

# **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Including**

**Primary Roles and Responsibilities**

**Fiduciary Responsibilities**

**Areas of Ambiguity and Common Concern**  
*(When Blue and ~~Yellow~~ Become Green)*

**Communicating with Each Other**

**Efficient Meetings and Agendas**

## MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES

### SCHOOL COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER EDUCATION REFORM

The Education Reform Act of 1993 realigned the roles and responsibilities of School Committees. In brief, here are the principal responsibilities of the School Committee.

1. Hiring the Superintendent of Schools. The School Committee hires, contracts with, evaluate, and makes other employment decisions relative to the superintendent.
2. Additional "Employer" Responsibilities. The School Committee has powers of advice and consent over a limited number of additional personnel, subject to the recommendation of the superintendent. They include:
  - Deputy, Associate and Assistant Superintendents.
  - Special Education Director
  - School Business Officer
  - Legal Counsel(The School Committee is the employer of record for purposes of collective bargaining.)  
The school committee also sets the parameters for compensation of employees not subject to collective bargaining, including individuals who report to the superintendent, principals, and others.
3. Policy Responsibilities. The School Committee sets policy for the school district. Policy is a very broad term and includes, but is not limited to: By-Laws and/or Rules of Order for the School Committee, District Policy Manual, collective bargaining agreements, policy contained in meeting minutes, strategic plans, some elements of student handbooks, and other areas where policy is established.
4. Setting Goals and Standards (i.e., district goals, superintendent goals, school improvement plan review, etc.)
5. Setting the District Budget. This is both part of the policy parameter and the fulfillment of the "fiduciary responsibility" of a public elected board. The School Committee approves the district budget (subject to confirmation by the town's legislative authority), determines line items, sets policy issues that are linked to the budget, and modifies line items (i.e., transfers) during the year. Part of the budgetary process and fiduciary responsibility is review and approval of warrants to ensure payment of district expenses and payroll.
6. Employer of record for collective bargaining negotiations.

**Other than general parameters written in law, the statutes provide little clarity about where the policy making authority of the board ends and the administrative responsibilities of the superintendent begin. While they are obvious at the extremes, there are many areas of ambiguity. In these situations, it is important for the school committee and superintendent to work out these differences.**

**Finally, the School Committee represents the heart and soul of the community and its conscience as well when it comes to public education. Citizens look to the board for guidance and to personify the best qualities of the city, town and region. The obligation to fulfill these standards is an unwritten but important standard.**

**FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES – What does this mean for the School Committee?  
Duties of Care and Fiduciary Responsibilities**

**GOVERNANCE**

**Duty to Govern Establish Policies and Oversee, Evaluate, and Monitor the Execution of those Policies**

**LEADERSHIP**

**Duty of Leadership Guiding the Mission and Direction**

**STEWARDSHIP**

**Duty of Care to Protect the Integrity of Financial Operations and Use of Public Money.**

**GOVERNANCE**

**Fulfilling your care regarding governance includes the following steps:**

- Understanding the purposes and mission of your district.
- Hire/support/evaluate/discharge the chief executive officer.
- Review and approve annual budget, incorporating policy directives within the financial plan. Review and approve major organizational decisions, commitments, and plans including expenditures, grants and leases.
- Evaluate progress toward program and financial goals.
- Ensure the stability and efficiency of the district through policies that ensure professional development of the board and staff.
- In conjunction with superintendent, ensure leadership on organizational transition, structure and planning as they follow from board policy.
- Act with independent judgment after obtaining the necessary information to make a sound decision.
- Delegating authority as permitted by law with good judgment and consideration.
- Understanding your liability.

**LEADERSHIP**

**Fulfilling your duty of care regarding leadership includes the following**

- Conduct the affairs of the school committee, including board development, transition and board operations (i.e., agenda, parliamentary procedures, compliance with Open Meeting and State Ethics Laws, etc.).
  - Leadership Duty of Care includes:
    - Reading distributed meeting information in advance.
    - Attending all meetings of the committee and subcommittees when appointed.
    - Freely participating and asking questions.
    - Seeking information that will help you to exercise your duty of care.
    - Putting the appropriate financial controls and systems in place. (See below.)
- Represent the organization in the community and among stakeholders.
- Participate in public relations and, where appropriate, fundraising.

## STEWARDSHIP

**The duty of care for stewardship includes fulfilling your fiduciary responsibilities which are considerable. This area of responsibility is detailed below.**

The School Committee has clearly defined responsibilities for financial oversight and the scope of required audits (regional school districts) needs to be carefully reviewed.

One best practice is establishing an orientation for board members and administrators covering their duty of care and statutory financial oversight responsibilities.

An appropriate orientation should include financial literacy training.

1. During the orientation School Committee members should consider:
  - their decision-making duties regarding financial matters including how they formulate district policy and strategic goals with the administration, and
  - how they take actions with respect to specific financial matters, including any legally required steps.
2. School Committee members should also consider how they exercise oversight duties including ongoing monitoring of the district's business and financial affairs, business performance, plans and strategies, risk assessment and management, compliance with legal obligations and policies, financial reports, and any matters suggesting a need for inquiry or investigation.
3. School Committee members should consider how best to carry out their responsibility to promote the best interests of the school district and its stakeholders in evaluating the superintendent and how effectively (s)he supervises the school business officer performance.
4. A School Committee member should exercise independent judgment for the overall benefit of the school district and all its stake-holders.
5. A School Committee member must discharge his or her duties in good faith, with care, diligently and reasonably, and in a manner he or she reasonably believes is in the best interests of the school district. This includes:
  - a. regularly attending meetings;
  - b. receiving information and agendas in advance of meetings and studying them;
  - c. keeping informed of the efforts of those the School Committee relies on including legal counsel, auditors, accountants, and others acting within their professional or expert competence over financial and fiduciary responsibilities; and
  - d. evaluating the superintendent and ensuring that the superintendent evaluates the others who have an important role exercising its corporate responsibilities.

### **Establishment of a Budget/Finance Committee (or Committee of the Whole)**

Many of these responsibilities are delegated to the Budget or Finance Committee. This may be a subcommittee or a committee of the whole. In a committee of the whole, all School Committee members serve on the body, but someone other than the School Committee Chair might serve as chair of this special committee. In this way, all members may participate in fiscal oversight.

In a Regional School Committee where an annual audit is required, the board may form an audit committee is to recommend the appointment of the auditor to the board, recommend the terms of engagement set forth in an engagement letter, including compensation, and to review the work of the independent auditor. The superintendent and business manager could be required to certify that they have reviewed the audit report, that it does not contain any untrue statement of a material fact, or omit a material fact that makes the statement

misleading. The audit committee could also work with the administration and the board to establish internal controls.

Subject to applicable state law and school board's review and approval, the audit committee could be primarily responsible for the oversight of the board's financial reporting process. Oversight functions may include prevention, deterrence, investigation and detection of fraud; monitoring the financial reporting process; overseeing the audit function; overseeing the internal control system; and reporting findings to the board.

Public accounting firms should not perform non-audit services for the School Committees they audit as they would otherwise be auditing themselves. The School Committee may want to include in its policy or code of ethics a statement that it is unlawful for a board member, administrator, or employee to exert influence or mislead an auditor. The policy could require periodic rotation of the lead audit partner and the audit review partner and require the auditor to report to the audit committee and the board, not to the administration. Additionally, if a school district hires someone formerly employed by the auditor, that person may have restricted responsibilities with respect to the audit.

### **Code of Ethics**

In addition to reviewing and establishing internal controls, the School Committee would be wise to adopt a code of ethics that sets high standards of ethical conduct. Specific topics may include:

- conflicts of interest which may exceed those restrictions placed by law;
- gifts; travel and expense reporting;
- use of consultants or agents;
- use of district-owned equipment.

### **Two Provisions of the Federal Sarbanes-Oxley Statute Apply to School Districts**

Regarding document destruction, Sarbanes-Oxley makes it a crime to knowingly destroy a document with the intent to obstruct or influence "the investigation or proper administration of any matter within the jurisdiction of any department or agency of the United States...or in relation to or in contemplation of any such matter or case." Boards of Directors should adopt a document management policy to make sure employees do not improperly destroy documents.

Sarbanes-Oxley also makes it a crime for anyone, with intent to retaliate, to take any action harmful to anyone for providing to a law enforcement officer any truthful information relating to commission of any federal offense. This requirement is in addition to any responsibilities an organization has under state whistleblower and state and federal employment and civil rights statutes.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS SHOULD ASK

Do we have a strategic plan that is aligned with the goals set for the district? Do you use data to measure the progress toward meeting your goals?

Have the school committee and superintendent developed district goals and is our superintendent's evaluation tool based on our goals?

Does our School Committee participate in professional development that includes learning about our mission, our programs, and our fiduciary responsibilities including ethical practice and conflicts of interest?

Does our district have a clear and accessible set of policies related to the mission, administration and operation of the organization?

Does the district have a program-based financial plan and a budget that also includes funding sources, and are they updated as needed with scheduled financial reports to the School Committee?

[Regional School Committees] Does the regional school district undergo a thorough and diligent annual financial audit by an objective and impartial auditor in which the review includes an analysis of revenues and expenses as well as variances from year to year? Does the School Committee review the audit, ask thoughtful questions, and use the document as a planning tool?

Are the faculty members and school committee members aware of the requirements for public meetings (Open Meeting Law), ethical practice (conflict of interest and state ethics laws) and are they updated periodically?

Do you have any reason to question the integrity of the operation of the organization, and, if so, have you brought them to the attention of the superintendent or appropriate authority?

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: WHEN BLUE AND **YELLOW** BECOME GREEN**

### **Most Frequent Issues Between the School Committee and the Superintendent**

1. **Budget Related issues (including budget development, approval, oversight, and line item transfers.**
  - **What you need to know?**
  - **How to develop an appropriate monitoring system?**
2. **Parent complaints that are brought to a school committee member.**
3. **School Committee member contact with School District Administration and Faculty.**
  - ***Principals***
  - ***Teachers***
  - ***SPED***
4. **Anonymous Complaints Against Staff**
5. **Problem Principals.**
6. **Setting the Meeting Agenda and/or Rules of Order**
7. **Personnel Decisions**
  - ***Hiring***
  - ***Promoting***
  - ***Assignments***
  - ***Reorganizations/Staff Restructuring***
  - ***Layoffs***
8. **Crafting Policy**
9. **Curriculum (Entire Sphere of Issues)**
10. **Communicating with the Public**
11. **Dealing with confidential information.**
  - **Information you want to know, but legally do not have to know.**
12. **Line Item Budget Management and Change During the Fiscal Year**
  - **Budget Development and Finance**
13. **Legal Counsel – Who’s the Client?**
14. **Use of School Facilities.**
15. **Opening or Closing a School**
16. **Collective bargaining: What is appropriate to bargain and what is off the table under the Education Reform Law.**
17. **Remediating grievances: who hears and/or resolves grievances and how.**
18. **Criticizing a public employee in public.**
19. **Staff restructuring.**
20. **School Committee meeting rules of order.**
21. **Hiring the Legal Counsel.**
22. **Confidential Information.**

## **WHOSE JOB IS IT ANYWAY?**

### **When Even the Legal Lines Aren't All That Clear**

**Here are some of the most frequent issues that come to the Massachusetts Association of School Committees when the lines appear to blur on administrative responsibilities. The issues are listed in order of volume of calls and questions:**

#### **1. Hiring/Personnel**

- What is the appropriate role of the School Committee in the hiring process for administrators, teachers, and others employees?
- Contracting with Administrators
- Compensation for Non-Union Personnel
- What is the most appropriate process for evaluations?
  1. Superintendent's Evaluation
  2. Principals' Evaluations
  3. Teacher/Administrator Evaluation Process
- How to Handle Confidential Personnel Documents

#### **2. Student and Parent Complaints and Concerns**

- Complaints with Teachers
- Disciplinary Action
- Choices of Courses
- School Safety/Facility Safety
- Issues Related to Interscholastic Athletics

#### **3. Curriculum and Instruction**

- Educational Philosophy
- Pedagogy
- Course Offerings
- Program Expansion

#### **4. Teacher and Administrator Complaints and Concerns**

- Assignments
- Grievances

#### **5. School Site Management Issues**

- Principal Management of the School.
- Assignment of Teachers/Assignment of Teachers
- Visits to School by School Committee Members
- Sharing Facility Management with Municipality

#### **6. School Finance**

- Line Item Management of Budget
- Mid-Year Corrections or Changes



## **7. Buildings and Grounds**

- Condition of Buildings
- Use of School Facilities
  1. Community Group Use/Rental
  2. Rentals to Others
  3. Rentals of Facilities
- Capital Improvements (Architectural, contractors)
- Closing a School

## **8. General Sharing of Information**

## **9. Critical Incidents**

- Accidents
- Involvement of Parents
- Interpersonal Crises
- Incidents Involving a Crime

**In case there was any doubt about the role of School Committees:**

***"... this Court has repeatedly stressed the importance of acknowledging that local school boards better understand their own communities and have a better knowledge of what in practice will best meet the educational needs of their pupils."***

**Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, 2007**

# **MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION SERIES**

## **SUPERINTENDENT/SCHOOL COMMITTEE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Finding the Right Balance**

### **COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER**

MASC frequently hears from School Committee members about communicating with their superintendents, principals, and faculty members. The new interpersonal dynamic that grew out of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act has played a role in the evolution of many communications related situations.

Education Reform placed the School Committee in the position of chief policy making entity for the district. The Committee also has the clear responsibility to hire and evaluate the superintendent of schools and a limited number of other school personnel. It is the superintendent who then must take the policies established by the Committee and move forward to administer the district. The Education Reform Act removed the School Committee from most the confirmation process for hiring decisions.

As with any complex set of relationships defined by law, many of the roles and responsibilities addressed by Education Reform are clear cut, but others are somewhat more ambiguous. The result has been a decade of political and diplomatic development to clarify the intent of the law and define the responsibilities.

To assist our members and colleagues in sorting out some of these gray areas, MASC has compiled several opinions from its general counsel, the Department of Education, other school district attorneys, and the courts which may help clarify these matters.

There have been a number of instances where MASC has worked with School Committees and superintendents to reach a mutual understanding of their unique roles and, as such, how to move forward. These situations often call for extraordinary communication, interpersonal, and diplomatic skill. For example:

#### **I. ACCESSING YOUR LEGAL COUNSEL**

Legal Counsel for the District. Legal counsel is employed by the School Committee. However, there are situations, including confidential personnel matters, where the district's attorney must report only to the superintendent. This poses a problem for reporting the scope and volume of work by the attorney. In one district, a School Committee member who was asked

to sign the warrant for payment asked for a description of the legal counsel's work. Unfortunately, the member was told, "You don't need to know that. It's not your responsibility." A more appropriate response would have been to explain the volume of confidential work vs. service as a matter of public record.

## **II. DEVELOPING, APPROVING, AND MONITORING THE BUDGET**

Budget Development and Implementation. Budgeting is a legally designated function for School Committees. During the year, however, modifications to the district budget are usually necessary. The question of line item transfers and how they are authorized is a frequent source of conflict. In developing a budget, the superintendent will often present a voluminous directory of budgetary information, including hundreds of lines of items and proposed expenditures. These are very different from the "line items" that the School Committee will use to monitor progress during the year.

State officials have explained that the School Committee should identify the cost centers it will use to implement and monitor the budget (these cost centers are also frequently cited as "line items.")

A well crafted budget will include not only a designated number of line items for which the superintendent must recommend changes during the year, but also several sections of policy guidance to reinforce the link between the Committee's intent and actual expenditures. For example, a budget document may have language included to add new programs (e.g., create a foreign language program for K-6; establish free, full-day kindergarten; foreign exchange program), restructure other programs (eliminate specific sports teams; eliminate foreign language instruction; etc.), consolidate schools, or set economic parameters for employment contracts.

A skillful superintendent will be able to work carefully with the School Committee to recommend a reasonable number of cost-centers/line items for review during the year. Some districts have as few as three or four while others have dozens. Savvy superintendents also present regular financial reports to allow board members to monitor progress. Nothing can be more disruptive to otherwise harmonious relationships than to learn suddenly that a district budget deficit is at hand.

## **III. WHAT'S POLICY vs. WHAT'S ADMINISTRATION**

Interpretations Over What is Policy. There are more than 300 possible topics for school district policy subject to School Committee approval, ranging from School Committee operating rules to sexual harassment and bullying, just to identify a few. Sometimes these areas of policy are clear and unambiguous, but policy can also be found in several areas not normally viewed as such. For example:

- The budget document articulates several policy initiatives.
- Collective bargaining agreements represent your personnel policies. School Committees are the employer under the state’s collective bargaining statute.
- Student handbooks.
- Interagency agreements represent a commitment of your district and operational policy.
- Legal briefs filed on behalf of your district include an official articulation of your position on several issues. In a recent Supreme Judicial Court case, the view of School Committee/Superintendent roles on employment and promotional policy was critical to the SJC’s affirmation of the School Committee’s role around personnel, employment, and hiring. Legal briefs filed in the case presented critical information on how parties to the case viewed their roles. School Committees should always know what arguments are being made on their behalf, and legal counsel should explain them when they are important to ensure that the Committee is in agreement.
- Major grant applications often require attachment of district policies (e.g., non-discrimination policies). Also grant applications may require districts to make commitments that bind them to spending or policy changes. School Committees should be involved in situations where their policies are being changed or may need to be revised.

#### **IV. HOW TO RESPOND TO CONSTITUENT COMPLAINTS**

How to Address Constituent Complaints. Citizens, including parents and students have the right to contact elected officials whenever they like to address whatever problems they want to cite. This right is unambiguously stated in both the state and federal constitutions. However, School Committee members—like city councilors, members of Boards of Selectmen, and even state legislators—often lack the authority to resolve problems brought to their attention.

Parents frequently complain about school issues to members of the Committee. These may involve concerns about individual school department personnel who are under the authority of the superintendent or principal.

MASC strongly recommends that School Committee members refer parents with questions to the most appropriate school officials and complaints directly to the superintendent. In personnel matters and many school administrative issues, the School Committee lacks the authority to intervene directly. However, parents are likely to follow up with the people they elect to represent them if they are not satisfied. This presents a daunting and sensitive situation.

MASC urges superintendents to follow up with School Committee members who direct problems to their attention to acknowledge that they are working on the problem and provide whatever information is appropriate. Often it is a simple statement that “I have spoken with Terry Jones, the parent you referred, and I am taking care of the situation.” Or, “I have spoken with Terry Jones and we are working to resolve the problem.”

It is also possible that the superintendent must respond with, “Thank you for the referral. I am addressing it now, but it is a confidential matter and I cannot discuss it. But be assured, I am giving it my attention.”

## **V. BEING INFORMED OF NEWSWORTHY OR CRITICAL EVENTS**

Newsworthy Matters. There are many situations about which the School Committee does not have the right to know before the public, nor about which there is a legal mandate for the superintendent to alert them. Still, this does not preclude a superintendent from cultivating a strong and trusting relationship with the Committee by notifying members appropriately.

It is unfortunate when School Committee members read about a district crisis or controversial event in their local newspaper before getting a heads-up from their superintendent. It undermines a constructive relationship and disrupts the collegiality and level of trust that is critical to a successful operating scenario. And yet, there are many confidential matters that superintendents and principals address every day that may or may not end up being blown out of proportion and reported publicly.

Reporters may ask whatever they wish and report as the First Amendment allows – which is effectively unlimited and restricted only by journalistic ethics. They can also report rumor, unattributed comments, and criticism, and they may editorialize without crossing ethical lines.

On the other hand, the rights of your employees, students, and parents to due process, confidentiality, and the benefits of collective bargaining can preclude School Committee members and school administrators from getting answers to many of their questions on the same matters.

More frightening, school districts, like any workplace where many people work closely together are hotbeds of rumor about any number of things. Rumors take on lives of their own, unless they are addressed quickly.

School Committee members are often put in the uncomfortable but unavoidable position of having to respond to rumors in the community. Constituents, and this may include virtually anyone, may contact elected officials at any time on any matter even if those same officials lack the authority to resolve the problems at hand.

Skillful superintendents identify quickly those issues about which their members are likely to inquire and provide members with advance alerts that preserve confidentiality and management practices. MASC also urges School Committees to establish a policy about how they are to be informed for appropriate situations, particularly if the superintendent is to contact only the chair, and not the full board.

Here are some of the situations that School Committees have cited where superintendents contacted them to give them a first alert:

- “We had a fire in our school today, but it was put out quickly and no one was hurt. It appears the cause was \_\_\_\_\_ and the fire department is looking into it.”
- “The roof leaked over the weekend and we must close the school for two days to fix it.”
- “Two students were arrested in school today for fighting. The police are handling the matter. No one was hurt.”
- “A playground dispute made its way into school today with a fight in the cafeteria and a student was sent for medical attention.”
- “A student was suspended from school for \_\_\_\_\_. Several reporters were inquiring about the matter, but because it involves minors and an ongoing investigation, we’re not commenting on the record at this time.”
- “Tomorrow, we will be sending out notices of non-renewal to teachers whose positions have been eliminated in the budget.”
- “I was accosted in my office by a group of parents who object to the curriculum for \_\_\_\_\_ and are threatening to take their complaint to the newspaper.”

Other communications problems are related to interpersonal relationships and trust. For example, in development of school policy skillful superintendents understand that timing and initiative are critical elements to building healthy relationships and credibility.

School Committee members should not have to learn that they were in fact included in important policy developments or decisions without knowing it by failing to ask key questions or reviewing in full certain detailed documents or recommendations. For example, members have provide these examples:

- “We budgeted a new program last spring and the superintendent apparently decided not to implement it without telling us.”
- “We were told we had no option but to accept the proposal we saw for the first time tonight.”
- “We were told that ‘you don’t need to know that.’”
- “We learned that we had no alternative than to budget this amount (or change this policy) because we agreed to it in a grant application for funds that we never knew about.”

- “It was made worse when we were told it was our fault by not reading all the fine print of the application or recommendation when it was sent to us in our packet.”



## **FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

Superintendents and principals have important and substantial responsibilities for their districts and schools. Sound management requires an appropriate measure of control that can include elements of supervision, discipline, information flow, and contact with municipal officials and community members. Even the finest school administrators cannot please every constituent or colleague, nor may they compromise the sound management of their districts and schools to appease individual or collective wishes of others.

Subordinates, parents, students, elected officials and representatives of the media interact in this environment. They are particularly sensitive to limits to their own desire to act freely or obtain information. Tact and communication skills are critical in these situations.

Managing a school district requires that everyone involved know their roles and responsibilities, but also that they understand that skillful interpersonal contact, respect, and teamwork should be built into all communications.

Frequently, though there may be no obligation to involve others, seek input, or share information appropriately, it is a good strategy to build relationships and foster trust.

## TOP TEN ENEMIES OF EFFICIENT MEETINGS

### Top 10 Reasons that Meetings Devolve into Chaos or Become Otherwise Unproductive (according to the National School Boards Association)

1. **Agenda is not carefully developed to expedite business.**
2. **Members fail to prepare for the meeting and use time getting information already provided to them, but unread.**
3. **Chair fails to manage the meeting or expedite the agenda.**
4. **Failure to use (or understand) your rules of order.**
5. **Outlier behaviors: Longwinded speakers, pathological talkers, bullies, "last worders," incoherent comments, ad-hominem attacks, erratic temperaments, and those who simply can't lose an argument in public. In particular, those board members who view the session as group therapy rather than a business meeting simply prolong the agony.**
6. **Board members and superintendent who do not help put meeting back on track by expediting resolution of a particular matter.**
7. **Public comment period gets out of control.**
8. **A controversial issue that should have been resolved elsewhere makes its way to the meeting inappropriately or without adequate preparation (i.e., the termination of a principal.)**
9. **Dead time at meeting (i.e., chair fails to move meeting along).**
10. **Members pandering to the media, including cable audience.**

\*Did you ever wonder just how fast listeners and colleagues might tune you out?

- A public speaker has less than twenty seconds to convince colleagues and the public to listen to them. If the speaker takes too long to get to the point, cannot be heard, or cannot focus remarks, the audience will tune out instantly. This is particularly problematic with speakers who use lengthy verbal paths to get to their points.
- If the speaker continues for up to 90 seconds without capturing the attendance of the audience, most people will simply stop listening.
- If the speaker continues for another minute, audience members (including viewers on cable) begin to view the speaker with ridicule or scorn.

Check for yourself. Note carefully that at the start of one's remarks, how close to 90% of any audience will be attentive (looking at the speaker). Usually, by as early as two minutes into remarks, more than 50% of the board colleagues and audience will be looking elsewhere, reading, talking to each other, or showing visible signs of disinterest or disdain. The share declines quickly after that.

## **MAKE YOUR AGENDA WORK FOR YOU**

### **1. HAVE A CLEAR PROCESS FOR SETTING YOUR AGENDA**

- a. Identify who sets the agenda
- b. How items get on the agenda
- c. Who is responsible for putting them there
- d. Discretionary placement vs. member rights to put something there
- e. Deadlines for the meeting agenda
- f. Protocols for any late items

### **2. DISTRIBUTE THE AGENDA WELL AHEAD OF YOUR MEETING**

- a. Ensure that you have a regular, predictable timetable that members will anticipate
- b. Consider putting the agenda on line for the public. (See #5, below)

### **3. DEVELOP THE AGENDA WITH CLARITY**

- a. Use the agenda as a clear path through the meeting.
- b. Avoid ambiguities
- c. Make sure non-members know when and to what they may speak

### **4. CONSIDER TIMELINES FOR THE AGENDA (IF APPROPRIATE)**

- a. Limit certain parts of the meeting to specified time tables. Such items may include:
  - i. Public Comment Period(s)
  - ii. Academic Presentations by Faculty
  - iii. Special Recognitions

### **5. PUT A DESIRED OUTCOME NEXT TO THE AGENDA ITEM TO LET THE MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC KNOW WHY THE ITEM IS LISTED, WHAT YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH, AND HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE ALLOTTED FOR THE DISCUSSION**

### **6. KNOW THE RULES OF ORDER TO EXPEDITE DEBATE AND RESOLVE COMPLEX MANEUVERING**

- a. Have Rules of Order Guide close at hand (all members).
- b. Use the "without objection" process to move things along.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL COMMITTEES**

**STRONG SUPERINTENDENT-SCHOOL COMMITTEE COLLABORATION** - Understanding roles and responsibilities; sharing common goals; and establishing a common purpose, sending a consistent message

**CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES IN PROMOTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT** - in such areas as hiring and evaluating a good superintendent, making budget and fiscal oversight a priority, making policy, in collective bar

**VARIED, PURPOSEFUL MEETINGS** - including meetings built around goals, identifying key data, providing new information, giving useful academic presentations, and in such formats as working sessions and retreats.

**GOAL SETTING** - for both long-term and short range district goals and benchmarks along the way.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** - including new member orientation, skill building, public policy, emerging hot issues, communications strategies, and the ongoing work to improve student achievement.

**SELF GOVERNANCE** - wherein board members deal with their outlier member behaviors and where the school committee promotes the concept of principled dissent and thoughtful debate over argumentativeness and control.

**HIRING AND SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT** - including giving clear goals, using a good evaluation instrument, and allowing the superintendent to demonstrate how (s)he addresses student achievement.

**ROUTINE USE OF DATA** - including working with data rather than anecdotes and incorporating thoughtful use of information in new areas.

**SETTING ACHIEVEMENT RELATED POLICIES** - in such areas as class size, curriculum and curriculum milestones, graduation and promotion standards, and other requirements beyond what the law requires.

**SHARED LEADERSHIP ROLES AMONG SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP AMONG SUPERINTENDENT'S SUBORDINATES**

**AN ENGAGED SCHOOL COMMITTEE CHAIR** - Mentor to superintendent and members, mediator of disputes, community role model and positive image for the community.

**ALIGNED SUBCOMMITTEES** - to coordinate work between meetings and to make good use of member talents in areas like policy making, budgeting, accountability and student achievement, and collective bargaining.

**COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT** - including teacher evaluation.