

At The Board Table: A School Board
Group Learning Experience

The Board and Superintendent

Date updated: 3/28/12



Iowa Association of
School Boards

Introduction

As a service on the IASB web site, we offer this “At the Board Table” as a way for your board to have a 15 minute “board development” item on your agenda. Boards that take time to discuss how they will work together generally find their common work at the board table to be easier and more effective.

It’s possible to consider this section as an individual board member, but it is much more effective if the entire board engages in the discussion. Working as a team is improved when boards come to a common understanding of ground rules and responsibilities.

If your board team conducts one of these discussions at your board table, each participant will earn two Better Boardsmanship points per session (up to a maximum of 10 points per person).

Next Steps for Meeting Facilitators

1. Add a development item to your next board meeting agenda.
2. Download or open the presentation from the web site at the URL listed below.
3. Print off the four hand-outs on the following pages for each board member and include in their board packet, if possible.
4. Review the presentation with your entire board.
 - Scenario discussions are divided into:
 - Two real-world scenarios facing school board members
 - Possible responses a board member might give
 - Consequences of each response
 - Process for whole-board discussion
 - True and False questions require the board to think about the “why” and to select an appropriate response.
 - Once your board has chosen “true” or “false”, click on the letter of that statement to check their answers.
 - Food for Thought: Quotes require the board to apply quotes from business research about effective practices to their work at the board table and devise principles which would improve their board work.
5. Once you’ve completed the discussion, complete and return the form on the next page to receive credit for Better Boardsmanship points.

Presentation Details

Title: The Board and Superintendent

Web location:

http://www.ia-sb.org/uploadedFiles/IASB/Events_and_Training/At_the_Board_Table/Board_and_Superintendent_Relations_Presentation.ppsx

At the Board Table Hand-Out #1

Situation A: Four Possible Actions

The Situation

The Dreamfield district's Superintendent, Cathy Clear, is meeting with her board president, Sam Smart. "Sam, I am really having trouble with our new board member's attitude. Jess criticizes everything I say and always has his own "counter suggestion" when I make a recommendation to the board. He just doesn't seem to be a team player to me. Can you do anything to help me out here?"

Four Possible Actions

What are the advantages/disadvantages/potential consequences of the following action which Sam is considering? While considering options be sure to discuss the "why" it might or might not work.

1. Stop and see the new board member. Tell him about his role as a board member. Remind him that it is important to support the superintendent if the board wants to use the expertise of the superintendent to good advantage.
2. Call a private meeting including Sam himself, the new board member and the superintendent. Let the new board member know that the superintendent has been complaining about him. Encourage the two of them to "hash out their differences" and referee if the going gets rough.
3. Place an item on the next month's agenda: "Considering Superintendent Recommendations: A process for questions and answers." Discuss as a whole board what works and what does not for getting clear information regarding recommendations.
4. Compose your own choice.

At the Board Table Hand-Out #2

Situation B: Four Possible Actions

The Situation

The Minefield District has a board member, Amos Athlete, who is an avid golfer. Amos pretty much ran for the board on the premise that Minefield must add a golf team to its roster of extra-curricular activities. The superintendent, Gus Gamble, has made board-approved cuts to district programs and has chosen not to recommend any new programs at this time. Amos has offered to coach the program for free and has been individually contacting each of his fellow board members: "I have told our superintendent, it's either golf or Gus goes. Either add golf or look for a new job. He seems to be ignoring me." If you were a board member on this board, what would you say and do?

Four Possible Actions

What are the advantages/disadvantages/potential consequences of the following actions a board member might consider? While considering options be sure to discuss the "why" it might or might not work.

1. Let Amos know that you recognize he was elected for this purpose and you will support him because you feel he represents the public view. Be open with the superintendent that you support Amos on this one.
2. Ask Gus to please prepare a brief list of pros and cons for the board to consider in relation to the addition of the golf program. Let Gus know that the board is being lobbied hard on this one, and that the public may be showing up at board meetings.
3. Prepare a statement supporting the cuts that Gus has made. Let the public know that the board supports the superintendent and that you will never support Amos on this single issue he is pushing. Convey to the public that your job is to help the superintendent manage the district.
4. Compose your own choice.

At the Board Table Hand-Out #3 True or False

- A. True or False: The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district. As such, the board meeting is his meeting and he or she should be in control of the board meeting.

- B. True or False: When the superintendent makes a recommendation it is the result of his professional judgment, which the board hired the superintendent to exert. Therefore, the board should always vote in favor of that recommendation.

- C. True or False: The superintendent should always communicate any district information to all board members.

- D. True or False: The need to keep strong communication links between board and superintendent is primarily the responsibility of the superintendent.

- E. True or False: No matter how experienced the board and superintendent team, they can always profit from discussing the difference between the board's role and the superintendent's role in a given situation.

- F. True or False: Part of the board's responsibilities for governance is approving good clear goals for the superintendent and evaluating how he/she is doing in relation to those goals.

- G. True or False: The superintendent should be responsible for approving good, clear goals for the board and for evaluating how individual board members are doing in relation to these goals.

At the Board Table Hand-Out #4 Food for Thought: Quotes

Please examine the following four quotes from the literature on effective business practices and clarify how they might apply to the work of the board/superintendent team. Devise a sample principle for your board/superintendent team based on the quote.

A Sample Principle is provided for Number 1.

Quote 1

“A brand is what a business is all about in the hearts and minds of the people most important to its future. In any competitive market, what distinguishes the business is the brand. (What makes a business grow and outdistance competition) is a brand ideal of improving people’s lives.”

Grow, How Ideals Power Growth and Profit at the World’s Greatest Companies, (A study based on 10 years of market research) Stengel, 2011. p. 7-9

Sample Principle

The mission of our school district is important. Keeping that mission in front of us at the board table and consistently having board members and superintendent reference that mission in decision-making will unite and energize our board/superintendent team.

Quote 2

“We must set our moral course, and then fix our sights firmly on it. There will be many distractions along the way, but we can’t let ourselves be led away by what happens. We must first determine and then hold our course.”

Integrity Works, Strategies for Becoming a Trusted, Respected, and Admired Leader, Telford and Gostick, 2005 p. 111

Devise Your Own Principle

Quote 3

“Recognizing the behaviors you want and those you don’t is essential to keeping people on track toward achieving your Big Goal. In order to ensure that you are recognizing the right things in your business, you’re going to need a system whereby you can track progress and identify when things are going well and when they aren’t. People get moved by what is truly measured.”

Taking People With You, The Only Way to make Big Things Happen, David Novak, 2012, p. 193-195

Devise Your Own Principle

Quote 4

“Focusing on the whole means keeping the perspective of the larger organization constantly in view. Focus on the whole becomes more important as you rise in the leadership hierarchy; it is the quality that most separates great leaders from good ones.”

Decent People, Decent Company, (how to lead with character at work and in life) Robert and Carolyn Turkett, 2005, p. 181.

Devise Your Own Principle

Notice of Participation

For Iowa board members: After taking part in this board discussion, you will be eligible to receive Better Boardsmanship credits. For IASB to track your participation, please complete this form and return to:

Iowa Association of School Boards
ATTN: Board Leadership Team
6000 Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50312
Fax: 515-243-4992 Email: cbloyer@ia-sb.org

Notice of Participation Form

(please print)

Date: _____ **District:** _____

Participants (Print your name, sign and tell us if you are a board member, president, vice president or superintendent.)

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Name _____ Signature _____ Role _____

Summary of Session (Please provide a short summary of how your discussion went and any feedback on this tool.)
