current with all aspects of the instructional program. (____)
2. Ensures sound, comprehensive approaches to meeting the educational needs of all students. (____)
3. Cultivates knowledge of the emerging social, economic, political, and legal issues that affect education and the operation and welfare of the district. (____)
4. Participates with the staff, board, and community to develop strong curriculum. (____)
5. Promotes democratic procedures in the teaching and learning process, capitalizing on the knowledge, talents, and creativity of teachers, specialists, principals, and central staff. (____)
6. Organizes a planned program of curriculum evaluation and improvement. (____)
7. Delegates authority and supports the people with whom s/he works. (____)
8. Insists on a strong professional development program for all staff, and ensures that it is tightly correlated with the district's goals and education plan. (____)
9. Evidences interested in professional organizations for school boards, administrators, and teachers. (____)
10. Actively promotes the meaningful participation of parents and community volunteers in the district (____)
11. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

E. COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- 1. Gains the community’s respect and support for effectively leading and managing the school system (____)
- 2. Solicits and gives attention to problems and opinions of all groups and individuals. (____)
- 3. Develops friendly and cooperative relationships with news media. (____)
- 4. Participates actively in community life and affairs. (____)
- 5. Achieves status as a community leader in public education. (____)
- 6. Works effectively with public and private groups. (____)
- 7. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

F. PERSONAL QUALITIES

- 1. Defends principles and convictions in the face of pressure and partisan influence. (____)
- 2. Maintains high standards of ethics, honesty, and integrity in all personal and professional matters. (____)
- 3. Earns respect and standing among professional colleagues. (____)
- 4. Devotes adequate time and energy to the job. (____)
- 5. Exercises sound judgment in arriving at decisions. (____)
- 6. Maintains friendly but professional decorum in all in relationships with the board, staff, students, and community. (____)
- 7. Suggestions for improvement:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

I have reviewed this evaluation, conferred with the evaluator, and received a signed copy for my personal use.

No comment Comment attached Date of Conference _____

Superintendent’s Signature: _____

President of Board Signature: _____

School Board Member's Code of Ethics

As a member of the board, I will promote the best interests of the school district as a whole, and to that end I will adhere to the following education and ethics standards:

1. Bring about desired changes through legal and ethical procedures, upholding and enforcing all laws, State Board of Education rules, and court orders pertaining to schools.
2. Make decisions in terms of the educational welfare of all children in the district, regardless of ability, race, creed, sex, or social standing.
3. Recognize that decisions must be made by the board as a whole, make no personal promise, and take no private action that may compromise the board.
4. Focus board action on policymaking, goal setting, planning, and evaluation. Insist on regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.
5. Support and protect school personnel in the proper performance of their duties.
6. Vote to appoint the best qualified personnel in the proper performance of their duties.
7. Hold confidential all matters pertaining to schools that, if disclosed, may needlessly injure individuals or the schools. Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.
8. Attend all regularly scheduled board meetings insofar as possible and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings.
9. Delegate authority for the administration of the district to the superintendent.
10. Endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings. Render all decisions based on the available facts and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special groups.
11. Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members and seek systematic communications between the board and students, staff, and all elements of the community.
12. Communicate to board members and the superintendent, at appropriate times, expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs.
13. Inform myself about current education issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school boards associations.
14. Refrain from using my board position for personal or partisan gain.
15. Make certain the board remains responsive to the community.
16. Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the education welfare of all the students attending the public schools.

Standards for Arkansas School Boards

I. Vision/Philosophy

- A. The school board creates a clear vision for the district that focuses on students, excellence in education, and academic achievement.
- B. The school board adopts this vision that is created through collaborative processes that involve staff, parents, community, and students.
- C. The school board effectively communicates this vision to the staff, parents, community, and students.
- D. The school board adopts long- and short-term goals to accomplish the vision of the district.
- E. The school board believes that accountability for achieving the goals of the district rests with the school board, superintendent, staff, parents, community, students, and the state.

II. Organization

- A. The school board adopts and follows a Code of Ethics.
- B. The school board adopts policies that clearly define the roles and duties of its members.
- C. The school board adopts policies delineating the procedures for electing its officers and defining their roles and duties.

III. Board Operations

- A. The school board governs through approved policies and maintains a current policy manual that is reviewed regularly.
- B. The school board conducts professional meetings according to the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act, and establishes and publishes the agenda prior to the meeting, and by following the agenda during the meeting.
- C. The school board conducts public forums periodically to receive input from citizens.
- D. The school board acts with fiscal responsibility.

IV. Board Development

- A. The school board receives annual training as recommended and/or conducted by the Arkansas School Boards Association and is familiar with A Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members.
- B. New school board members receive additional timely training regarding the responsibilities of school board members.
- C. The school board conducts annual self-assessments and avails itself of professional development opportunities based on the needs of its members.
- D. The school board keeps abreast of state and federal laws that impact education.
- E. The school board stays informed about current education issues.
- F. The school board attends regional and state Arkansas School Boards Association meetings and remains informed of National School Boards Association meetings and issues.
- G. The school board, at least annually, convenes for an extended work session to review goals, evaluate the progress of the district, and develop long-range plans.
- H. The school board is familiar with Key Work of School Boards and implements those concepts.

V. Personnel Operations

- A. The school board maintains a high standard of ethics in all personnel matters.
- B. The school board remains neutral in all personnel matters until the superintendent brings a recommendation to them.
- C. The school board adopts personnel policies with input from district personnel.
- D. The school board empowers the administration to recruit and recommend highly qualified applicants to the board.
- E. The school board expects the administration to maintain a highly qualified staff by offering timely and adequate opportunities for professional development.
- F. The school board hires the superintendent and is responsible for conducting a search to replace an exiting superintendent.
- G. The school board evaluates the superintendent annually and determines the continued employment of the superintendent.

VI. Board/Staff/Community Relations

- A. The school board maintains a positive, supportive, and professional attitude toward all staff.
- B. The school board and the superintendent work together as a leadership team.
- C. The school board recognizes, protects, and encourages the chain of command at all times.
- D. The school board and superintendent recognize that communication is a two-way process.
- E. The school board and the superintendent work together to provide and follow a process that encourages and seeks input from the staff and community when appropriate on significant issues by:
 - 1. providing leadership in establishing open dialogue through community discussion groups, school councils, and other means;
 - 2. collaborating with local, state, and national agencies;
 - 3. working with the media to provide information;
 - 4. visiting schools; and
 - 5. including informative presentations from staff and students at school board meetings.
- F. The school board models respect for the superintendent, staff, parents, community, and students.
- G. The school board supports and adopts the use of Study Circles, or a similar process, as a method of communicating with staff, parents, community, and students.

How do You Measure Up?

I. Vision and Philosophy

- A. We have a clear vision for the district that focuses on students, excellence in education, and academic achievement.
- B. We create our vision in collaboration with staff, parents, students, and the community.
- C. We effectively communicate the vision to staff, parents, students, and the community.
- D. We have long- and short-term goals for accomplishing the district's vision.
- E. We believe that accountability for achieving the goals rests with the board, superintendent, staff, parents, students, community, and state.

Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Pending

II. Organization

- A. We have a Code of Ethics, and we follow it.
- B. We adopt policies that clearly define the roles and duties of our board members.
- C. We adopt policies delineating the procedures for electing our officers and defining their roles and duties.

III. Board Operations

- A. We govern through approved policies and maintain a current policy manual that we regularly review.
- B. We conduct professional meetings in accordance with the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act by setting and publishing the agenda before the meeting and by following it during the meeting.
- C. We periodically conduct public forums to invite citizens' input.
- D. We act with fiscal responsibility.

IV. Board Development

- A. We receive the annual training recommended or conducted by ASBA and are familiar with the *Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members*.
- B. Our new board members receive an orientation and meet state training requirements with timely training about their responsibilities.
- C. We conduct annual self-assessments and meet state training requirements by seeking professional development based on our board's needs.
- D. We stay abreast of state and federal laws that affect education.
- E. We stay informed about current education issues.
- F. We attend regional and state ASBA meetings and remain informed of the National School Boards Association meetings and issues.

Fully
Achieved Mostly
Achieved Partially
Achieved Pending

- G. We convene at least annually for an extended work session to review goals, evaluate the district’s progress, and develop long-range plans.
- H. We are familiar with *Key Work of School Boards* and implement its concepts.

V. Personnel Operations

- A. We maintain a high standard of ethics in all personnel matters.
- B. We remain neutral in all personnel matters until the superintendent brings us a recommendation.
- C. We adopt personnel policies with input from district personnel.
- D. We empower the administration to recruit and recommend highly qualified applicants to us.
- E. We expect the administration to maintain a highly qualified staff by offering timely and adequate professional development.
- F. We hire the superintendent and are responsible for a search to replace an exiting superintendent.
- G. We evaluate the superintendent annually and determine his or her continued employment.

VI. Board, Staff, and Community Relations

- A. We maintain a positive, supportive, and professional attitude toward all staff.
- B. We and the superintendent work together as a leadership team.
- C. We recognize, protect, and encourage the chain of command at all times.
- D. We and the superintendent recognize that communication is a two-way process.
- E. We work together with the superintendent to follow a process that encourages and seeks input from the staff and community, when appropriate, on significant issues by:
 - 1. establishing open dialogue through community discussion groups, school councils, and other means.
 - 2. collaborating with local, state, and national agencies.
 - 3. working with the media to provide information.
 - 4. visiting schools.
 - 5. including informative presentations from staff and students at board meetings.
- F. We model respect for the superintendent, staff, parents, students, and the community.
- G. We support and use Study Circles, or a similar process, as a method for communicating with staff, parents, students, and the community.

6-13-620. Powers and Duties

The board of directors of each school district in the state is charged with the following powers and required to perform the following duties in order to provide no less than a general, suitable, and efficient system of free public schools:

- (1) Attend meetings of the school board;
- (2) Determine the mission and direction of the school district;
- (3) Adhere to state and federal laws governing public schools;
- (4) Enact, enforce, and obey school district policies;
- (5)(A) Employ staff, including:
 - (i)(a) A superintendent of schools to oversee the day-to-day operations of the school district.
 - (b) A superintendent shall be evaluated annually or no less often than prior to any extension of his or her employment contract.
 - (c) Superintendents and assistant superintendents may be employed under contract terms and conditions that incorporate all elements prescribed by the State Board of Education; and
 - (ii)(a) School district employees under initial written employment contracts in the form prescribed by the State Board of Education, not including day-to-day substitutes.
 - (b) The employment contract shall:
 - (1) State the duration of employment, specific duties of the employee and the annual salary or hourly wage of the employee and projected annual earnings in the case of nonexempt employees under applicable state and federal law; and
 - (2) Incorporate all personnel policies adopted by June 30 to be in effect on July 1 of the following employee contract year, subject to the requirements and exceptions contained in §§ 6-17-204 and 6-17-205.
- (B) Copies of initial written employment contracts and renewed written employment contracts issued in accordance with §§ 6-17-1506 and 6-17-1703 shall be distributed as follows:
 - (i) One (1) copy to be given to the employee;
 - (ii) One (1) copy to be retained by the school board of directors; and
 - (iii) One (1) copy to be retained by the school district's treasurer or bookkeeper;
- (6) Understand and oversee school district finances required by law to ensure alignment with

the school district's academic and facility needs and goals, including without limitation:

- (A) Reviewing, adopting, and publishing the school district's budget;
- (B) Overseeing and monitoring the school district finances, including:
 - (i) Revenues;
 - (ii) Expenditures;
 - (iii) Investments;
 - (iv) Debts;
 - (v) Obligations;
 - (vi) Inventory; and
 - (vii) Real property;
- (C) Borrowing money as necessary, but in no case shall the school board of directors permit the school district to end the fiscal year with a negative legal balance;
- (D) Entering into contracts for goods and services necessary to operate the school district;
- (E) Buying, selling, renting, and leasing real property and personal property on behalf of the school district;
- (F) Receiving, reviewing, and approving each annual financial audit report and presenting it to the public;
- (7) Ensure that:
 - (A) Necessary and sufficient facilities are built or obtained, furnished, and maintained; and
 - (B) All properties belonging to the district are managed and maintained for the benefit of the school district;
- (8) Approve the selection of curriculum and ensure that students are offered and taught the courses of study and educational content required by the State Board of Education;
- (9) Visit district schools and classrooms when students are present no less than annually and attend some events and functions;
- (10) Obtain the training and professional development necessary to serve as active and informed members of the school board of directors; and
- (11) Do all other things necessary and lawful for the conduct of efficient free public schools in the school district.

History. Acts 1931, No. 169, § 97; Pope's Dig., § 11535; Acts 1939, No. 316, § 1; 1941, No. 389, § 1; 1943, No. 96, § 1; 1949, No. 287, § 1; 1953, No. 204, § 1; 1957, No. 280, § 1; 1969, No. 327, § 1; 1973, No. 253, § 3; 1973, No. 690, § 1; 1977, No. 658, § 1; 1983 (Ex. Sess.), No. 41, § 1; 1983 (Ex. Sess.), No. 53, § 1; Acts 1989, No. 822, § 1; 1993, No. 294, § 7; 1995, No. 233, § 1; 1999, No. 391, § 3; 1999, No. 1078, § 38; 2001, No. 581, § 1; 2001, No. 1747, § 1; 2003, No. 1738, § 1; 2007, No. 617, §§ 5, 6; 2007, No. 710, § 1; 2007, No. 1573, § 45; 2009, No. 1180, § 2.

A.S.A. 1947, § 80-509.

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