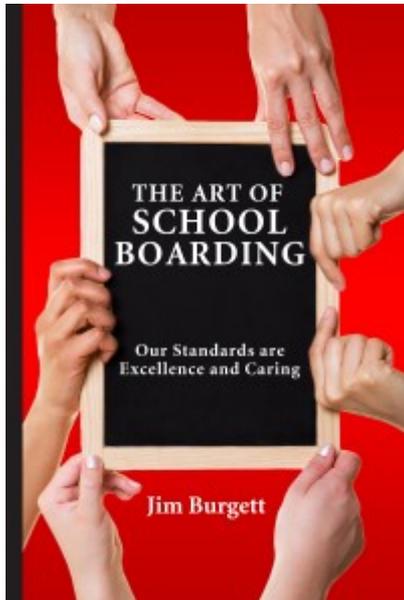


# Top Ten Strategies for Developing an A+ Board of Education



A Board of Education that works well together, supports the mission of the district, respects and communicates positively with the superintendent, and comes to the table with no agenda other than to do what is best for kids in a reasonable and intelligent way is a Board to behold! Is it possible to find seven people who can do this? Of course, but it takes savvy and leadership from the top. Here are ten strategies that may help develop that A+ Board of Education. (Jim Burgett, author and speaker.)

1. Start the process before new Board members are elected. When a citizen takes out a petition, or indicates they are thinking about running for the Board, go to work! Do some invaluable pre-service prepping before they invest their time and money. Give them a free copy of [The Art of School Boarding](#), a book that clearly and honestly outlines the job responsibilities and mindset they need before they get involved getting elected. Encourage them to read the book, and

offer to answer any questions. Make sure they are aware of the necessary time commitments.

2. Continue the training as soon as they are chosen. Without delay invite the new members in for a session with you and possibly your cabinet. Give them a general review of the funding process, the budget outline, the procedures for developing board packets, and other communications they will need.

3. Introduce new Board members to the central office staff so they know who does what in the office. Offer to take them to school buildings. Answer all the questions they ask, and more. Be open and thoughtful.

4. Meet them for a one-on-one lunch (or early breakfast) and talk about families, past history, their relationship with the district, etc.

5. Train (or remind) all Board members about the importance of the chain of command. Review who reports to whom, what the organizational structure is, and how the entire system works. Include facilities, transportation, and food services. You can't expect them to follow the chain if they don't know it. You might even engage in some faux case studies so they see how the Board members know the staff and the chain.

6. Handling complaints will be one of the toughest tasks a Board member must do. Teach them the art of receiving a complaint and then handling it. (In **The Art of School Boarding** that's called "catching" and "throwing" a complaint.) It is a process that shows every Board Member how to properly and effectively handle any random or planned complaint from phone calls at home to unexpected visits in the store. Sticking to the outlined process is a win-win-win for the complainer, the Board Member, and the school.

7. Remind the Board who does what whenever possible or when it may seem unclear. This helps keep everyone's roles and

responsibilities neat and clean. “That task falls to the building principal according to the policies you have established,” is a sample reminder of who does what.

8. Periodically, with all Board members, review the steps of routine processes. Examples of these processes might be how to change or write Board policy, set a tax levy, who and how staff are recommended for hire or dismissal, or how disciplinary hearings are held. Some of these events happen infrequently, some annually, some often, but an A+ Board must be aware of the specifics each time. A warm-up lesson before the tax levy meeting, or a handout listing the steps in a disciplinary hearing (before the event happens), for example, makes everyone a better participant. It also helps to guide those who will be experiencing the process for the first time. Even a private tutoring session for new members might be helpful.

9. Distribute the School Board Association’s Code of Ethics every month and read/review one item from the list. This is often done at the beginning of every meeting, to emphasize the importance of the Code and to help all follow it. It doesn’t hurt to read and review the District Mission Statement frequently too.

10. Don’t get so caught up with budgets, basketball, beans, and buses that talking about people is forgotten! Reminding the Board that they are really in session for kids might help, as might a reminder that most of the staff works very hard and a thank you to them for their personal service is always much appreciated.

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**Information about The Art of School Boarding: What Every School Board Member Needs to Know**

by Jim Burgett

Jim Burgett's new book, *The Art of School Boarding*, explains what a school board really is, what functions it must perform, how it does that best, what its members can (and can't) legally do, and how every school boarder can be extraordinary every day they serve. (But some won't be because they don't know how—until now.) This book is written in plain (sometimes unconsciously humorous), jargon-free prose for school board rookies, veterans, superintendents, other administrators, and you. It should be mandatory reading for candidates seeking board election—read before they run and again before they serve.

But why accept what Jim Burgett says about boardsmanship, or the other 20 experts whose case studies the book includes? Because during his 40 years as an educator he has written five books for school leaders, provided hundreds of training sessions for aspiring and active school board members, and trained and/or consulted with dozens of school boards concerning internal issues, governance, and strategic planning. Jim was selected "Illinois Administrator of the Year" by the American Association of School Administrators and the Illinois Association of Educational Office Professionals. He is also in persistent demand to speak about K-12 education nationwide.

Being a school board member is not a political position, nor one of royalty. It's held in modest esteem. Board members deal with families, law, curricula, finances, mandates, athletics, the fine arts—the list goes on. No pay, tough issues, lots of controversy, much reading... Oh yes, the future of the community it serves is in its hands.

"School Boarding" is indeed an art. Boards have their own purpose, means, personality, process, and protocol. These pages help them define their mission, their governance, and the role of the board, its members, and the administration. Explained are ethical expectations and Codes of Conduct, and how the board handles community concerns and builds vital

relationships. The Art of School Boarding's straightforward common sense simply explains what present or future school board members have to know.

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