

# New School Board Member Handbook





## Introduction

**CASB's New School Board Member Handbook** provides new school board members with some of the basics of school board service. Use this handbook to find answers to questions that new board members commonly ask when they begin school board service. It is written in a question-and-answer format for quick reading and draws on the deep well of knowledge and expertise of the Colorado Association of School Boards.

We hope you'll find **CASB's New School Board Member Handbook** a helpful reference as you begin your school board service and hope you'll rely on the Colorado Association of School Boards for assistance at any time during your term. Please contact us at 303-832-1000, [info@casb.org](mailto:info@casb.org), or visit our website at [www.casb.org](http://www.casb.org).

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Beginning Your School Board Service.....	3
Chapter 2 - As A Board Member, Who Can I Speak With?.....	6
Chapter 3 - Meeting and Meeting Protocol.....	11
Chapter 4 - Working With The Board.....	17
Chapter 5 - Building A Relationship With The Superintendent.....	21
Chapter 6 - Basics Of School Law And Finance.....	22
Chapter 7 - Doing Your Homework.....	26
Chapter 8 - Community Connections.....	27

# **CASB's New School Board Member Handbook**

This is your guide to not only surviving your first year on the board but thriving as well. It answers commonly asked questions that a new board member may have. We are excited that you are representing your district and our great state of Colorado as you work to give every student opportunities for success. CASB is here to offer support, resources, and community in your new role. Connect with us at [info@casb.org](mailto:info@casb.org) or by calling 303-832-1000.

## ***Chapter 1 - Beginning Your School Board Service***

### **1:1. I've been elected. Now what?**

Welcome! As a school board member you are a representative of the community, not just those that elected you. You are a leader of the district. You are a steward of your district's children and your district's tax dollars. You are an advocate of public education and also an educated public. And now, you learn how to govern with your board members. Your focus is on providing opportunities for every student to grow and succeed.

### **1.2 What do school boards do?**

A school board oversees the district's affairs, personnel, and properties. Boards have the responsibility of approving the district curriculum, employing a superintendent, and submitting a proposed budget to the district C.R.S. § 22-32-110. But there is more;

- School boards are policymakers. Their policies have the force of law at the district level.
- School boards employ a superintendent and hold this person responsible for managing the district/schools in accordance with federal and state law, as well as the school board policies.
- School boards set educational goals for the district/schools, based on state laws and community values.
- School boards serve as a link between the school system and the public, as well as the school system and the state and federal legislators.
- School boards focus on the ends while the superintendent focuses on the means to attain the ends. The ends all point to student success.

### **1.3 What does my community expect of me?**

Communication. Listening. Involvement. Use public forums and town meetings to gather input from your community. You are elected by the community and have a duty to listen to all community members, not just those that voted for you or align with your positions.

You are expected to attend board meetings, participate on committees, attend school functions, keep yourself informed about issues, pursue developmental opportunities, and interact with your fellow board members and superintendent.

### **1.4 How much time should I expect to spend in my new role?**

It depends on where you live and the board you serve on, but expect it to be anywhere from 20 hours a month to over 40 hours a month. This includes board meetings (workshops and retreats), time-of-year activities, new facilities, superintendent searches, negotiations, and student events such as graduation ceremonies.

### **1.5 How are the responsibilities of the school board different from those of the superintendent?**

The school board is the governing body of the district voted upon by the community members. Board members serve as representatives of the community in providing direction for district programs and ensuring that the school system operates efficiently and effectively. Boards also adopt policy, plan school services, and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of district services.

Each member on your board has the same number of votes on an issue - one. It is the collective challenge of the board and its individual members to bear in mind that an individual school board member has no individual authority. The board may only take action, make decisions, and direct district operations as a full board acting in its corporate role.

The superintendent is hired by the board. They serve as the principal adviser to the board on all matters having to do with the district and education in general. The superintendent is the executive administrator of the district with the responsibility of seeing that the policies and directives of the board are implemented.

The school board is not operational. The school board is the governing body that sets the goals, vision, and mission of the school district and the superintendent carries out

the goals. The superintendent is operational. You can find a full description of the role of the board versus the role of the superintendent in our CASB Leadership Guidebook.

### **1.6 Where do I go for information to help me in my role?**

Your first step should be the board president. They can answer your questions on protocol or procedure, as well as share any issues the board is facing. The superintendent is another good source of information. Your other board members may have been in their position longer than you and they will have great advice. And, CASB has valuable resources, professional development opportunities, and answers to questions you may have.

### **1.7 Are school boards required to have officers?**

Colorado law requires the following officers to be elected by the board: a president, a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer. One person may simultaneously hold the offices of secretary and treasurer, or the offices of assistant secretary and assistant treasurer if there are such offices. C.R.S. § 22-32-104.

After each election year, the board secretary calls a special meeting of the board, called the board's organizational meeting, for the purpose of electing board officers. Most of the laws relating to school boards and their powers and duties are found in Title 22, Article 32, Colorado Revised Statutes. It contains laws relating to the organization of the board, the duties of the officers, meetings of the board, powers, and duties.

### **1.8 What are the duties and responsibilities of the school board officers?**

The board president sets the tone for how the school board will function. This officer is a leader of the board and a presider who articulates agendas, maintains order, and announces results. They are a communicator who listens and speaks on behalf of the board.

The vice president often works closely with the board president and superintendent and will preside at board meetings when the president is not there. They assume the office of the president in the event of a vacancy until a new president is elected.

### **1.9 What is the board's role when there are problems with an administrator?**

The superintendent is the only employee who answers directly to the school board. If there are concerns about an administrator's performance, the board should raise these

concerns with the superintendent in executive session. It is the superintendent who has the responsibility to handle these issues.

It is the superintendent's job to lead and manage the employees in the district. The superintendent takes the board's collective input into account, but it is ultimately the superintendent who completes the final evaluation of administrators.

If there is a problem with the superintendent, the board needs to address the problem through the annual review process or informal feedback via the board president.

## ***Chapter 2 - As A Board Member, Who Can I Speak With?***

### **2.1 Can I call the superintendent?**

You need to establish a productive working relationship with your superintendent. This means you will have to speak with that individual. If you have questions, it is better to call the superintendent and discuss them before the board meeting rather than surprise them at a public meeting.

If the questions are concerns or relate to negative feelings from the community, the superintendent will appreciate knowing these in advance of the board meeting so they come prepared to address them. It is appropriate to call or email the superintendent in order to set up a meeting to discuss questions you have.

### **2.2 If I disagree with board members or the superintendent, what is the best way to let them know how I feel?**

Make sure to treat your fellow board members and the superintendent with respect. This doesn't mean you cannot disagree on an issue. Discussion about an issue that reflects two or more views usually results in a better decision than if everyone agrees with the first solution offered. Make sure you debate the issue and not the person. Demeaning comments or angry discussions do not facilitate effective decision-making efforts.

### **2.3 How do I approach my superintendent or board if I have a suggestion for a change?**

If your suggestion needs to be discussed by the entire board and voted on, it should be added to the upcoming board agenda. Review your district policy, or board operations manual, on agenda setting to understand how to do this. Contact the superintendent or

the board president to discuss your idea and have it either put on the agenda or referred to a committee.

#### **2.4 Is it all right to speak with district administrators and staff?**

As a board member, you will naturally interact with a wide range of district staff, including administrators, teachers, and support personnel. These interactions are entirely appropriate and can help build positive relationships. However, it's important to respect the district's chain of command when handling concerns or seeking information.

#### **2.5 Can I speak to board members outside of the board meeting?**

You can speak with fellow board members, but it cannot be more than two at a time and you are not allowed to discuss district business. As a board member, you will meet in social settings, at community events, or even at the grocery store. These gatherings do not constitute board meetings subject to the legal transparency requirements so long as board members do not use them to discuss public business or take formal action.

However, some boards, out of an abundance of caution, notify the public of events where three or more board members are scheduled to attend.

#### **2.6 What can I say, or not say, to parents and friends about school issues?**

School board business that is discussed in executive session or relates to confidential matters (such as an employee personnel issue or student discipline issue) should never be discussed with anyone other than another board member or the superintendent. If board members do share information from an executive session they open the district up to liability and possibly lawsuits. Only discuss items that have been made public at a school board meeting. Adhering to this rule of thumb will go a long way in maintaining trust with the superintendent and other board members, as well as protecting staff and the public.

#### **2.7 What information is considered confidential?**

Employee personnel issues or information contained in student educational records are considered confidential. The information discussed in an executive session is also confidential. A board may call an executive session only on the following subjects:

- The purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer, or sale of any real, personal, or other property interest. No executive session shall be held to conceal the fact that a member of the local public body has a personal interest in such property transaction. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(a).

- Conferences with an attorney for the school board for the purpose of receiving legal advice on specific legal questions. The mere presence or participation of an attorney at an executive session is not sufficient to satisfy this requirement. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(b).
- Matters required to be kept confidential by federal or state law or rules and regulations. The board must announce the specific citation of the statute or rules that are the basis for such confidentiality before holding the executive session. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(c).
- Specialized details security arrangements or investigations. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(d).
- Determining positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations, developing strategy for negotiations, including strategy for negotiations relating to collective bargaining or employment contracts, and instruction of negotiators. Discussion of negotiations relating to collective bargaining or employment contracts (other than negotiations for an individual employee's contract) must occur in a public meeting unless an executive session is otherwise allowed. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(e).
- Personnel matters; except if the employee who is the subject of the session has requested an open meeting or if the personnel matter involves more than one employee, and all of the employees have requested an open meeting. If the employee(s) does not request an open meeting, the board may hold the discussion in executive session. The board may, at its discretion, invite the employee into the session. Discussion of personnel policies that do not require discussion of matters specific to a particular employee are not considered "personnel matters." Discussions concerning a member of the board, any elected official, or the appointment of a board member are not considered personnel matters. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(f).
- Consideration of any documents protected under the mandatory nondisclosure provision of the Colorado Open Records Act, except that consideration of work product documents and documents subject to the governmental or deliberative process privilege, must occur in a public meeting unless an executive session is otherwise allowed. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(g).
- Discussion of individual students where public disclosure would adversely affect the person or persons involved. C.R.S. § 24-6-402(4)(h).

## **2.8 I have children in school. How can I speak with their teachers now that I'm on the school board?**

No matter what you say about 'speaking as a parent, not a board member,' it is difficult for some teachers to separate your role on the board from your role as a parent. Some teachers may be intimidated. Some married board members have indicated that they ask their spouses to take the lead in speaking to their children's teachers.

Make sure you are not using your position as a school board member to secure special treatment for your child. If there are issues you wish to discuss with a teacher, you should follow the normal procedures for contacting your child's teacher to discuss them.

You should not relinquish your parental rights now that you are a school board member. You are a parent first and a board member second.

## **2.9 As a board member, may I visit the schools?**

You have the same right as a parent to visit the schools in your district, so long as you follow the procedures your district has for visitors. You may also visit the schools in an official capacity for specific purposes, such as special events or board business but there are protocols you must follow. Your district policy states the procedures in policy KI - Visitors to Schools. It is always important to make sure the superintendent and/or the principal know of your visit in advance. There should never be surprise visits.

## **2.10 How do I respond to a community that questions the school board's decisions?**

It's not uncommon for school board decisions to generate questions or even disagreement within the community. As a board member, your role is to represent the district with honesty, professionalism, and integrity—even when the decision may be unpopular or you personally held a different view during the discussion. Emphasize that while individual board members may hold differing opinions, decisions are made collectively, and once a vote is taken, the board stands united.

## **2.11 How do I respond to questions from the media?**

Your board may already have a policy for responding to the media. On issues of great sensitivity, a single spokesperson, usually the president, is designated to speak for the board. If the media is waiting to do an interview following a board meeting, it is appropriate to refer the question to the president or the superintendent.

Individual board members should be free to explain their votes or comments they may have made at a public meeting. If you are contacted by a local reporter and you're not prepared or don't have the relevant information, don't say "No comment." Instead, let the reporter know you'll get an answer and get back to them. Ask what kind of deadline they have and then follow through.

Don't lie. Be honest and speak in short, quotable sentences. Stay on message. Answer the question that was asked. Do not feel compelled to offer more information than is needed to answer the question. Be friendly and warm. Body language is as important as what you say so be mindful of that.

## **2.12 How should I respond to parental complaints?**

Make sure you are familiar with your board policy on public complaints. You want to be a good listener as this allows you to ask questions to understand the situation better. Be careful so that the parent does not interpret your questions or comments as an indication of future board action.

Once the parent has shared their complaint with you, try to give them guidance on how to get their concerns addressed through the chain of command. This could be referring them to the public complaint policy. Many of the complaints will not be administrative in nature nor will they be policy issues.

You are not responsible for solving the parent's problem. You owe the superintendent and staff the opportunity to respond and to support them.

## **2.13 Can I use email or social media to communicate with my board colleagues?**

You may use email to communicate with each other only if you are not using it to discuss board business or influence votes on issues in advance of a board meeting or as a means of avoiding open meeting requirements. This holds true for social media. You should be careful to avoid sequential email communications or social media conversations.

It is not appropriate to engage in online discussions nor is it appropriate for a majority of board members to email one another prior to a board meeting as this will likely affect the board's discussion at the meeting. It also precludes the community from hearing the board debate important issues.

If you are using a school email address, your emails are open to public records requests under the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA). The basic rule is to not have conversations with fellow school board members online.

## ***Chapter 3 - Meeting and Meeting Protocol***

### **3.1 What should I expect at my first board meeting?**

If you have never participated in a board meeting you may feel overwhelmed at first. There are basic rules of parliamentary procedure that should be followed, but many boards operate in their own way. There will be a meeting agenda and protocol. It is best to speak with your board president before attending your first meeting. Ask them the following questions:

- Where should I sit?
- How is the agenda created?
- How long do the meetings usually take?
- When should I speak?

You should ask for an orientation if you haven't had one already. Expect to receive your board packet containing the agenda and any supporting information several days before the meeting. Go through the material carefully and take time to call the superintendent or board president to ask questions about information you don't understand.

This is a board meeting in public and not a public meeting. Staff and community members are invited to attend and participate in public comment. But, this is your board's opportunity to conduct business and the board should remain in control of the meeting at all times.

### **3.2 Where should I sit?**

Most board rooms are set up in a consistent configuration for board meetings, which includes name plates for each person at the table or dais. Some boards have assigned seats that do not change from meeting to meeting. Other boards mix the seats up each

time. Contact the board president and ask if there are any “traditions” that you should be aware of in advance.

### **3.3 What is considered an acceptable dress code at board meetings?**

Your board decides how formal or informal the meeting should be. A good rule of thumb is to dress appropriately for a business meeting as board meetings are business meetings. The public and the media may also be in attendance and your dress should reflect the professional approach that your school board takes in overseeing the important operations of the school.

### **3.4 How professionally must a board meeting be run?**

All board meetings follow a set of “rules of order” that are based upon parliamentary procedure. The method your board selects should be identified in a policy. Many boards follow Robert’s Rules of Order. Other boards may prefer a basic version of parliamentary procedure.

### **3.5 How often does a board meet?**

Many boards meet once or twice a month, but there are some that meet every week. There are a variety of other meetings as well:

- Regular board meetings - notice is required and the board may take action.
- Special board meetings - called by the board president or upon the written request of a majority of the members; special notice requirements are needed; no business other than stated in the notice, unless reasonably related and unanimous agreement by members; the board may take action.
- Work sessions or retreats - a type of regular or special meeting; called in order to receive information or for discussion; no action may be taken; notice is required, including the topics for discussion and study.

### **3.6 What are the legal requirements for school board meetings?**

School boards must meet in compliance with the Colorado Open Meetings Law C.R.S. § 24-6-401 *et seq.*, and make public records available consistent with the Colorado Open Records Act. The Colorado Open Meetings Law, also known as the Colorado Sunshine Law, requires that all school board meetings, including most committee meetings, be open to the public. Proper notice of at least 24 hours must be given to announce regularly scheduled meetings as well as special meetings. Minutes of the

meetings must be taken and include specific information required by the Open Meetings Law.

### **3.7 What are the steps to enter into an executive session?**

The Board president must announce the topic of the executive session and the specific citation to the statute, C.R.S. 24-6-402(4), authorizing the board to meet in executive session. They must also describe the matter of the executive session in as much detail as possible without compromising the purpose of the executive session. The board must vote whether to convene, and upon the affirmative vote of 2/3 of the quorum present, the board may enter executive session.

*During an executive session, the board must not stray from the matter stated at the onset of the executive session, and the board may not take any formal action in an executive session.* However, be sure to discuss this important topic with your board president, as your board may have a specific procedure or other considerations regarding executive session.

### **3.8 How can a board have good exploratory discussions given the restrictions of the Colorado Open Meetings Law?**

The Colorado Open Meetings Law does not preclude good exploratory discussions. You may find it awkward to talk about some topics openly, but the board is obligated to conduct all discussions in open sessions except during the limited and narrow situations that permit executive sessions. All official board votes must be conducted in public at an official meeting of the board.

### **3.9 Can board members meet socially or as a group at training conferences without violating the Colorado Open Meetings Law?**

Yes. Social gatherings and conferences, including retreats, are not considered school board meetings, even if a quorum is present, so long as the board members in attendance do not discuss school business or arrive at decisions by taking action on an issue. Some boards, out of an abundance of caution, notify the public of events where three or more board members are scheduled to attend.

### **3.10 What is the role of the superintendent during school board meetings?**

The superintendent is a key person during school board meetings. The superintendent and president plan the meeting agenda together, but the superintendent makes certain

the meeting room is set up as required and all tools that are needed are available, such as audio or visual recording equipment, easel, microphone, etc.

Each item on the agenda is introduced by the president; however, for discussion or action items, the superintendent or a designee is often asked to explain the issue. The superintendent's opinion or recommendation should be solicited before a vote is taken. The superintendent typically gives a report to the board.

### **3.11 How do I get involved in board committees?**

The president is responsible for assigning board members to committees if your board uses them. If you have an interest in a particular committee, let the president know of your interest prior to identifying committee assignments.

The board should have a clearly written statement about the following:

- The type of work the committee is to do
- How long the committee has to complete their work
- How information will be reported back to the board

### **3.12 How can I get my issues onto the board agenda?**

You should follow your board policy and protocols. This means you would typically contact the board president prior to the pre-agenda meeting. If you have an issue that comes up after the agenda has been distributed, you may still be able to have it added to the agenda the night of the meeting, depending on your district's policies.

If a decision is not needed immediately, it is better to have the topic added to the agenda for a subsequent meeting, which will give your colleagues sufficient time to prepare for the discussion.

### **3.13 Does public comment only pertain to agenda items?**

Although school board meetings are open to the public, there is no Colorado law stating the public must be allowed to speak. Familiarize yourself with your board's policy on public comment. Many boards set up rules that restrict topics and the duration of each comment.

### **3.14 What if a member of the public complains at a board meeting?**

If an individual raises a complaint during a board meeting, it is best to listen to the individual and then share that the board will take the issue under advisement. The board president should take control of this situation. Your board should always refrain from engaging the individual in public debate during the meeting. Public comment means that the public has a chance to comment on issues. *The board should listen and not engage in dialogue.*

### **3.15 What is a consent agenda?**

A consent agenda is an item listed on the regular agenda that groups routine items under one agenda heading. This may be items such as paying bills, approving minutes from the last meeting, approving the agenda, etc. The consent agenda can be approved by a single unified motion and vote of the board.

The purpose of the consent agenda is to expedite business and streamline the meeting. There is no discussion of items on a consent agenda. If clarification of an item is necessary, then you should request that the item be removed from the consent agenda and considered by the board as a separate motion.

### **3.16 Can I ask questions during the board meeting?**

Yes. This is a responsibility of each board member. You should have taken time to review the materials in the board packet so that you can ask for clarification from the superintendent or board president prior to the meeting. During the discussion of an item, you may have other questions you want to ask.

### **3.17 How may I ask questions at a board meeting and still adhere to the “no surprises” rule?**

If you believe your question may be controversial, let the superintendent or president know ahead of time. They can offer advice on if there is a better way to address the issue. If your question is to clarify an issue or if it is prompted by the discussion, then it is appropriate to ask it at the board meeting, as long as you don't broach topics that should be discussed in executive session.

If you have a question that may require collecting data or information not already in the board packet, let the superintendent know prior to the meeting so they can come prepared to answer your questions.

### **3.18 How is voting handled at a board meeting?**

All votes taken at a school board meeting are a matter of public record and must be recorded in the minutes. In some situations, school boards can use roll call votes where your name is called and you state your vote. If a roll call vote is not required, the vote must be taken in such a way that a person attending the meeting or reading the minutes can see how individual board members voted.

### **3.19 When does the board president vote?**

The board president votes each time a vote is called. The board president is expected to vote as a member of the board.

### **3.20 Can a school board member vote by proxy at regular or special board meetings?**

No. It is not permissible for a board member to vote by proxy. The Open Meetings Law requires that a board of education take action on a motion only when that motion is voted on by a majority of the members who sit on the board at a lawfully convened meeting.

### **3.21 Can a school board member vote with electronic participation?**

According to C.R.S. § 22-32-108(7), a board may adopt a policy permitting board members to attend and participate electronically in the board's meetings. Any board member participating electronically pursuant to a lawful board policy is present for purposes of voting. C.R.S. § 22-32-108(7).

A policy permitting electronic participation must include the following provisions. C.R.S. § 22-32-108(7)(b):

- A requirement that a quorum of the board, including members physically present and attending electronically, is attending in order to convene a meeting;
- A description of the extenuating circumstances the board deems sufficient to permit electronic attendance;
- Discretion for the board to decide the maximum number of meetings a board member may attend electronically before the board member's position is declared vacant;
- A requirement that the board have the technology in place that ensures members of the public can hear the board member participating remotely and to ensure the board member can hear comments made by the public;

- A clear description of the methods by which a board member may attend electronically, including via telephone, video conferencing, or other electronic means; and
- A requirement that the board has a procedure in place to ensure that a board member who attends the meeting electronically has real-time access to any materials that are presented and available to members who are physically present at the meeting.

### **3.22 Can I abstain from a vote?**

It is important not to abstain from voting. You were elected or appointed to fill the role of a school board member and this means participation in action taken by the board. The only reason you would abstain from voting is in regard to a conflict of interest.

### **3.23 What if I disagree with a board decision?**

If you do not agree with a board decision, you may express your position for the record. It is still your responsibility to support the board's final decision. The time to disagree is during the discussion and with your vote, which is public record.

If you are asked about the decision, explain why the board voted the way it did. You may say why and how you voted; however, you should not do it in a way that undermines the board's majority decision. As long as your comments remain factual and do not evaluate the board's action, you are showing support for the decision. You should also direct questions to the board's spokesperson if one has been assigned.

### **3.24 Can a board president offer motions?**

The board president typically calls for motions on agenda items. The president is a member of the board with the same voting rights, no more and no less. It is permissible for the president to offer a motion but it is preferable for other members of the board to offer and second a motion.

## ***Chapter 4 - Working With The Board***

### **4.1 Should I ask for a mentor?**

Some boards may have a designated person who serves as a mentor for new board members. A mentor will orient new board members prior to their first board meeting. They will also check in with new board members periodically during the year to explain

key activities, such as the process for evaluating the superintendent or the budget process. If you find your board does not have a person designated as a mentor, you might suggest it, particularly if you prefer having a mentor to get you up to speed.

#### **4.2 When are issues serious enough to bring them to the board?**

You are the link between the school district and the community. You should also be aware of issues confronting other districts that could become an issue in your district. It is important to filter what you bring to the board for consideration to be sure it truly requires board attention.

If you are hearing concerns from community members, you might want to ask other board members whether they are hearing the same concerns. An issue or activity that is counter to board policy should be brought to the attention of the president or the superintendent. When in doubt, discuss concerns with the president and superintendent at any time. They can help decide if the board needs to be proactive about a particular issue.

#### **4.3 What is the committee structure, function, and role?**

Some boards operate as a committee of the whole where all issues or activities are addressed by the entire board together. Members of boards that choose this method of operation generally receive the same information at the same time and have the authority to deliberate on each issue. Other boards function with a well-defined committee structure where board members serve on several committees, and a committee first addresses issues or activities before the issue comes to the full board.

Board members are appointed to standing committees by the president and serve one-year terms. Ad hoc committees or task forces can also be established to deal with a one-time issue, and their length of term is often less than one year. A task force is a good approach to invite staff and community members to offer their insights and/or special expertise on a particular issue.

The committee structure works best when the board fully trusts all the board members and is willing to accept the work and recommendations of this smaller subset of the board. This does not mean the full board cannot ask questions and become informed prior to voting on a motion at a board meeting; in fact, all need to become informed in order to vote responsibly.

Rehashing the entire work of the committee defeats the committee's purpose. Boards that use a committee structure believe it saves time and allows each board member to delve more deeply into fewer areas. Some boards find they are able to handle more issues with this approach and each board meeting is more reasonable in length.

Possible standing committees include: policy, finance, curriculum, public information, students, athletics, building and ground, and personnel. Committees and task forces report to the board, not to the community or media. Committees can be subject to the Open Meetings Law requirements even when there is no quorum.

#### **4.4 How can I survive the politics?**

You are now a part of the largest body of elected officials in the state. School governance is founded on the belief that a group of very different people representing various constituencies in their district can make better decisions than any one person alone. This is the board's strength.

Be open-minded about the opinions of your fellow board members. Your goal should not be to convert them to your point of view, but rather to determine the best solution to an issue by working together to try and accommodate all views. Your main goal is to have your students be the 'winners', not one board member or another.

#### **4.5 How can I best assimilate into the team?**

You may be joining a board with members who have been together for several years. It will take you time to become part of the team. Start building relationships by talking to your new colleagues. Respect their expertise. Listen and observe. Ask questions. Do your homework. Make recommendations. Time and experience will help you become a contributing member.

#### **4.6 What should a board do when it is not working well as a team?**

Open communication is critical to an effective school board. If you believe your board is not working together well it may be appropriate to suggest a workshop where the board reviews its norms that establish how it will function. If the norms are not effective, consider adding to or clarifying them. It may be important to develop a specific set of guidelines, a board protocol, or a code of conduct. Remember that your focus and goals all relate to student achievement and this should be the North Star for every board member. CASB staff are available to facilitate board training to help improve the board's working relationship and get them oriented toward their North Star.

#### **4.7 How do school boards make decisions?**

To begin, the board can only make decisions, or act, during legally called board meetings. School board members are trustees, responsible for a trust established with the community. When making decisions, the board should seek the advice, where appropriate, of the district's administrators, teachers, employees, community members, and experts such as the school district's legal counsel, financial advisor, or auditor. It is important for board members to do their homework prior to attending a board meeting so that they can discuss the issue and be prepared to take action at the meeting.

#### **4.8 What is the most important consideration when making a decision?**

The primary consideration is the tangible impact the decision will have on your district's students. If you understand the facts and relevant data and keep the needs of all students in mind when making decisions, you will make good decisions. Your first responsibility is to each and every student in your district.

#### **4.9 What can or can't school board members reveal to each other?**

School board members will learn information that is confidential and should not be discussed outside of a board's closed session with friends and family. This does not limit discussions among school board members at appropriate times in conformity with the Open Meetings Law. Board members should feel they can discuss issues among each other that are before and within the jurisdiction of the board.

#### **4.10 Should the board set goals for itself each year?**

Yes. It is always a good idea for a board to have goals for the effectiveness and efficiency of board operations and evaluate them on a yearly basis. In this way, you have a scheduled forum for discussing the proficiency of your board and how to improve it.

#### **4.11 Are there term limits for board members?**

Yes and no. There is a statewide requirement that no person can serve more than two consecutive terms in office. However, boards may lengthen, shorten, or eliminate term limits as they see fit according to the Colorado Constitution Article XVIII, § 11.

Additionally, C.R.S. § 22-31-105 states that school board members have a term of four years, or six years if they were already electing members for terms of six years as of July 1, 1999.

## ***Chapter 5 - Building A Relationship With The Superintendent***

### **5.1 What is the role of the superintendent relative to the school board?**

The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district who reports to the school board of directors. The superintendent is the only employee who is employed by the board. All other administrators, teachers, and staff are hired by the superintendent, pending board approval.

The board serves as a representative of the community in providing direction for district programs and ensuring that the school system operates efficiently and effectively. They also adopt policies, plan school services, and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of district services. The board is responsible for setting the vision and goals for the district. The superintendent serves as the principal adviser to the board on all matters having to do with the district and education in general. They serve as the executive administrator of the district with the responsibility of seeing that the policies and directives of the board are implemented.

Colorado statutes do not define the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent. They do spell out a board's authority to employ a superintendent of schools to administer the affairs of the district. C.R.S. § 22-32-110(1)(g). This means a board must set forth the superintendent's duties and responsibilities in board policy and/or the superintendent's contract.

### **5.2 When and how does the board evaluate the superintendent?**

The responsibility to evaluate the superintendent's performance rests exclusively with the board. C.R.S. § 22-9-106(4)(b). It is often laid out in the superintendent's contract and/or board policy and regulation and should be established well before the board sits down to formally evaluate the superintendent. Boards should approach an evaluation as an ongoing process, not a single event.

### **5.3 How do I gain the respect of the superintendent and other administrators?**

As with any relationship, you have to earn it. The superintendent and administrators should be shown respect as they are the education experts. Seek their advice and listen. Ask thoughtful questions. Take time to learn about the school environment and issues that may be unique to your district prior to making suggestions and trying to effect change.

## **Chapter 6 - Basics Of School Law And Finance**

### **6.1 What are the powers and duties of school boards?**

The work of the board is carried out as a group, but as an individual board member, you do have important responsibilities. You have been elected by your community and this requires a duty to listen to all community members.

Colorado statute. C.R.S. § 22-32-109 specifically outlines the powers and duties of school board members, which are more detailed in policy *BBA-School Board Powers and Responsibilities*. The following duties are of particular importance:

- Hold regular and special meetings in public and keep required records of the meetings
- Adopt policies and regulations for the efficient administration of the affairs of the district and as required by law
- Adopt policies for accreditation of district school(s)
- Adopt academic standards and a plan for implementation of such standards
- Adopt student enrollment policies, including intra- and inter-district choice
- Adopt conflict-of-interest policies for board members
- Determine the educational programs in the schools of the district and prescribe the textbooks for any course of instruction or study in such programs (AEA Standards Based Education)
- Adopt the school district calendar
- Provide instructions about the use and effects of tobacco, alcohol, and controlled substances (Policy ADC - Tobacco Free Schools)
- Require development of student Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)
- Adopt a student discipline and conduct code, mission statement, and safe school plan
- Educate children with disabilities
- Adopt a student publications code
- Enforce the school attendance law (Policy JEA - Compulsory Attendance Ages)
- Employ all personnel required to maintain district operations and carry out the educational program (Policy GCE/GCF - Professional Staff Recruiting/Hiring; plus additional policies for support and other staff)
- Ensure that required background checks are conducted prior to hiring district personnel
- Provide an in-service program for district teachers, including mandatory reporting obligations
- Implement a licensed personnel evaluation system (Policy GCO - Evaluation of Licensed Personnel; GDO - Evaluation of Support Staff)

- Adopt a salary schedule or salary policy
- Keep complete and accurate financial and accounting records
- Protect public deposits in authorized investments and depositories
- Adopt a budget for each fiscal year
- Certify necessary tax levies to the county commissioners
- Protect student information
- Preserve and dispose of district records in accordance with the law

Boards **may do** the following but they aren't required (partial list):

- Purchase and construct buildings C.R.S. § 22-32-109
- Furnish transportation for students C.R.S. § 22-32-113
- Provide food services for students C.R.S. § 22-32-120
- Provide furniture, equipment, library books, and everything needed to carry out the educational program C.R.S. § 22-32-109
- Reimburse board members and employees of the district for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties C.R.S. § 22-32-109
- Procure group life, health, or accident insurance covering employees of the district C.R.S. § 22-32-109
- Sue and be sued C.R.S. § 22-32-101
- Adopt policies related to all aspects of employment C.R.S. § 22-32-109
- Suspend, expel, and deny admission to students for statutory reasons C.R.S. § 22-33-105

## **6.2 What are the primary legal functions of school boards?**

Boards adopt policies, consistent with state and federal law, which govern the affairs of their districts. They are responsible for hiring and evaluating a superintendent of schools as well as the employment of necessary professional and support staff. They also establish goals that the collective bargaining negotiations team will rely on to make specific proposals and implement negotiation strategies. Boards propose budgets for their communities to adopt, which in turn funds the district's educational system.

## **6.3 What is the legal manner in which school boards make decisions?**

School boards, acting in their corporate capacity, are required to transact business where their acts are required to be authorized by resolutions or motions duly adopted or passed by a majority of the whole board. Unless the board has taken official action to designate an individual member as the representative of the board for a particular purpose, an individual board member has no more authority than any other qualified voter of the district.

#### **6.4 What constitutes a conflict of interest on the part of school board members?**

A conflict of interest exists when a school board member is in a position to benefit financially from a decision that members may make on behalf of the district. Board members should be aware of certain conflicts of interest so they don't jeopardize the reputation of the board or the district.

It is important for members to publicly disclose any potential conflict of interest. The board is required to adopt a policy relating to conflicts of interest for its own members. C.R.S. § 22-32-109(1)(y). A board member who has a personal or private interest in any matter proposed or pending before the board must disclose that interest to the board, abstain from voting on the matter, and refrain from attempting to influence other members of the board on the matter. C.R.S. § 24-18-109(3)(a). State law creates a narrow exception allowing a board member with a conflict to vote if the board member has made specific disclosures. C.R.S. § 24-18-109(3)(b), 24-18-110.

#### **6.5 Must school boards fill vacancies on the board when they occur?**

Yes. At the next board meeting immediately following the occurrence of any vacancy condition, the board must adopt a resolution declaring a vacancy in the office. CASB has sample resolutions declaring a board vacancy available on their website. Once the vacancy has occurred, the board has 60 days to appoint a person to fill the vacancy. If the board fails to appoint within this 60-day period, the board president is required to make the appointment.

#### **6.6 May a school board member be removed from office?**

A school board member can be removed from office via a recall effort that succeeds. An elected official must hold office for six months before a recall can be attempted. No recall petition may be circulated or filed against any elected officer whose office is up for election within six months. The recall petition must be signed by at least 40% of those electors who voted in the last preceding election at which the director to be recalled was elected. If the recall petition is found to have a sufficient number of valid signatures, the question of whether to recall the officeholder is placed on the ballot. This is the only way a school board member can be removed from office.

According to Policy BEAA (electronic participation in board meetings), and C.R.S. § 22-31-129(1)(h), a board member may be subject to removal if they fail to attend three consecutive regular board meetings. This policy underscores the expectation that consistent participation is essential to fulfilling the board's governance responsibilities and maintaining effective district leadership.

## **6.7 What are the Sunshine or Open Meetings Laws?**

School board meetings must be open to the public under the Colorado Open Meetings Law, also known as the Colorado Sunshine Law C.R.S. § 24-6-401 et seq. A public meeting is a gathering of three or more members of the board at which any public business is discussed or at which any formal action may be taken, regardless of whether the meeting occurs in person, by telephone, electronically, or by other means of communication. These meetings are open to the public at all times.

Colorado boards of education are required by law to provide full and timely notice to the public of any board meeting by posting information regarding the meeting and its agenda at the board's designated posting location in the district or on the district's website at least 24 hours before the meeting begins. Publicizing meetings in this way meets the legal requirement for the meetings the board schedules as part of its annual calendar, called "regular meetings."

## **6.8 What is the board's responsibility when it comes to school finance?**

The principal responsibility of a board is to deliver a well-rounded education to district students. A board has the responsibility to manage district financial resources wisely for this purpose. To do this effectively, the board may also need to take steps to secure adequate resources to finance the needed instruction in the district. The Board is responsible to pass a balanced budget, ensure an annual audit is conducted, and direct the Superintendent to manage the budget.

## **6.9 What are the sources of revenue for school districts?**

Public school districts receive funding from a variety of sources. Most revenues to Colorado's school districts are provided through the Public School Finance Act of 1994 C.R.S. § 22-54-101 et seq.

The state's contribution to a district's funding comes mostly from state income and sales taxes, which are primarily deposited in the state General Fund. State aid, allocated through the School Finance Act, is the primary source of state revenue for school districts. The remaining state revenue is used to fund categorical programs, which include special education, English language proficiency education, gifted and talented education, small attendance centers, transportation, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Federal revenue is provided for specific programs such as special education, CTE, compensation for the impact of federal facilities in the district, and assistance to districts for at-risk students. The use of federal revenues is strictly regulated by federal law.

## ***Chapter 7 - Doing Your Homework***

### **7.1 Is it important that I know every policy in the district's policy book?**

Policies are the means by which a school board governs the school district. They communicate expectations, as well as guide the administration, staff, students, parents, and the public. Policies ensure accountability, consistency, and fairness. You can't expect to know every policy but you will find it helpful to read through the district policy manual every now and then. This will help you to become familiar with policies and the policy codes.

### **7.2 How can I build my skills and knowledge to become a better school board member?**

Take advantage of CASB resources, podcasts, webinars, virtual calls, and events. You can find this information on our website under Professional Development. Listening and learning from colleagues is also very important.

### **7.3 Is board development mandatory?**

In Colorado, board development is not mandatory but if you want to be an effective board member and serve your students and community it should be a top priority for you during your board tenure.

### **7.4 Do I pay for board programs or does the district?**

The district pays for board activity. Payment must be authorized by the board prior to attendance. Because leaders are learners, it is prudent to include funds for board leadership training in the annual budget. CASB offers a variety of learning and training opportunities.

### **7.5 What services does CASB offer?**

CASB provides advocacy, leadership development resources, customized training for boards, policy support and services, legal information, election seminars, school board candidate information, Fall Conference and Delegate Assembly, Annual Convention, Winter Legislative Conference, Days at the Capitol, Regional Meetings, Rural Legislative Bus Tour, and a Legislative Wrap Up Tour. We provide information in our newsletters; CASB Serving You, CASB Professional Development, School Board Advocate, and Special Policy Update. Visit our website for an in-depth look at all of the services we offer; [www.casb.org](http://www.casb.org).

## **Chapter 8 - Community Connections**

### **8.1 Who does the board connect with in the community?**

Board members should identify and engage key internal and external stakeholders. These individuals and groups can either help or hinder the district in achieving its vision and goals. Internal stakeholders may include students, faculty, staff, administrators, volunteers, PTA/PTO, etc. Key external stakeholders may include parents, taxpayers, unions, public officials, business/civic/social/religious leaders, and representatives of higher education, health, social, and youth services organizations.

### **8.2 How should the board engage the community?**

The board should invite community members to participate in standing and ad hoc committees, advisory panels, focus groups, forums, and surveys to describe a vision for the district, set its goals, plan strategically, align resources with goals, and other actions. Offering community members an opportunity to learn about public education creates allies for public education and your district.

There are a variety of means to inform community members about the district and offer opportunities to learn. Using print and electronic media, social media, and face-to-face conversations play important roles in a year-round district campaign to inform and to be informed.

It is important to accentuate the positive aspects of your district and your students. You must also be the first to inform your community about negative trends and what you are doing to dispel them. Board members and the superintendent can be effective ambassadors for the district by scheduling dialogues with a cross-section of your community and doing this in their communities and not your district office.

### **8.3 There are so many acronyms and terms I don't understand. Where do I find this information?**

You can check out CASB's Leadership Guidebook for a comprehensive list of education terms and acronyms.

*Thank you to the New York State School Boards Association for allowing us to borrow their New Board Member Handbook idea and some content for this publication.*