

# 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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## **30 key points about The Art of School Boarding**



Jim Burgett's just-released book, [The Art of School Boarding](#), is our newest release from Education Communication Unlimited, in both paperback (from [us](#) and CreateSpace) and in digital versions (in .pdf from [us](#) and in the respective reader versions from Kindle, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, and Scribd).

Here are specific ordering [details](#), plus much more about the book's contents and Jim's extensive, award-winning background in K-12 education.

Would you also like to read some **key extracts** from **The Art of School Boarding**?

Here is a summarized Table of Contents and 30 segments directly from the book.

### **Summary Table of Contents**

1. Boarding Basics
2. Why Does Anyone Want to Board?
3. The Foundational Principles of School Governance
4. Board Roles and Superintendent Roles
5. Boarding Code of Conduct
6. Know the Chain of Command
7. Learn the Art of Receiving and Responding to Complaints
8. Never Forget Who Comes First

9. Money Matters
10. Programs and Growth
11. Relationships
12. School Boarding at its Best
13. Expert Advice
14. Taking Care of You
15. The Ride

\* This book should be mandatory reading by every new member of every school board in America. They should read it before they seek election or accept appointment.

\* Being a member of a board of education is one of the most important jobs that a person can hold, and it should be reserved for people who have the courage, the fortitude, and the desire to make a difference.

\* (Being on a school board) is not an easy job, but it's a very important one. The lives of every kid in this country, our kids, are at stake. And so is the present and future fabric of our nation.

\* Who else should read its pages? Current board members, both as a reminder of the pledge they have made and to provide a unifying language, shared process, and commonly held goal that they and their new followers can seek together.

\* I'm writing this book because it needs to be written. It is intended to serve as a guide, a primer, a companion, a training manual, a motivational tool, and a down-to-earth conversation starter about a job that is always, for those involved, a life-changing event.

\* "School Boarding" is a verb that captures movement and change. The "Art of School Boarding" is the process that propels and steers that change.

\* I think school boards in general are doing a superb job, despite the fact that much of that is done "by the seat of

their pants.” And much of that is because too many of the members just don’t know any better. And some don’t care.

\* You see, some folks run for the school board without understanding both its importance and its complexity. Some, once elected, simply don’t get it. And some lose their vigor and vision. So maybe a straightforward, common sense, jargon-free book like this can help all of the board members become essential components of a crucial process for helping kids. Perhaps it can provide a shared starting point for boards of education working as cohesive teams, knowing their purpose, rolling up their collective sleeves, and never losing focus while making a true difference. Helping school boards “board” in a positive, effective, and meaningful manner, then, is the goal of this book, the very reason for its existence.

\* This book contains the kind of information that board members, particularly beginners or others considering joining, should know, like being a member of a board of education is an act of noble and selfless public service.

\* Being a member of a board of education takes time. If done right, it is a time-consuming task.

\* There are no board of education members who don’t face difficult decisions, votes, or issues. Nor any who haven’t had to defend his or her decisions many times. This is a job that often includes some degree of conflict.

\* (Being on a school board) can be fun and rewarding. It is always life changing. But it can also be taxing and frustrating. One thing for certain, it is not a job to be entered into lightly.

\* This is not a textbook. It has no footnotes, nor many statistics. It comes from me (who sat through thousands of hours of school board meetings), mentors, and colleagues with a century-plus of school board experience... The format is casual, like a conversation.



\* School boarding isn't a science—I taught science. Yes, there are some rules, procedures, and recommended guidelines. What makes it an art (as in *The Art of School Boarding*) is that at the core what we most need to share is thoughtfulness, tact, and the process (really the art) of building relationships.

\* School board members mold, direct, and outline the educational opportunities of children and adults. Would it be too theatrical to say that they hold the future of mankind in the palm of their hand? Well, if mankind is composed of one person at a time, one new opportunity, one creative philosophy permitting another, then maybe, just maybe, theatricality borders on reality. You have an opportunity to change the world.

\* From the minute you are elected or appointed a school board member you hold a position of public authority. Your vote always counts. You become responsible for huge sums of money, the stewardship of property, and the employment and welfare of many human beings. Essentially, you hold the personal livelihood of people in the power of your vote. And not only the individual, but his/her family.

\* Can it be rewarding to be a school board member? You bet. Consider the rewards—permanent ones, each growing with every kid from day one in kindergarten to graduation day from high school, and spin-offs all the days that follow.

\* The Pros (of school boarding) are serving mankind, volunteering for the good of society, helping young people have a chance for success, making sure opportunities are fair and appropriate, and being accountable to those who elected you by being diligent in your duties and demonstrating professional and respectable behavior.

\* The school board is the “corporate” entity charged by law with the task of governing a legally defined school district.

\* School boards write and approve district policies that

clearly define delegation. In fact, almost every aspect of a school board's authority should be contained in a well-crafted set of policies. The board has the ultimate responsibility for every aspect of school governance, but those responsibilities need to be easily understood and well crafted.

\* The board of education is the engine that runs the system. The engine transforms power into action; thus, the superintendent is like the transmission, taking the energy and converting it into productive motion.

\* The superintendent is hired to do the following: understand, interpret, refine, and implement the vision, mission, goals and policy as set forth by the board of education. That's one powerful and jam-packed expectation.

\* The superintendent's role is ... to take the decisions made by the school board and to implement them, in accordance with both their request, existing policy, and in compliance with legal and ethical restrictions.

\* Knowing where you stand in the flow also helps you direct yourself to the right place. Your place in every organizational chart (as a school board member) is at the top, at least within the district. Some charts may put state government or state leaders over you, but within the district you are generally considered the last stop, the head honcho, the buck stopper. And next to you, down the scale only one notch or position, is the person you hired and hold responsible, the superintendent.

\* "Who comes first?" The answer is always "the kids." Call them students, children, young adults, pre-adolescents, adolescents, infants, or whatever, all of these are, in my thinking, "the kids." If you program your thinking in this direction, then everything, absolutely everything, you do will in some way affect the kids and their opportunity to learn.

\* I recommend, without any hesitation, that school board

members ask the tough questions.

\* Everything in this chapter (about school finances) defines the word “art” in the title of this book. The reason is simple: managing and projecting school finances is not, and never will be, a science. Certainly the cash in, cash out accounting procedures are pure science and legally controlled, but no district will ever know for sure the future of the financial variables.

\* I can’t tell you how many times I have told teachers over the years, “Never discipline kids, just behaviors.”

\* I have often pictured a board of education as a jigsaw puzzle with eight pieces. Seven are the individual pieces that fit together, each piece representing one of the (board members). The eighth makes up the border of the puzzle. All the inside pieces fit inside the border. The border is the superintendent. He/she holds everything together and provides the boundaries, protection, and (the) shape of the puzzle. When the board is cohesive and working well, all the inside pieces fit nicely together with no binding (or) straining, clearly displaying a comprehensive “picture” of the district.

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**Jim Burgett** is a frequent keynoter, workshop provider, academy presenter, and consultant throughout the United States. His audiences include school administrators, teachers, board members, businesses, and institutions. When his audiences evaluate his presentations, three words frequently appear: passionate, inspirational, and practical. Jim’s mission is simply “To make a difference.”

Jim is the author of [Teachers Change Lives 24/7](#), the coauthor of [Finding Middle Ground in K-12 Education](#) (with Brian Schwartz, General Counsel and Associate Director of the Illinois Principals Association), and coauthor of two other best-selling books for administrators, [What Every](#)

[Superintendent and Principal Needs to Know](#) and [The Perfect School](#) (both with Max McGee, President of the Illinois Math and Science Academy, and Jim Rosborg, Director of Graduate Education at McKendree University).

Burgett has taught and served as principal and superintendent at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. He was twice named administrator of the year by his peers, and has won many other awards. Burgett serves on several boards for many organizations. Following a full career as a working educator, he is now the lead member of The Burgett Group and focuses on providing exceptional professional development. For details, see [www.burgettgroup.com](http://www.burgettgroup.com).