

THE TRI COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION ORIENTATION FOR NEW MEMBERS

Welcome

This information was created for you, a new board member. It is a compilation of guidance from the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB), publications, Tri County board members, and other districts. It is designed to help you be an effective member of this board, and to make your experience gratifying. Thank you for your commitment to serve the students of Tri County Area Schools.

Getting on Board

“It's not what I expected. It takes a lot more time than I ever anticipated to deal with the array of concerns the board must handle. Such an array I hadn't anticipated either.” - Kansas Board Member

Some things that may surprise you:

1. The great amount of time it takes to be an effective board member.
2. The variety of concerns with which the board deals.
3. The board-related paperwork.
4. The abrupt change from “citizen” status to board member status.
5. That the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the board with administration, in operating the school district, do not match initial assumptions.

Getting started – Board meetings schedule

Our full board meets on the 2nd and 4th Mondays each month, so clear your calendar if possible.

- 2nd Monday of the month is for the Regular meeting of the board at 7:00PM.
- 4th Monday of the month is for the Board Workshop at 6:30PM.

Board committees and assignments

- All committees are formed under the authorization of the board and superintendent.
- There are 3 standing committees of the board: Finance/Negotiations, Policy, and Facilities. They meet monthly, or as often as determined by the board and superintendent. Athletics is a 4th committee that meets as needed.
- Committee assignments will be determined by the board president at the July organizational meeting of the board each year, or when there is a change in board membership.
- Each committee will be responsible for selecting its chairperson to prepare reports for the board as a whole. The regular monthly BOE meeting agenda includes an opportunity for Committee Reports to the board.
- Committees are not voting entities, however, they are of immense help to the board by reducing the workload. When the board is asked to vote on a subject in an open meeting, the relevant committee may be asked for their recommendation on the action item, as well as being available to answer questions regarding their findings.
- *Ad hoc* committees may be added as determined by the board and superintendent based on need. These are temporary committees assigned with a specific task. Their findings are reported back to the board. The committee will disband once their assigned task is complete.
- Any one committee may have **no more** than 3 board members serving. More than 3 would constitute a 'voting quorum' and violate the Open Meetings Act (more on this later).

Meeting Structure

- Agenda format using Parliamentary Procedure in the spirit of Robert's Rules of Order.
- The meeting agenda is prepared by the superintendent and board president during the week prior.
- Any board member may request to have an item placed on the agenda.
- Background information and supporting documents will be provided for you in a board packet, which is sent electronically several days before the meeting. A printed copy will be available for you, at the meeting, upon request.
- Please review the documents sent to you and come prepared to the meetings. Feel free to ask us any questions you have, preferably before the meeting.
- No surprises. We will expand on this during orientation.
- Our meetings are structured to begin on a positive note, with recognition of a variety of accomplishments or achievements by students, staff, and the community.
- Items that will require board action are presented 1 month in advance during an open meeting. This is for both the board and the public, by allowing ample time for questions and for the purpose of transparency. This practice is followed with rare exceptions.
- On complex issues, work may develop in a board or staff committee.
- **Open Meetings Act.** We obey in spirit and word. We operate in the sunshine. We do not do what we aren't supposed to do. You will be provided with a printed copy of the “*Guide to the Open Meetings Act*” authored by attorneys from the Michigan Association of School Boards.
- No surprises. We are firm on this.
- All meetings of the board offer opportunities for public comment.

***The Board of Education meeting is a meeting held in the public.
It is not a public meeting.***

Tri County Area Schools Strategic Plan 2017-2022

In January 2017, members of the TC administration, board, staff, and community met to create these Mission and Vision statements as part of our Strategic Plan. It's important that we always keep these statements in mind as we make decisions affecting our students and schools.

Our Mission Statement is to:

“Educate. Encourage. Empower.”

Our Vision Statement:

“Leading the way in educational opportunities for the successful future of each student.”

Governance

As a governing body, the board of education of Tri County Schools will be reviewing, in cooperation with the superintendent, the Board Governance Standards set forth by MASB and approved by the State Board of Education. In the past, we have followed the Carver Model of Policy Governance.

- You may anticipate this review and discussion during your first meetings.

Before a school board can establish an effective working relationship with the superintendent, it is imperative that the board members, themselves, are able to work together.

What does the board do?

Sets the tone, builds trust, and provides leadership:

- ***Sets vision*** – (Vision and statements with short- and long-term goals)
- ***Structure*** – we empower the superintendent (administrators), create a management infrastructure, and support our staff.
- ***Accountability*** – by evaluating student achievement and our goals. Communicate. Are we putting our money where our goals are?
- ***Advocates for children and public education*** - Become informed about legislation.
- ***Hires the superintendent*** – our *only* employee.
- ***Sets policy*** - It's the how and why we do things. Policy provides direction to the administration, consistency, and compliance with the law(s).
- ***Listens to and works with*** - parents and other citizens, including governmental and civics groups.

We are also charged with:

Designating & Evaluating the Superintendent

The board recruits, hires and evaluates the performance of the superintendent. A school board is able to fulfill its mission when members of the board and the superintendent understand their roles and work together in an environment of trust, mutual respect, understanding, and shared purpose. The superintendent is our only employee. His/her full evaluation takes place in November each year.

Goal Setting

The district vision is translated into long-term and short-term goals. The board establishes the structure to accomplish the vision, and periodically evaluates the results during workshops and meetings.

Policy

We have partnered with NEOLA to provide us with a policy framework that is customized by the board to fit our district, while the superintendent is charged with administering the policy. A link to our BOE policies can be found on the TC website on the board page.

Budget

Reviews the budget submitted by the superintendent and aligns the funding priorities with the district goals. Budgets are presented and amended throughout the year.

What does the administration and staff do?

Everything else. The board creates the environment in which they can carry out policy and our directions. We are accountable for all of it.

How do the board and administration work together?

Essentially the board and superintendent work together. The superintendent oversees the work of the other administrators. The board evaluates the superintendent and holds him/her responsible for the operation of the district and other administrators. The board evaluates the superintendent via the annual evaluation and intermittent monitoring.

We approve the policies, strategic plan and budget. *Administration carries them out.*

We have a monitoring system in place, however, we let them do their jobs.

Role of a board member versus the full board

A board has power *only* when acting as a full board. No individual has authority to make decisions.

No individual has the right to speak for the entire board, unless appointed by the board to do so.

Board members can become informed, may ask questions and listen to staff or community.

Board members do not direct staff.

Board members can – and should – visit buildings, *but as guests*. Inform the superintendent and administration prior to any visits.

Dealing with the press

It is our practice to refer most press inquiries to the superintendent. Be prepared to provide them with a phone number or contact information.

The board president may also be asked to speak to the media, at the board's direction.

Be courteous to members of the media. You have a right not to respond.

Stating “No comment” is not the best answer. Cooperate, but if you don't know the answer, say so. Ask for information where they can be reached and have someone contact them.

Dealing with the public

Get off on the right foot by always sending them to the source closest to the problem. Chain of command. If possible, alert appropriate staff that this may be headed their way.

Do not make promises or offer to 'take care of it'.

Do not agree to act on behalf of an 'anonymous' third party.

Listen, verify what you have heard, and redirect following appropriate chain of command.

Listen. Many times, people just want to be heard, they are not seeking action.

Dealing with the staff

Same things apply.

They will appreciate your interest. You can learn from them.

Do NOT let yourself get caught in the middle. Do not try to fight someone else's battles.

Confidentiality. Follow the chain of command.

Required Training

Michigan law requires that local and intermediate school district boards of education ensure that a performance evaluation system is in place for school administrators and teachers - this includes the superintendent. The law requires training for all evaluators, which includes school board members. Training must be provided by someone who has expertise in the evaluation tool being used. The board has chosen to use the most recent version of the MASB Superintendent Evaluation Tool. You will be notified of opportunities to receive this training. The district will cover the cost.

Board Professional Development

Tri County Area Schools is a member of the Michigan Association of School Boards. You will be provided with information to register on their website and given a password to access additional information. We have a small budget set aside for board continuing education and conference attendance. MASB offers a wealth of free information for new board members on their website, as well as classes to support your growth. We also have a mini-library for board members to share or borrow books.

Volunteering

There are several opportunities for board members to volunteer in the district throughout the year. Examples such as being a greeter at open houses, sporting events, building special events, and community events are available for us to sign up for so we may support these efforts. Board members also volunteer to author the article "Board Briefs", which is published monthly in the Viking Views during the months school is in session. Board Brief articles are also posted to the Tri County Area Schools website on the board page. A sign-up sheet will be provided annually.

Questions?

All board members are here to provide support and help every step of the way. Feel free to ask any one of us questions, we're here to help you be successful. Please be patient with yourself, there is so much to learn. You will be provided with numerous documents for review. We hope this helps you become more familiar with what we do and how we serve. We will plan to include an orientation for you with the full board at your first Workshop (4th Monday). Please jot down any questions you may have and bring them with you to the meeting.

Partial Document Checklist

These and other helpful documents will be provided to you:

- Tri County Strategic Plan 2017-2022
- Book "A Guide to the Open Meetings Act" by MASB
- Current budget
- Superintendent Evaluation Tool
- BOE member contact information
- School calendar