

BOARDSMANSHIP

Boardsmanship encompasses the basic characteristics and behaviors that Board members have in common who effectively create a climate for excellence. How a school Board governs is as important as what steps the Board takes to govern. To fulfill the Board's responsibilities, Board members should:

- Recognize that Board members are members of a team;
- Focus on serving all children;
- Realize perceptions and demeanor have dramatic consequences;
- Respect the diversity of perspectives and styles of Board members, staff and members of the public;
- Understand the Board's and Superintendent's respective roles;
- Keep confidential information confidential;
- Strive to know Board policies and bylaws; and
- Commit the time and energy required to be prepared and effective.

The County Board of Education must keep the importance of its responsibilities in mind when holding Board meetings and ensuring its behavior reflects the seriousness of the matters at hand.

Each Board meeting should be a model of fairness, deliberation, and trust. Board members should endeavor to understand diverse points of view and ideas that are introduced. Board members must communicate leadership, understanding, decisive decision-making, and courage to the public and staff. To Board colleagues, Board members must communicate open-mindedness and fairness.

The general tone of a Board meeting will be set by the Board President acting as chair. All Board members need to work together to help the Board President keep focused on actual issues on the agenda. Anyone may occasionally wander off track.

As Board members listen to information from the public, staff and each other, they need to:

- Watch their demeanor. (Are they looking interested? Are they looking bored? Are they taking notes but perceived as not paying attention?)
- Listen to negative comments without taking them personally. (The most passionate people are emotional because of the deep commitment to their cause.)
- Maintain a professional tone.
- Remain courteous.
- Be firm when necessary, not threatening.

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Intentionally or not, the Board sets the tone for the public's perception of its members and for the County Office staff through its behavior in public settings. The Board should be a role model of professional behavior; the Board cannot expect staff and others to behave professionally if Board members do not.

Board members need to watch their words. They must be civil, reasonable, patient and courteous, and ask questions that convey interest. They must avoid sarcasm, raised voices and condescending tones. Conflicts will naturally arise, but they must be handled in an appropriate manner.

It is not easy to be patient in the face of impatience; courteous in response to rudeness; calm when attacked in anger; or manage stress in stressful situations. But Board members must strive to do just that.

Board members also need to watch their non-verbal language. Positive messages are conveyed by looking directly at people, listening carefully, and sitting up straight. Negative messages are conveyed by engaging in side conversations, yawning, shuffling papers, cutting off a speaker, intimidating, behaving rudely, dismissing the speaker's concerns, sitting with arms crossed defensively or sitting in an overly relaxed manner.

Often Board members are unaware of the signals they are sending. Board members might need to increase their conscious awareness by paying particular attention to their actions and behavior until positive behaviors become ingrained and automatic.

For Board meetings:

- Be on time. Be prepared. Bring a positive attitude. Remain for the full meeting except in case of emergency.
- Build the team by providing mutual professional and personal support.
- Actively participate in the decision-making process.
- Engage in full participation, active listening, and honest sharing.
- Be respectful and sensitive toward others. Allow for and respect individuality. Respect confidentiality.
- Utilize meeting time effectively and efficiently.
- Contribute by being prepared for the meeting.
- Clarify expectations.
- Evaluate the process and the meeting.

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References: A Guide to Effective Governance; County Board Member Handbook.
Boardsmanship: Maximizing School Board Leadership; CSBA Handbook

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