



# NEW SUPERINTENDENTS TIPSHEET

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

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## *Running a Smooth Board Meeting*

Board of education are different. Just as districts have individual characteristics and students are unique individuals unto themselves, boards are distinctive. But, basic rules apply to running a smooth board meeting, no matter how nuanced the board is. This *Tipsheet* offers a time tested TOP TEN list for successful board meetings.

### 1. FEWER IS BETTER

Boards of education are required to meet quarterly (monthly in city districts) (Ed. Law §1701). Monthly is adequate. More frequent meeting can lead to micromanagement and decrease productivity. Monthly meetings also allow staff time to respond to requests and take meaningful action when asked.

### 2. LESS IS MORE

Meetings should go on for more than three hours. Boards meet in the evening (for the most part). More than three hours is already a long time. It can be interminable after a full work day. Also, longer meetings risk getting into “the weeds” of issues more than necessary. Boards are policy makers and should focus on high level issues, not their implementation.

### 3. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Session should be short. Very few items can legally be discussed in executive session. These are:

- Matters that will imperil the public safety if disclosed.
- Any matter that may disclose the identity of a law enforcement agent or informer.
- Information relating to current or future investigation or prosecution of a criminal offense that would imperil effective law enforcement if disclosed.
- Discussions involving proposed, pending, or current litigation.
- Collective negotiations pursuant to article 14 of the Civil Service Law.
- The medical, financial, credit, or employment history of a particular person or corporation, or matters leading to the appointment, employment, promotion, demotion, discipline, suspension, dismissal, or removal of a particular person or corporation.
- The preparation, grading, or administration of exams.
- The proposed acquisition, sale, or lease of real property or the proposed acquisition, sale, or exchange of securities, but only when publicity would substantially affect the value of these things (Pub. Off. Law § 105(a-h)).

#### 4. COMMUNITY INPUT

Just as board meetings are times for the board to discuss issues affecting the district, so too are they opportunities to hear the concerns of the community. Some time should be devoted to allowing the public to express concerns, interests and ideas. In doing this it is often helpful to limit the scope of discussion to that which the board is presently considering. This is not always easy, but appropriate remarks by the Board president are appropriate. And, the board should not attempt to resolve particular problems at board meetings. These should be referred to the superintendent for appropriate handling afterwards.

#### 5. FOCUS BOARD DISCUSSIONS

Board meetings should be concentrated on a handful of issues. If the board limits each meeting to five issues, it can focus, fully explore ideas and take action. Less priority items might be suitable for a consent agenda. Board may decide to review the agenda in the first instance and dispose of the consent items immediately. This maximizes time for the focused, in depth issues.

#### 6. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

This should be part of every meeting. It allows the CEO of the District a chance to share what is on his/her plate, major issues that are being dealt with and status of ongoing projects. It is often a good way to start out a meeting. The report should be concise, offering major actions, issues and responses. Substance should trump form – don't get mired in how a decision was made, focus on what was done.

#### 7. REASONABLE PACE

Board meetings are critical. It is where the major policies of the district are discussed and decided. They should not be rushed. The board president should keep the pace even, not hurried.

#### 8. START ON TIME

This is an obvious oversight by many boards. While a board may not act without a quorum, once a sufficient number of members is present, the meeting should begin. There is no need to wait for straggling board or community members.

#### 9. PLANNING SESSION

It is always good for the superintendent and board president to informally discuss board meetings in advance. This enhances relationships and ensures the two leaders of the district work well together at the actual meeting. This is *not* a time for decision making, rather it is planning and general discussion.

#### 10. STUDENTS/ACADEMICS

Every board meeting should leave time to discuss academics and students. Recognizing student achievement at every meeting is not only good practice, it is the most important element – schools exist so children can learn. Board members serve to ensure that learning is the best possible. Their efforts to achieve should always be first and foremost.

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