

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Board Meeting Agenda Preparation

REF WCSD Policy #2342, 2342-R

- 1) A draft agenda will be developed by the superintendent and board president in time to allow the full board to receive it electronically on BoardDocs **five** days prior to the meeting.
- 2) In the event that circumstances require that an item be added to an agenda after it has been made public, the superintendent, in consultation with the board president, will distribute an updated agenda or addendum and any appropriate supporting materials as soon as practicable.
- 3) **How can I get my issues onto the board agenda?**
The best way to get an item that requires board action onto the agenda is to contact either the board president or superintendent prior to the agenda setting 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. At the meeting, a motion to amend the agenda to add an item; requires a second, debatable on changing the agenda only; needs a simple vote (5) to pass.

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

Board Meeting Preparation

REF WCSD Policy #2350

- 1) District administrative staff will supply appropriate supporting information required for informed decision-making to each board member in the board meeting agenda packet and electronically in BoardDocs.
- 2) Printed agenda packets will be distributed to board members at least three business days before scheduled board meetings.
- 3) All participants are expected to be prepared to address relevant agenda items.
 - a) Board members need to read and be familiar with agenda packet materials before each board meeting.
 - b) Board members who have questions should ask agenda-item-related questions of the Superintendent or Central Office Administrator before the scheduled board meetings. Any questions about agenda items or requests for additional information about them will be directed to the Superintendent or designated administrator and copied to all the members of the board.
 - c) Board Members will, as far as possible, let the Superintendent and staff know ahead of time when a request for information will be made in public so that staff can be prepared to provide a thorough answer.
- 4) **How may I ask questions at a board meeting and still adhere to the “no surprises” rule?**
If you think your question may be controversial, let the superintendent or president or both know ahead of time. They can help you decide 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 properly discussed in executive session.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Consent Agenda

REF WCSD Policy #2350

- 1) A consent agenda is an item listed on the regular agenda that groups routine items under one agenda heading. Routine items (such as accepting donations, approving minutes of the last meeting, approving bids and tax lists, etc.) can thus 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.
- 2) There are three specific times that call for an item to be pulled:
 - When a trustee plans to vote “no”
 - When a trustee needs further information or discussion before deciding how to vote
 - When a trustee has a conflict of interest and needs to abstain from voting on that item

Community and Public Input

REF WCSD Policy #1230

- 1) There are three opportunities for public input at board meetings:
 - a) during the time for public comment on agenda items at the beginning of the meeting
 - b) during the time for public comment at the end of the meeting
 - c) submitted on the public comment form at the district clerk’s desk; responses will be posted on the website
- 2) Board members listen to public input and take it into account during discussion and deliberation. However, Board members have no direct interaction with the public during a regular Board meeting. The Board President acknowledges and thanks members of the public for their input as appropriate. Once Board members make their comments and move to discussion on an item, the audience and staff no longer participate.

Board Committees

- 1) The president is responsible for assigning board members to committees. If you have an interest for a particular committee, let the president know of your interest prior to identifying committee assignments. This is usually done at or shortly after the organizational meeting in July.

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Legal Authority of Individual School Board Members

- 1) Individual school board members have no inherent powers by reason of holding office. Board members are reminded of their obligations as public servants.
- 2) The only authority to direct action rests with the full majority of the Board sitting at the Board table.
- 3) Board members may request action during Board meetings, explaining their interest in a particular course of action and asking that it come back as an action item. The Board President will then restate the request, seek consensus from the entire board to see if a majority supports having the item brought to an upcoming Board meeting for discussion/action.

Non-Agenda Item Information Requests

- 1) Generally, board members have no greater rights to information unrelated to matters before the board than does the public.
- 2) If a member has a request for information (RFI), a motion should be made to include it during the Request for Information section on the agenda, requires a second, is debatable, and needs a simple majority vote (5) to pass.
- 3) All Board members will receive a copy of any report generated by a board member's request.

School Visits by Board Members

REF WCSD Policy #1240-R, 2110R

- 1) You have the same right as a parent or community member to visit the schools in the district, so long as you follow policy #1240-R Visitors to the School Regulation and any process established by the respective building principal. As a school board member, you may also visit the schools in an official capacity, only with the board's authority, for purposes such as building inspections.
- 2) As a school board member, you should use school visits to build good working relations with building principals and staff, to celebrate the positive accomplishments of the schools, and to show your pride as a member of the board. Look for opportunities to visit when a school is hosting a special event or recognition program for students and staff. In any event, be sure to tell the superintendent and/or principal in advance of your visit.

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How should I respond to parental complaints? REF WCSD Policy #1400, 1440

- 1) The best way to respond to parental complaints is to be a good listener. This allows you to ask questions to understand the situation better. Be careful, though, that the parent does not interpret your questions or comments as an indication of future board action. Once parents have shared their complaints with you, try to give them guidance on how to get their concerns addressed through proper channels.
- 2) If the complainant does not know the district's chain of command, the board member will provide the following information:
 - a) Complaints about specific classroom practices shall be directed to the teacher concerned.
 - b) If the matter is not settled satisfactorily, the complainant may then contact the Building Principal and/or District Coordinator.
 - c) If there is no resolution on this level, the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee may be contacted.
 - d) The Superintendent shall refer the issue to the Board for final resolution.
- 3) All matters referred to the Superintendent and/or the Board must be in writing and signed by the sender. Anonymous correspondence will not be considered by the Board or by the Superintendent. Concerns registered directly to the Board as a whole or to an individual Board member shall be referred as soon as is reasonably possible to the Superintendent for investigation, report, and/or resolution.

Response to Executive Session or School Attorney-related Inquiries REF WCSD Policy #2330

- 1) Board members will not disclose confidential information that is either provided in confidential memoranda, in meetings with the school attorney or properly discussed in executive session.

What information is considered confidential?

Most employee personnel issues or information contained in student educational records are considered confidential. Also, the information discussed in a closed board meeting, more commonly known as an executive session, is confidential. A board may call an executive session only on the following subjects:

- 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 bargaining 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 their value would be substantially affected by publicity.

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- 2) In explaining their inability to answer questions, members may state that the board is restricted by law, Board policy, and/or the school board code of ethics from disclosing any such information.
- 3) Members should be aware that public disclosure of information shared at a meeting with the school attorney may result in violating attorney-client privilege and open the board to liability.

Role in the Public

- 1) School board members have a right to express their own personal views on school district issues, including the school budget and other propositions. However, school board members who wish to express their personal opinions about issues before the voters must:
 - a) Clearly distinguish their personal views from those of the board they represent. For example, when writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper in support of a voter proposition, school board members must be sure to explicitly state that the letter expresses their personal views.
 - b) Not use district funds, facilities or channels of communication to encourage voters to vote in support or against the school budget or any proposition.
- 2) Particularly on issues of great sensitivity, a single spokesperson – usually the president – may be designated to speak for the board. If the media is waiting to do an interview following a board meeting, then it is appropriate to refer the question to the president or the superintendent.
- 3) 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, tell the reporter you'll get an answer and get back to them. Ask what kind of deadline they have, and then promptly follow through.

Communication Between Meetings With Team Members

- 1) The superintendent will communicate with each board member by weekly board memo that may include information such as:
 - a) Schedule of or report on district events
 - b) Progress reports on board goals, policy initiatives and strategic objectives
 - c) Follow-up reports prepared in response to questions of the board
 - d) Updates on significant administrative matters
- 2) The superintendent will meet or communicate with the board president **as needed** to inform him or her of district issues that may need to come before the board for information or action.
- 3) The board president may direct the superintendent to distribute relevant documents to each board member for information. Such additional materials will be included in the **weekly** board information packet, unless unusual circumstances dictate a faster delivery.
- 4) The preferred method for board members who wish to share information relevant to district business or issues scheduled to come before the board is to relay the information to all Board members and the Superintendent. Board members may send relevant information directly to

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each other, but should also copy the superintendent and the full board with this information. Board members should refrain from encouraging electronic or other discussion about such information in a manner that would violate the Open Meetings Law.

- 5) **Can I talk to board members outside the board meeting?** Yes, the state’s Open Meetings Law generally permits you to converse with your fellow board members outside of board meetings. As with the superintendent, you should try to establish productive relations with each of the other board members. Talking with them in social situations or at school sporting events, for example, will give you an opportunity to learn about them outside of the school board. Be careful, however, that you do not discuss any school board matters if you have a quorum – a simple majority (more than half) of the total number of members on your board. This would constitute a meeting in violation of the Open Meetings Law. You should ensure that such informal chats do not substitute for full deliberation in a public meeting.
- 6) **Can I use email or social media to communicate with my board colleagues?** School board members may use email to communicate with each other only if they are not using it to discuss board business or influence votes on issues in advance of a meeting or as a means of avoiding open meeting requirements. The same holds true with social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. You should be particularly careful to avoid sequential email communications or social media conversations. While you may email or “direct message” another board member with a question, it is not appropriate to engage in online discussions. Nor is it appropriate for a majority of the board members to email one another prior to a board meeting as this will likely affect the board’s discussion at the meeting. It would also preclude the community from hearing the board debate important issues.

If you are using a school email address, all email can be requested by the public or media under the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). Similarly, the Committee on Open Government has observed that communications made from a public officer’s personal email account or from a home computer, if made for the purpose of carrying out a governmental function, may constitute a “record” under FOIL, which may be subject to disclosure. Your online communications may also become public as well, even with privacy settings set to “friends only.” If you don’t want your conversations to become front-page news, then don’t have them online.