

Veteran school board members offer advice and a heads-up

Becoming a school board member can be a daunting task. To help, we called upon the collective wisdom and experience of our Reader Panel and other subscribers to tell us what advice they found helpful when they joined their school boards. We also asked what they wish they'd known before becoming a school board member.

If you want to add your own advice, email it to us at editor@asbj.com.

What is the best piece of advice you received as a new board member?

Get to know what your role is as a board member, develop yourself in many ways, set goals for yourself, be positive, know your limits, and above all listen. -- *Jo Ann Beamer, board member, Ohio*

Do not be in a hurry to do something. It takes time to develop governance skills. -- *Jill Wynns, board member, California*

I am only one of five voting members and not a power of one. -- *Richard Asadoorian, board member, California*

Read and learn your board policies and state law regarding school boards. -- *Ginny Moe, board member, South Carolina*

Remember, you were elected by citizens. Try to carry their voices and needs. -- *Cynthia Shabb, board member, North Dakota*

When people present you with a problem, make sure you ask them whether they have already discussed the issue with the building level administrator, i.e., principal, before bringing it to you. If they have not, ask them to before you begin investigating. -- *David Mauffray, board member, Mississippi*

Once a decision is made you should support the decision. If you disagree, try to change the decision. -- *James R Dykeman, Jr., board member, Massachusetts*

If it is not good enough for my child, it is not good enough for any child. -- *Bill Kress, board member, New York*

Read your school state laws and codes and ask questions about anything you don't understand. -- *Terisa Fitzpatrick, board member, Illinois*

As long as you are working in the best interest for the students, vote your conscience. -- *Mary Mathes, board member, Indiana*

Read everything and to be prepared. -- *Iris Lane, board member, Virginia*

If you feel like you are overwhelmed, you are micromanaging. -- *Jim Butt, board member, Pennsylvania*

Be respectful of the opinions and positions of your fellow board members. -- *Scott M. Johnson, board member, New York*

Your primary constituents are the students -- who do not vote. -- *Charles Wilson, board member, Virginia*

Change takes time. Start slow and build to fundamental change. -- *Sheldon Wigdor, retired board member, California*

Don't surprise your superintendent or the staff with questions at board meetings. Give them a heads up that you will be raising an issue so that they will be prepared to speak about it. -- *Jeff Phillips, board member, North Carolina*

Don't take things personally. -- *Vanessa hatcher, board member, Illinois*

Recognize the difference between policy and procedure. -- *Bill Culbertson, board member, Kentucky*

Create alliances with each board member, learn what they care about and how to present ideas to each and every person to speak to their beliefs. -- *Mary S. Cunningham, board member, Virginia*

Vote based on facts and data, rather than getting caught up in the politics or trading votes. -- *Kyle K. Walker, board member, Oregon*

Be open to listen from all stakeholders before making up your mind. -- *Raymond Eng, board member, New Jersey*

Go to the state association certified training as soon as possible. -- *Peggy Taylor, board member, Missouri*

At Board meetings don't respond immediately to criticisms or complaints -- *Kathleen Oxberry, board member, Pennsylvania*

What do you wish you had known before becoming a school board member?

I wish I had known that the board meetings are not always where the suggestions are made or where the work gets accomplished. -- *Cynthia Shabb, School board member, North Dakota*

How much time it would take (and how many nights I'd be away from my family). -- *Stephanie Gunderson, board member, Pennsylvania*

All of the acronyms. -- *Steven Hermann, board member, Missouri*

I didn't realize that so much was prescribed by law. -- *Terry Reed, board member, Indiana*

How demanding the job can be when there are "hot button" issues pending. -- *Cheryl D. Mayes, board member, Tennessee*

The thing that surprised me the most was the level of respect that I received after being elected. Even people I had known for years and always on first name basis immediately started referring to me as "Mr." -- *Joseph M. (Mickey) Furcron, board member, Texas*

I wish I had known right from the start that I need to evaluate all requests that come my way and respond appropriately. -- *Kathy Korte, board member, New Mexico*

Constitutents expect you to be on call 24/7. -- *Sann Knipple, board member, Illinois*

Your first year is like drinking from a fire hose. The amount of reading materials and data you will be inundated with is unbelievable. -- *Ronald Sommer, board member Vice-President, New York*

That I would actually feel good about being a trustee. -- *Michael Castellano, board member, N.Y.*

The misinformation that the public and parents have about public schools and how they educate children. -- *Elaine G. Davis, board member, Louisiana*

I wish I would have known how best to communicate collaboratively as a board with the superintendent. -- *Michelle Engel, board member, Indiana*

How rewarding it feels when things are going well, and to know you have been a good shephard for the district. -
- *Nick Hankes, board member, Illinois*

I wish I had known more about district finances. Early on, I heard someone say, "Show me where you put your money and I will show you where your priorities are." That is so true! -- *Kathryn Simpson, board member, Washington state*

That changing a system is hard work, even in a small district. -- *Kacie Neaby, board member, Washington state*

As a board member, you personally will not make any difference, but as a team, you will. -- *Linda Kessler, board member, Wyoming*

I did not realize how much "business" was involved. Purchases, leases, budgets, etc. I thought the work I would be doing would be closer to the children. -- *Bill Bradley, board member, Mississippi*

I wish I had known how easily misunderstood board decisions may be in the community and how important it is to over-communicate. -- *Julia K Beckman, board member, Illinois*

I wish I'd had a thorough study of Robert's Rules of Order. -- *Ginny Moe, board member, South Carolina*