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Introduction

Congratulations on your recent election as school director. This can be both an exciting and overwhelming time for newly elected members. There is much to learn and much to do before you get comfortable with your new position. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association, your association, understands this and believes making you successful is our most important responsibility.

Essentials of School Board Service – A guide to surviving your first year provides new school board members with some of the basics of school board service. It answers questions that new board members commonly ask when they begin school board service. It’s written in a question-and-answer format for quick reading, and includes a glossary of common education terms and a list of commonly used acronyms that new board members will find helpful.

Essentials of School Board Service draws on the deep well of knowledge and expertise of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. It includes references to PSBA’s premier handbook, Pennsylvania School Law Handbook 10th Edition, as well as the varied programs and services PSBA offers to its members.

We hope you will find Essentials of School Board Service a helpful reference as you begin your school board service, rely on PSBA for assistance at any time during your term. You may contact us at (800) 932-0588 or (717) 506-2450, or visit our website at www.psba.org.

Dr. Richard Frerichs
2014 PSBA President

Nathan Mains
PSBA Executive Director
1:1. I've been elected. What now?
Congratulations! You’ve joined the ranks of more than 4,500 locally elected officials in Pennsylvania dedicated to helping your community’s students succeed and ultimately become productive citizens. You hold positions as:
   1. An individual school board member
   2. A member of a board made up of other members
   3. A member of the district governance team composed of school board members and the superintendent

As a school board member, you are a representative of the community. You are a leader of the district. You are a steward both of your district’s children and its tax dollars. You are an advocate of public education and an educated public.

1:2. What are some of the powers and duties of the board?
The Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949 defines a school board’s general powers and duties. The board fulfills its primary role by adopting and maintaining compliant board policies for the organization and operation of the school district. The board has the authority to establish, equip, furnish, operate and maintain schools as required for the education of every student. Generally, the board oversees the educational programs, personnel, and properties, with specific responsibilities to determine curriculum, employ a superintendent and approve a budget.

1:3. What exactly do school boards do?
A school board:
   • Sets the district’s direction with performance-based goals
   • Ensures alignment of strategies, resources (including the approved budget), policies, programs and processes with district goals
   • Assesses and accounts for student achievement using comprehensive data, thorough deliberation and open communication
   • Annually conducts a written performance assessment of the district superintendent and assistant district superintendent(s)
   • Leads the district, accentuating and reinforcing the positive while correcting the negative

Keep in mind the school board’s job is to focus on the ends, while the superintendent focuses on the ways and means to attain the ends. In other words, the board oversees the education of students and is responsible for school district operations, but does not directly run the district’s day-to-day operations.

1:4. Now that I’m a board member, what does my community expect of me?
As a new board member you will be asked to make decisions on major issues that affect the students and citizens of your community. You will be asked to vote publicly on matters that you may know little about. As with every new job, it takes time to learn the ropes. You need to take that time to learn about your job and the issues at the same time you are performing your job.
Some of the activities you will be expected to do are: attend board meetings, participate on committees, attend school functions, keep yourself informed about issues, pursue developmental opportunities for yourself, and interact with your fellow board members and the superintendent. These activities require a significant amount of time, but it is time extremely well spent when you consider that you are helping to shape the future of the children in your community.

1:5. I’m overwhelmed. How do I learn my job?
With help. Don’t hesitate to ask questions. Nobody expects you to have all the answers, and most boards and superintendents welcome the opportunity to get you up to speed.

PSBA offers New Board Member Training which is an excellent way to quickly learn the role and responsibility of a school director.

1:6. How much time can I expect to spend on school board responsibilities?
The time required to complete your school board responsibilities will most likely vary by time of year. It will depend on how many meetings are scheduled, which committees you serve on and what issues are going on in the district at the time. For example, if the district is going through a building project, hiring a superintendent or conducting negotiations, the time needed for board meetings may be more extensive.

1:7. How do the school boards responsibilities differ from the superintendent’s?
The school board is the district’s board of directors and is responsible for establishing goals, adopting policy and overseeing resources for the school district. The superintendent – the district’s chief executive officer – works for the school board and is the person who translates the policy into action. Consistent with the goals established by the school board, the superintendent and staff make the day-to-day decisions that affect the operation of the school district, deploying resources, assigning staff and documenting results.

1:8. Where, or to whom, do I go to for information?
The board president usually can answer your questions on protocol or procedure, as well as issues facing the board. The superintendent also is a good source of information. Other board members, both current and past, are good resources. PSBA also is a good source for information and has staff specialists ready to answer your questions. Visit PSBA’s website (www.psba.org) for in-depth information on many important policy, legal and legislative issues.

1:9. Are school boards required to have officers? What are their duties?
A school board is required by law to have a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

The board president sets the tone on how the school board will function. This officer is a leader of the board who plans, organizes, motivates
and builds bridges; a presider who articulates agendas, maintains order and announces results; and a communicator who listens and speaks on behalf of the board.

The vice president often works closely with the board president and superintendent, and will preside at board meetings when the president is not there and assumes the office of president in the event of a vacancy until a new president is elected.

The secretary shall:
- Keep a correct and proper record of all proceedings of the board.
- Prepare and sign orders of the district’s bills in conjunction with the board treasurer.
- Attest in writing to the execution of all deeds, contracts, reports and other instruments that are to be executed by the board.
- Furnish reports as required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- Have general supervision of all the business affairs of the school district; be the custodian of all the records, papers, office property and official seal of the school district; and at the expiration of his/her term, turn over the same to his/her successor.
- Keep contract accounts with each receiver of taxes, school treasurer or school tax collector of the district, reporting a statement of the same, together with a statement of finances of the district, at each regular meeting of the board, which statement shall be entered in full upon the minutes.
- Perform such other duties pertaining to the business of the district as are required by the School Code or as the board of school directors may direct.

24 P.S. § 4-433.

The treasurer shall receive all state appropriations, local taxes and other funds, make payments on orders prepared and signed by the board secretary, and pay district bills. Other duties include: deposit funds every month and furnish the board with a monthly report of those deposits, invest monies of the school district as authorized by the board consistent with restrictions in the School Code, settle accounts annually with the school board and other actions as directed by the board. At the end of the treasurer’s term, he/she shall turn over monies and records that the treasurer has maintained to her/his successor. 24 P.S. §§ 4-439 - 4-442.

1:10. How do I translate all the educational jargon and acronyms I hear at each board meeting?
There are a lot of abbreviations and acronyms for educational terms. This guide includes a glossary of common education terms as well as a list of commonly used acronyms you may encounter throughout your school board service (pages 27-31). For jargon or acronyms that are not included here, consider asking your superintendent or other board members.

1:11. What is the board’s role when there are problems with an administrator?
If there are concerns about an administrator’s performance, the board should raise these concerns with the superintendent in executive session. It is the superintendent who has the responsibility to handle these issues. Take care not to cross the line into micromanaging the relationship with this administrator. It’s the superintendent’s job to lead and manage the employees in the district.
2:1. Is it ok to call the superintendent?
You need to establish a productive working relationship with your superintendent. To do this, you will have to talk to that individual. If you have questions, it is better to call the superintendent and discuss them before the board meeting rather than surprise him or her at a public meeting. If these questions are concerns or relate to negative feelings from the community, the superintendent will appreciate knowing about these in advance of the board meeting so that he or she can come prepared to address them. It is appropriate to call the superintendent, set up a meeting to discuss questions, or even email him or her for simple questions or requests.

2:2. If I disagree with board members or the superintendent, what is the best way to let them know how I feel?
Always treat your fellow board members and the superintendent and administrators with respect. Don’t be afraid to disagree on an issue, however. In fact, a discussion about an issue that reflects two or more views usually results in a better decision than if everyone agrees with the first solution offered. Be certain you debate the issue, not the person. Demeaning comments or angry discussions do not facilitate effective decision making.

2:3. How do I approach my superintendent or board if I have a suggestion for a change?
If your suggestion needs to be discussed by the entire board and voted on, it should be added to an upcoming board agenda. Contact the superintendent or the board president to discuss your idea and have it either put on the agenda or referred to committee.

2:4. Is it ok to talk to district administrators and staff?
In addition to the superintendent, you will come in contact with district employees, including administrators, teachers and other staff members. While there’s nothing wrong with talking to district staff, keep in mind the chain of command. For example, teachers report to principals; principals report to the superintendent; the superintendent reports to the board. If you have a request for information, you should ask the superintendent unless he or she indicates otherwise.

2:5. Can I talk to board members outside the board meeting?
Based upon case law and the Sunshine Act’s definition of the term “meeting,” it is unlikely a court would find a violation of the Sunshine Act just because a group of members chat in the parking lot after a meeting, provided that the parking lot get-together is spontaneous and not held for the purpose of deliberating or taking action on agency business. School directors may get together in a social setting, even if it is prearranged, provided they are not getting together for the purpose of deliberating or taking action on agency business. It is wise to be cautious whenever a quorum of a board or committee is present in an unadvertised gathering.
Even the most innocent and legal of gatherings could raise public suspicion and legal challenges.

2:6. What can I say, or not say, to parents and friends about school issues?
School board business that is discussed in executive session or relates to confidential matters (such as an employee personnel issue or student discipline issue) should never be discussed with anyone other than another board member or the superintendent. A good rule of thumb is to discuss only items that have been made public at a school board meeting. Adhering to this rule of thumb will go a long way in maintaining trust with the superintendent and the other board members, and to protecting staff and the public.

2:7. What information is considered confidential?
Most employee personnel issues or information contained in student educational records are considered confidential. Also, the information discussed in a closed board meeting, more commonly known as an executive session, is confidential. A board may call an executive session only on the following subjects:

- To discuss any matter involving the employment, appointment, termination of employment, terms and conditions of employment, evaluation of performance, promotion or disciplining of any specific prospective public officer or employee, or current public officer or employee employed or appointed by the agency, or former public officer or employee, provided, however, that the individual employees or appointees whose rights could be adversely affected may request, in writing, that the matter or matters be discussed at an open meeting. The agency’s decision to discuss such matters in executive session shall not serve to adversely affect the due process rights granted by law, including those granted by Title 2 (relating to administrative law and procedure). The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply to any meeting involving the appointment or selection of any person to fill a vacancy in any elected office.
- To hold information, strategy and negotiation sessions related to the negotiation or arbitration of a collective bargaining agreement or, in the absence of a collective bargaining unit, related to labor relations and arbitration.
- To consider the purchase or lease of real property, up to the time an option to purchase or lease the real property is obtained or up to the time an agreement to purchase or lease such property is obtained if the agreement is obtained directly without an option.
- To consult with its attorney or other professional adviser regarding information or strategy in connection with litigation or with issues on which identifiable complaints are expected to be filed.
- To review and discuss agency business which, if conducted in public, would violate a lawful privilege or lead to the disclosure of information or confidentiality protected by law, including matters related to the initiation and conduct of investigations of possible or certain violations of the law and quasi-judicial deliberations.

65 Pa. C.S.A. § 708(a).
2:8. I have children in school. How can I talk with their teachers now that I’m on the school board?
This is a tricky area. No matter what you say about “speaking as a parent, not a board member,” it’s difficult for some teachers to separate your role on the school board from your role as a parent. It’s not surprising that some teachers may be somewhat intimidated by your role as a board member. Some married board members have indicated that their spouses frequently take the lead in speaking to their children’s teachers.

Make sure you’re not using your position as a school board member to secure special treatment for your child. Your child should be treated the same as other students and be subject to the same rules and requirements. If there are issues you wish to discuss with a teacher, you should follow the normal procedures for contacting your child’s teacher to discuss them.

Keep in mind you don’t have to relinquish your parental rights now that you’re a school board member.

2:9. As a board member, may I visit the schools?
You have the same right as a parent or community member to visit the schools in your district, so long as you follow whatever procedures your district has for visitors. As a school board member, you may also visit the schools in an official capacity, only with the board’s authority, for purposes such as building inspections or staff interviews.

As a school board member, you should use school visits to build good working relations with building principals and staff, to celebrate in the positive accomplishments of the schools, and to show your pride as a member of the board. Look for opportunities to visit when a school is hosting a special event or recognition program for students and staff. In any event, be sure to tell the superintendent and/or principal in advance of your visit.

2:10. How do I respond to a community that questions the school board’s decisions?
It’s normal to hear questions about the board’s decisions. You will at times find yourself dealing with controversial, complex issues, and the board’s final decisions may be unpopular. Explain the thought process that went into the decision and why the board arrived at the conclusion it did. Be sure to answer honestly and without emotion. One of your roles as a school board member is to be an advocate for the district. Being asked about board decisions provides an opportunity to promote the positive activities that are occurring in your schools while at the same time responding to community questions.

2:11. How do I respond to questions from the media?
Your board has probably already adopted, at least informally, a policy for responding to the media. Particularly on issues of great sensitivity, a single spokesperson – for example, the board president, committee chair, chief negotiator or solicitor – may be designated to speak for the board. If the media is waiting to do an interview following a board meeting, then it is appropri-
ate to refer the question to the president or the superintendent.

Individual board members should be free to explain their votes or comments they may have made at a public meeting. If you are contacted by a local reporter and you're not prepared or don't have the relevant information, don’t say, “No comment.” Instead, tell the reporter you’ll get an answer and get back to them. Ask what kind of deadline they have, and then promptly follow through.

In all situations, be honest – never lie! Talk in plain English, in short, quotable sentences, and stay on message. Answer the question that was asked. Don’t feel compelled to offer more information than needed to answer the question. Be friendly and warm. If you are on camera, remember that body language is as important as what you say.

2:12. How should I respond to parental complaints?
This kind of question arises frequently, and is something members of the PSBA Legal Services try to address during New Board Member Training for new school board members. You may be glad to learn that whether the allegation involves serious misconduct by staff or by students, the course of action we recommend is the same and is relatively simple. There are four basic steps.

First, you should thank the parent for saying something about it to someone. Second, tell them you want them to call the superintendent of schools and give the superintendent the information directly. Third, explain that school board members are not a proper channel for such matters because board members must be careful not to appear as though they are participating in the investigation or prosecution of serious staff and student misconduct, so that they do not become disqualified from helping to decide what will happen as a result of a possible board hearing in the matter. Fourth, tell the parent that you will call the superintendent yourself to let the superintendent know about the matter, and tell the superintendent that the parent is going to call him or her to report the information directly. That way, the superintendent will be expecting the call, and can make sure it is given priority.

When you handle it that way, you have helped make sure the matter is properly reported, and you have fulfilled your responsibility in a way that does not interfere with your ability to perform your other duties as a school director.

It is a fair question to ask whether the parent instead should be told to report the matter to the school principal or other person designated to receive complaints under the various school district policies that address complaint procedures. That would not be an inappropriate response, and might be best for less serious issues, like complaints about a student’s grade in a course.

2:13. Can I use email or social media to communicate with my board colleagues?
School board members should use email to communicate with each other only if they are not using it to discuss board business or influence votes on issues in advance of a meeting or as a means of avoiding open meeting requirements. The same holds true with social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. You should be particularly careful to avoid sequential email communications or social media conversations. Pennsylvania courts have expressed concern about multiple board members discussing official school business via email even though there is no decision directly prohibiting it. PSBA recommends emails by and between board members be limited to things such as setting the time for a meeting. When board members email one another prior to a board meeting this could affect the board’s discussion at the meeting and mean the community does not hear the board debate important issues.

Under Pennsylvania’s Right-to-Know Law, emails from your personal or school district account may be public records subject to disclosure. Your online communications may also become public as well, even with privacy settings set to “friends only.” If you don’t want your conversations to become front-page fodder, then don’t have them online.
3:1. What should I expect at my first board meeting?
If you have never participated in a board meeting, you may be overwhelmed at first. There are basic rules of parliamentary procedure that should be followed, but each board operates in its own way. There will be a meeting agenda and protocol.

Talk with the board president before attending your first meeting to ask basic questions such as:

- Where should I sit?
- How is the agenda set up?
- How long do the meetings usually take?
- When should I speak?

Ask for an orientation if you haven’t yet had one. You also should receive your board packet containing the agenda and any supporting information several days before the meeting. Be sure you go through the material carefully and take the time to call the superintendent or board president to ask questions about anything you don’t understand.

Remember, this is a meeting of the board of school directors. Staff and community members are invited to attend and participate. But this is your board’s opportunity to conduct business. As such, the board should remain in control of the meeting at all times.

3:2. Where should I sit?
Many boards have their rooms set up in a consistent configuration for board meetings, with name plates for each person at the table. Some boards have assigned seats that do not change from meeting to meeting. Other boards mix the seats up each time. And others do not have name tags or assigned seats. To feel comfortable prior to attending your first meeting, you might want to contact the board president and ask if there are any “traditions” that you should know about in advance of the meeting, including where you should sit.

3:3. What is considered an acceptable dress code at board meetings?
Your board decides how formal or informal the meeting should be. A good rule of thumb, though, is to dress appropriately for a business meeting, as board meetings are business meetings. Remember also that the public may attend as well as the media. Your dress should reflect the professional approach that your school board takes in overseeing the operations of the school.

3:4. How does being on TV affect board members?
Any time you are being filmed or are in the public eye, it is normal to be more self-conscious and nervous. Some, but not all, boards tape their meetings for broadcast on a local cable access station. Naturally, the first time you participate in a taped board meeting you may find that you are less articulate and forget some of what you want to say. After you attend a few taped meetings, though, you should become comfortable and even forget the camera is on. Periodically
reviewing a tape to see how the board is presenting itself is a good idea. Board members are often surprised by their unconscious body language that may or may not accurately communicate their feelings.

3:5. How professionally must a board meeting be run? What is considered too lax or too formal?
All board meetings need to follow some set of “rules of order,” often based on parliamentary procedure. The method that your board selects should be identified in your policies. Some boards elect to follow Robert’s Rules of Order. Other boards may specifically elect to not follow Robert’s Rules, but prefer a basic version of parliamentary procedure. Your school board can be as relaxed or as formal as it chooses, as long as a policy is identified in the policies describing the method you will employ, and this method does not violate the Sunshine Act.

If your board elects to follow Robert’s Rules of Order, school boards must follow Pennsylvania state law where it differs from Robert’s. For example, under Robert’s, a quorum of the board consists of a majority present or voting. Under state law, a quorum is a majority of the members of a board of school directors.

3:6. How often does my board meet?
The School Code requires school boards to meet at least once every two months. Most boards, however, meet once a month. Boards also are required to hold an annual organization meeting in December. Special meetings may be called at any time by the board president. The president is required to call a special meeting whenever three members of the board of school directors make such a request. If the president fails or refuses to do so, a special meeting may be called any time by a majority of the legally qualified and active members of the board.

3:7. What are the legal requirements for school board meetings?
School boards must meet in compliance with the Sunshine Act and make public records available consistent with the Right-to-Know Law. Basically, the Sunshine Act requires that all school board meetings, including most committee meetings, be open to the public. Proper notice must be given to announce regularly scheduled meetings as well as special meetings. Minutes of the meetings must be taken and include specific information required by the Sunshine Act (see A Practical Guide to the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act).

3:8. What is the Sunshine Act?
The basic intent of the Sunshine Act is to insure the right of all Pennsylvania citizens to have notice of and right to attend all meetings of agencies at which agency business is discussed or acted upon subject to certain exceptions. For more information about the Sunshine Act, see PSBA’s A Practical Guide to the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act.

3:9. Can board members meet socially or as a group at training conferences without violating the Sunshine Act?
Yes. Social gatherings and conferences, including retreats, are not considered school board meetings, even if a quorum is present, so long as the board members in attendance do not discuss official school business or arrive at decisions about an issue.

3:10. What role does the superintendent play at school board meetings?
The superintendent is a non-voting member of the board who has the right to attend all board
meetings and speak on all matters before the board subject to limited exceptions.

3:11. How do I get involved in board committees?
The practices surrounding committee operations vary considerably from school district to school district.

3:12. Who is responsible for setting the agenda?
Development of the board agenda varies from district to district.

3:13. Do community members have a right to make comments at public board meetings?
The Sunshine Act requires school boards to provide residents and taxpayers an opportunity at each open meeting to comment on matters of concern, official action or deliberation that are or may be before the board prior to taking official action. School boards have the option to accept all public comment on agenda items at the beginning of the meeting, rather than before the vote on each individual agenda item. 65 Pa.C.S.A. § 710.1. Public comments on non-agenda items may be held until the end of the board meeting, and may be limited where clearly appropriate. See e.g. Baravordeh v. Borough Council of Prospect Park, 706 A.2d 362 (Pa. Cwmlth.1998).

3:14. What if a member of the public complains at a board meeting?
The grocery store isn’t the only place board members will hear complaints. If an individual raises a complaint during a board-established public comment period, it’s best to listen to the individual and then say that the board will take the issue under advisement. You can expect the board president to take control of this situation. Your board should refrain from engaging the individual in public debate during the meeting.

3:15. What is a consent agenda?
A consent agenda is an item listed on the regular agenda that groups routine items under one agenda heading. Routine items (such as approving minutes of the last meeting, approving the agenda, etc.) can be approved by a single unified motion and vote of the board. The purpose of the consent agenda is to expedite business and streamline the meeting. There is no discussion of items on a consent agenda. If clarification of an item is necessary, then you should request that the item be removed from the consent agenda and considered by the board as a separate motion.

3:16. Can I ask questions during the board meeting?
Absolutely! Hopefully, you have taken time to review the materials in your board packet and have asked for any clarifications from the superintendent or board president prior to the meeting. Certainly as the discussion of an item ensues, other questions may occur to you that you have not previously asked.

3:17. How may I ask questions at a board meeting and still adhere to the “no surprises” rule?
If you think your question may be controversial, let the superintendent or president or both know ahead of time. They can help you decide if there is a better way to address the issue. If your question is to clarify an issue or if it is prompted by the discussion, then it is appropriate to ask it at the board meeting, as long as you don’t broach topics properly discussed in executive session. If you have a question that may require collecting data or information not already in your board packet, you might let the superintendent know prior to the meeting so that he or she can come prepared to answer your questions.

3:18. How is voting done at a board meeting?
All votes taken at a school board meeting are a matter of public record and must be recorded in the minutes. Secret ballots are not permitted. In some situations, school boards must use roll call votes (where your name is called and you must state your vote) to take board action. If a roll call vote is not required, the vote must be taken
in such a way that a person attending the meeting or reading the minutes can see how each board member voted. This can be done by roll call vote, show of hands or any other method by which each board member’s vote is made known to the public.

3:19. Do most school boards vote in a rotating order or consistent order, or doesn’t it matter?
The manner in which your meeting is run is determined by your school board. Some examples of ways to vote include: alphabetical, seniority, left to right, or a rotating order. The Sunshine Act requires that the “vote of each member who actually votes on any resolution, rule, order, regulation, ordinance or the setting of official policy must be publicly cast and, in the case of roll call votes, recorded.” 65 Pa. CSA § 705.

3:20. Is a school board president entitled to vote on all questions when presiding at a meeting of the school board?
Nothing in the School Code precludes the board president from voting on issues merely because he or she is presiding over the meeting. Nor does the law require the board president to vote last.

3:21. Can a school board member vote by proxy at regular or special board meetings?
No, it is not permissible for a board member to vote by proxy.

3:22. May a school board member abstain from voting on a matter before the board?
Although the School Code does not address this issue, it generally is understood that school board members have a right to abstain from voting on an issue if they desire to do so. See e.g. Wrezski v. City of Madison, 558 F. Supp. 664 (W.D. Wis. 1983) (city council policy prohibiting members from abstaining on votes violated the First Amendment). In some instances, school directors may be required by law to refrain from voting, such as when they have a conflict of interest. To the extent people believe a school board member is abusing the privilege of abstaining from voting, the ultimate remedy is with the voters.

3:23. When is a school board member required to abstain from a vote?
The Ethics Act requires a board member with a financial conflict of interest to abstain from voting. Prior to the vote, the board member is required to publicly announce and disclose the nature of that interest by filing a written memorandum with the board secretary for recording in the meeting minutes. 65 Pa.C.S.A. § 1103(j). Additionally, the School Code requires a board member to abstain when voting for a relative recommended for a teaching position. 24 P.S. § 11-1111.

3:24. What if I disagree with a board decision?
If you don’t agree with a decision that the board has made, you may express your position for the record. But it is still your responsibility to support the board’s final decision. The time to disagree is during the discussion and your vote, which is public record. If you are asked about the decision, explain why the board voted the way that it did. You may say why and how you voted; however, you should not do it in a way that undermines the board’s majority decision. As long as your comments remain factual and do not evaluate the board action, you are showing support for the decision. You also should direct questions to the board’s spokesperson if one has been assigned to that particular issue.

3:25. Can a board president offer motions?
Ideally, the function of the chair is to call for the motions on agenda items. However, even as chair, the president is a member of the board with the same voting rights, no more and no less. Robert’s Rules of Order recognizes that under the less formal procedures applicable to small boards such as school boards it is acceptable for the chair to vote, speak on motions, and offer motions.
**Working with the Board**

4:1. Should I ask for a mentor?
Some boards may have a designated person who mentors the new board member. Serving as mentor may be a defined responsibility for one of the officers, such as the vice president, or it may be a rotating position. A mentor will orient the new board member prior to his or her first board meeting. The mentor also will check in with the new board member periodically during the year to explain key activities, such as the process for evaluating the superintendent or the budgeting process. If you find your board does not have a person designated as mentor, you might suggest it, particularly if you prefer working this way.

4:2. When are issues serious enough to bring to the board?
You are the link between the school district and the community. You should be aware of issues confronting other districts that could become an issue in your district. You also must filter what you bring to the board for consideration to be sure it truly requires board attention. If you are hearing concerns from community members, you might want to ask other board members whether they’re hearing the same concerns. An issue or activity that is counter to board policy should be brought to the attention of the president or the superintendent. When in doubt, feel free to discuss concerns with the superintendent and the president. They can help decide if the board needs to be proactive about a particular issue.

4:3. Explain the committee structure, function and role.
School boards operate in various ways. Some boards operate as a committee of the whole where all issues or activities are addressed by the entire board together. Members of boards that choose this method of operation generally receive the same information at the same time, and have the authority to deliberate on each issue. Other boards function with a well-defined committee structure where board members serve on several committees, and a committee first addresses issues or activities before the issue comes to the full board.

Ad hoc committees or task forces also can be established to deal with a one-time issue, and their length of term is often less than one year. A task force is a good approach to recruit staff and community members to offer their insights and/or special expertise on a particular issue.

The committee structure works best when the board fully trusts all the board members and is willing to accept the work and recommendation of this smaller subset of the board. This does not mean that the full board cannot ask questions and become informed prior to voting on a motion at a board meeting; in fact, all members need to become informed in order to vote responsibly. Rehashing the entire work of the committee, though, defeats the committee’s purpose. Boards that use a committee structure feel it saves time and allows each board member to delve more deeply into fewer areas. Some boards find they are able to deal with
more issues with this approach, and each board meeting is more reasonable in length. Possible standing committees include: policy, finance or budget, curriculum, buildings and grounds, and personnel.

Keep in mind that committees or task forces report to the board, not to the community or media. They should not take on life of their own.

One last point to be aware of is that committees can be subject to the Sunshine Act. See A Practical Guide to the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act for further clarification.

4:4. How can I survive the politics?
Don’t think of it as surviving politics; instead, view it as cultivating relationships. You are now part of the largest body of elected officials in the state. School governance is founded on the belief that a group of very different people representing various constituencies in their district can make better decisions than any one person alone could. That diversity is the board’s strength.

With this in mind, it’s best to be open-minded about the opinions of your fellow board members. Your goal should not be to convert them to your point of view, but rather to determine the best solution to an issue by working together to try and accommodate all views. You want the students to be the “winners” – not one board member or another.

4:5. How can I best assimilate into the team?
You may be joining a board with members who have been together for a number of years. As the “new kid on the block,” it will take you time to become part of the team. Talk with your new colleagues. Respect their expertise. Listen and observe. Ask questions. Do your homework. Make recommendations. Time and experience will help you become a contributing member.

4:6. What should a board do when it is not working well as a team?
Open communication is critical to the proper functioning of your board. If you feel your board is not functioning well, it may be appropriate to suggest a workshop where the board reviews its ground rules that establish how it will function. If these ground rules are not effective, then consider adding to or clarifying them. Consider developing a specific set of guidelines or a board protocol or code of conduct. You may want to hire a facilitator to assist your board in improving the board’s working relations. PSBA can help with a custom workshop tailored to your board’s specific situation.

4:7. How do school boards make decisions?
When making decisions, board members should seek the advice, where appropriate, of the district’s administrators, teachers, employees, community members and experts such as the school district’s legal counsel, financial adviser
or auditor. With this information, the board can act only during legally called board meetings. Therefore, it is important that board members do their “homework” prior to attending a board meeting so they can discuss the issue and be prepared to take action at the meeting.

4:8. What is the most important consideration when making a decision?
The primary consideration is the tangible impact the decision will have on your district’s students. If you understand the facts and relevant data, and you keep the needs of all students in mind when making decisions, you will undoubtedly make good decisions. Remember, your first responsibility is to every student in your district. Keeping this in mind will greatly assist you in making the right decisions despite pressures that certain constituent groups may exert.

4:9. What can or can’t school board members reveal to each other?
School board members will learn information that is confidential and should not be discussed outside of a board’s closed session. This does not limit discussions among school board members at appropriate times in conformity with the Sunshine Act.

4:10. When I’m in the minority on the board, how can I influence the other board members to consider my point of view?
You can practice patience, respect the majority and develop your skills. Genuinely listen to your colleagues. Don’t interrupt. Wait to be recognized, then make your point, but don’t deliver a monologue. Argue from fact, not emotion. Concisely identify the problem or the potential opportunity. Use facts to make the point that it is a district-wide problem or opportunity. State your recommendation and explain how it helps attain a district goal. Finally, be prepared to compromise.

4:11. Should the board of school directors set goals for itself each year?
Yes, it is a good idea for a board to have goals for the effectiveness and efficiency of board operations and evaluate them on a yearly basis.

4:12. Are there term limits for board members?
No. Pennsylvania board members serve four-year terms. Every other year, roughly half the positions are up for election, providing the community with an opportunity to select new board members or to re-elect sitting members. A board with both new and seasoned members can provide the best of both worlds: new thinking is introduced while institutional history is maintained.
5:1. What is the role of the superintendent relative to the school board?
Consider the superintendent the chief executive officer of the school district who reports to the board of directors – the school board. While the school board is responsible for setting the vision and goals for the district, it is the superintendent who implements the policies to attain the goals the board sets. The school board tells the superintendent what it wants done; the superintendent determines the best way to do it. The superintendent also is the board’s principal adviser – identifying operational needs and recommending policies for board action.

5:2. How do I communicate with the superintendent?
You should feel free to communicate in any way you are comfortable. Usually the superintendent is more than willing to meet with you, discuss issues on the phone or respond by email. The important thing is not how to communicate, but that you do communicate with the superintendent, especially when you have questions about agenda items being discussed at your board meeting.

5:3. When and how does the board evaluate the superintendent?
The School Code requires the board to evaluate the superintendent annually. A timeline for the evaluation must be included in the written contract. The contract also must include objective performance standards that are mutually agreed to in writing by the school board and the superintendent.

The performance standards may be based on:
- Achievement of annual measurable objectives established by the school district
- Achievement on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests
- Achievement on Keystone exams
- Student growth measured by the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System
- Attrition rates or graduation rates
- Financial management standards
- Standards of operational excellence
- Any additional criteria deemed relevant and mutually agreed to by the board of school directors and the superintendent/assistant superintendent

The board is required to post whether or not the superintendent met objective performance standards on the district’s website. These requirements also apply to assistant superintendents.

5:4. As a new board member, how should I approach the superintendent about making a change without being overly aggressive?
You should feel free to contact the superintendent, or the board president, to discuss your idea and have it either put on the agenda or referred to committee.

If you are tactful and ask thoughtful questions about the way the board currently operates and why, you won’t be perceived as pushy. If your suggestion relates to district operations,
you should first ask yourself if you are getting too involved in the management of the school district. Even so, if you do it tactfully, the superintendent should not mind discussing how the school district functions and be open to new ideas.

5:5. How do I gain the respect of the superintendent and other administrators?
As with any relationship, you have to earn it. Respect the superintendent and district administrators – they’re the education experts. Seek their advice. Listen to what they have to say. Ask thoughtful questions. Be open, honest and direct. Take time to learn about the school environment and issues that may be unique to your district prior to making suggestions and trying to effect change.
6:1. What is “school law?”
The area of law referred to as “school law” includes a broad range of legal topics and sources of law affecting numerous and varied aspects of public school operations, mandates and liability exposures.

Topics arising in the practice of “school law” include state and federal curriculum and assessment mandates, special education and disability rights, administrative procedure, litigation, torts (personal injury), constitutional law and civil rights, labor and employment, professional certification, contracts, procurement, construction, vehicles and transportation, food service, zoning, real estate, parliamentary procedure, elections, taxation and tax assessments, trademark and copyright, government borrowing and investing, child abuse, search and seizure, public health services, privacy, workers compensation, environmental protection, open meetings and government information access, government official ethics, and many other subjects.

6:2. How is the law on these subjects established?
Legal requirements, powers, limitations and other standards in these areas are established through a variety of state and federal sources, including the United States Constitution, the Pennsylvania Constitution, federal and state statutes enacted by Congress and state legislatures, federal and state administrative regulations and guidelines promulgated by executive agencies, boards and commissions, as well as judicial decisions of federal and state courts and rulings of administrative tribunals. It often is necessary to consult a combination of these sources in order to determine the rules applicable to a particular subject or the answer to a particular legal question. In addition, the state of the law affecting public school operations changes at an astounding pace during the course of an average year, with new state and federal legislation, regulations and court decisions appearing daily. Staying abreast of these developments requires specialized resources and information networks.

6:3. What is the School Code?
The School Code refers to a comprehensive act intended to address a variety of areas of public school operations in Pennsylvania. It is found in Chapter 1 of Title 24 of the non-consolidated statutes, and is sub-divided into various Articles (numbered with Roman numerals) addressing the establishment of school districts, the organization and general powers of school boards, school district finances, buildings and grounds, procurement of supplies, participation in intermediate units, superintendents, teachers and professional certification, school health, terms and courses of study, and so on. However, Title 24 and the School Code are not one and the same, and there are many other state laws affecting public school operations that are not contained in either the School Code or elsewhere in Title 24.
6:4. Are the laws the same for all school districts in the commonwealth?
Not always. As with other Pennsylvania local governments, school districts are classified according to size. 24 P.S. § 2-202. Some provisions of law apply only to districts of a particular class or classes, while others apply regardless of classification.

6:5. How are public schools funded?
A mix of local, state and federal dollars fund Pennsylvania’s public schools. Local dollars are derived primarily from real estate taxes.

6:6. What is the role of the school board in the collective bargaining process?
School directors become involved in the negotiation process for two main reasons. First, regardless of who actually negotiates for the district in the collective bargaining process, Section 508 of the School Code requires school board approval before the district can enter into a collective bargaining agreement. Second, the pay and benefits spelled out in collective bargaining agreements account for nearly three quarters or more of total expenditures in a school district budget, a category over which a school board has virtually no further control during the life of a collective bargaining agreement. So it is natural for school directors to be keenly interested in the negotiations. Districts can use a variety of different negotiation methods, including: appointing school directors as members of a negotiation committee, directing the district’s solicitor to conduct negotiations in consultation with the board, or retaining the services of outside counsel with labor negotiation experience. During all stages of the negotiation process, regardless of the chosen negotiation method, school boards should actively consult with qualified legal counsel because competent review of contract language and practical understanding of current compensation trends are essential. The simple fact is that most unions are represented in this process by highly-skilled and thoroughly trained negotiators, who the unions supply with volumes of state-wide and national research and analysis relating to compensation and benefits.
School boards attempting to negotiate without similar expert representation and advice are likely to be at an extreme disadvantage.

6:7. How can I stay abreast of changing legislation?

6:8. What does the concept “conflict of interest” mean and why should school board members try to avoid such conflicts?
The term “conflict of interest” in the context of serving on a school board refers to the potential clash between the public interest and the private pecuniary interest of an individual board member. Both the School Code and the Public Official and Employees Ethics Law enumerate cer-
tain types of conflicts of interest school directors need to avoid or potentially risk criminal prosecution, civil penalties or removal from office.

6:9. Must a school board fill a vacancy when one occurs?
Yes. Section 315 of the School Code provides when a vacancy occurs in all school districts (except Philadelphia), the remaining members of the school board, if a majority of the membership, shall within 30 days appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy. The appointee will serve only until the next succeeding municipal election when a member is elected for the unexpired portion of the term. If the vacancy occurs more than 60 days prior to the municipal election, the position goes on the ballot for what would be essentially a two-year term. If the vacancy occurs less than 60 days prior to the municipal election, an appointee could serve the balance of the unexpired term. 24 P.S. § 3-315. Board vacancies must be discussed in an open meeting.

6:10. What is the NCLB?
NCLB stands for the federal No Child Left Behind Act. It greatly affects the way states, school districts and individual schools are accountable for educating students. It was designed to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing schools and groups of students with a framework of standards, assessments and accountability. It requires states to establish proficiency levels in English/language arts, math, and, eventually, science. It also requires 100% of students to meet or exceed proficiency levels by 2014. NCLB amended the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.

NCLB was scheduled to be reauthorized in 2008; however, the provisions of the law continue to be extended through the congressional appropriations process. So long as Congress continues to appropriate funds to implement the law, the law remains in effect. However, to relieve states of the mandated requirements until Congress can agree on a reauthorization bill, the U.S. Department of Education has been granting NCLB waivers.

On Aug. 30, 2013, Pennsylvania’s No Child Left Behind waiver was approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The approved waiver is designed to improve Pennsylvania education in three areas: making sure all our students are ready for careers or college; developing recognition and accountability standards by the state for all public schools; and improving and supporting effective teachers and principals in all our classrooms.
7:1. Is it important that I know every policy in the district’s policy book?
Policies are the means by which a school board governs the school district; they guide its administration, staff, students, parents and the public, and are essential for maintaining compliance, accountability, consistency and fairness. While you can’t expect to know every policy as you begin your board service, you’ll find it helpful to read through the district policy manual at least once. You also will find that you become familiar with many policies as you go through the year. (PSBA’s Policy Services can assist your district with all of its policy needs.)

7:2. How can I build my skills and knowledge to become a better board member?
First, take advantage of PSBA’s School Board Academy programs, including the New Board Member Training, the School Leadership Conference, and other regional workshops and web conferences. You can find a schedule of PSBA’s programs on the PSBA website at www.psba.org, under Training & Events. Second, read the PSBA Bulletin and other publications on school board service. Third, watch and listen to your colleagues.

7:3. Is board development mandatory?
Professional development for school board members is not mandated by law in Pennsylvania; however, many school boards commit to engaging in board development through their adopted board policy language and through the board’s adopted Standards for Effective School Governance. A high-functioning school board ultimately ensures the success of the district.

7:4. What services does PSBA offer?
PSBA provides advocacy, information, leadership development and custom services for member school boards to help students succeed. We advocate at local, state and federal levels – in government and in the courts. We provide information through the PSBA Bulletin, Daily EDition and other publications, our website (www.psba.org), and expert advice. We offer a wide array of leadership development activities, including our School Leadership Conference, New Board Member Training, and regional workshops and seminars on a variety of topics. We deliver a variety of special programs and services to a wide audience, including school board secretaries, school solicitors and administrators. Superintendent searches and a complete line of personnel services are available in addition to research information, policy manuals and updates, and model administrative regulations. Visit our website – www.psba.org – for an even larger look at how we can help your school board and your district.

7:5. How do I manage the volume of reading that I have as a school board member?
Becoming a school board member is similar to going back to school, in that there are continuing education courses available, and there is “homework” you will have to prepare for board
meetings. You’ll have a lot of reading to be fully prepared to discuss and vote on issues.

As every student learns, don’t wait until the last minute to do your homework. If you find you don’t have enough time to review materials prior to your board meetings, ask if it’s possible to get materials earlier. You’ll find as you become more experienced that the material becomes more manageable and easier to absorb.

7:6. Where can I get comparative information relative to other schools?
The Pennsylvania School Performance Profile website offers a web-based resource for districts/schools to communicate performance results. The website is located at http://paschoolperformance.org.
8:1. With whom in the community should the board connect?
Although your board may not be able to engage every single group and community member, you should identify and engage key internal and external stakeholders. These individuals and groups can help or hinder the district in achieving its vision and goals. Key internal stakeholders may include students, faculty, staff, administrators, volunteers, PTA/PTO, etc. Key external stakeholders may include parents, taxpayers, unions, public officials, business/civic/social/religious leaders, and representatives of higher education, health, social and youth services organizations.

8:2. How should the board engage the community?
Engage key stakeholders by inviting and appointing them to participate in standing and ad hoc committees, advisory panels, focus groups, forums and surveys to describe a vision for the district, set its goals, plan strategically, align resources with goals, and other actions offering them an opportunity to learn about public education and to influence governance decisions.

The board also can engage community members by using a variety of means to inform them about the district, and to learn their interests, priorities and concerns. Print and electronic media, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and face-to-face conversations all play important roles in this year-round district campaign to inform and to be informed. While accentuating the positive – student successes and district progress – don’t neglect the negative. Be the first to let your community know about clouds looming on the horizon, and what you’re doing to dispel them. Board members and the superintendent can be effective ambassadors for the district, especially by scheduling dialogues with a cross-section of your community – preferably in their neighborhoods.

Part of your community engagement strategy also should encourage all members of the community to visit their schools. Invite them to extracurricular activities, schedule grandparents’ day, offer tours and briefings. In public education, familiarity often breeds support.

All these actions and more should be in your district’s public engagement policy.

8:3. How do you bridge a gap between community and board?
Most gaps result from poor communication. Remember that communication is a team sport: both parties must have the opportunity to speak; both must actively listen. You should review your school board policy on community engagement. If none exists, develop one. Community engagement means an ongoing collaborative process in which the district works with the public to build understanding, guidance and active support for the education of district students.

The board policy should direct the administration to use varied and effective methods for informing the community about the district. Does the district use varied means of communication – print media (such as newsletters and
board member or superintendent articles in local newspapers), electronic media (perhaps the district website), social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and oral delivery (such as board or superintendent talks with community organizations)? Does the district provide regular opportunities and various means for the public to inform the board and administration about its interests, priorities and concerns? Such means include opportunities for participation in district committees and advisory panels, focus groups, polling and social media. The board should recognize that their community offers resources of training and experience that are valuable to the schools. The quality of the district’s operations can be strengthened when these resources are used in an advisory capacity.

Transparency is key. When you bring the community into their schools, and when you bring school information into the community, knowledge and trust will improve as the community senses that “your” schools are “their” schools – and that their schools are in your good hands.

8:4. How can I make sure I represent community sentiment?
No community is a single, uniform entity. Every community comprises various subgroups, such as parents and senior citizens. So, to represent your community, your first task is to identify the groups and subgroups that together compose your community. It’s helpful to have a demographic and socioeconomic profile of community members served by your district. With it, you can check whether you really are aware of all community members, and whether your data and analysis truly reflect the total community.

Although individual board members may not be able to speak with everyone in your community about all issues, the board as a whole should be able to acquire valid input from a sound cross-section of community members. Varied approaches can be used. One is to include the public in committees, panels and forums as mentioned above. Some boards find it useful to rotate their meetings among various locations in the community. Also helpful can be a telephone hotline number, dedicated email address or social media tool where citizens can leave comments and questions. Of course, all board members should make opportunities to converse with people throughout the community about district education. Listening is key.

8:5. How does one encourage school board service?
Promoting school board service as a meaningful way to contribute to your community is an ongoing responsibility of school board members. Your actions, teamwork and enthusiasm for board service will influence people in your community to consider serving on your school board.

Attracting qualified and energetic candidates results from activities taking place year-round, not just at election time. By increasing community participation within the schools, you can identify community members who might be willing to consider school board service. Invite individuals to join ad hoc committees, to volunteer in the classroom, or simply to attend various events at school to strengthen their involvement. In this way, potential candidates can become more aware of the challenges facing your schools and the successes you have enjoyed.

8:6. How can boards increase public participation and support at meetings?
The first way to encourage public participation at meetings is to review how you treat the public when they come to your board meetings. A pleasant environment, a few social amenities and a procedure by which the public can address the board not only contributes to good decision making, but fosters good public attitudes about those decisions. The cardinal rule in building support for public education is to invite input and treat the public with respect. District practices and procedures should make people feel that they are a welcome part of the board meeting and resulting decisions.
A Glossary of Education Terms

**ABSTAIN:** To refrain deliberatively from an action or practice.

**AID RATIO:** The result of the formula that reflects a district’s wealth in relation to all other districts in the Commonwealth.

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION:** An educational placement outside of the regular classroom that is provided to a student who is expelled.

**APPROVED PRIVATE SCHOOL:** A private school licensed by the State Board of Private Academic Schools where the specific special education program for certain exceptional handicapped persons is approved by the Secretary of Education through the Bureau of Special Education and is thereby eligible to receive payments for tuition and maintenance from school district and/or Commonwealth funds.

**ARBITRATION:** A method of settling employment disputes through recourse to an impartial third party, whose decision usually is final and binding.

**AUDIT:** An inspection of accounting records and procedures for the purpose of verifying the accuracy and completeness of the records.

**AREA VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOL (AVTS) or CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER (CTC):** A public school, which provides career and technical education to secondary school students, out-of-school youth and adults in a geographical area comprised of and operated by one or more school districts.

**AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE (ADA):** The average number of students in attendance during the reporting period (aggregate days attendance divided by days in session).

**AVERAGE DAILY MEMBERSHIP (ADM):** The average number of students in membership during the reporting period (aggregate days membership divided by days in session).

**BASIC EDUCATION CIRCULAR (BEC):** A document that provides guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education relating to the Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, State Board of Education Regulations and Standards, and federal law and regulations.

**BARGAINING UNIT:** A local union representing the employment interests of a specific group of school district employees.

**BIDDING:** A solicitation by an intending purchaser to invite binding offers to sell goods or services at a specified price or rate.

**BOND:** A written instrument with sureties guaranteeing faithful performance of acts or duties contemplated. The term also refers to a written promise to pay a specified amount of money at a certain time in the future and carrying interest at a fixed rate.
BULLYING: Under the Pennsylvania School Code bullying is defined as an intentional electronic, written, verbal, or physical act(s) which: (1) is directed at another student or students; (2) occurs in a school setting; (3) is severe, persistent or persuasive; and (4) has the effect of doing any of the following: (i) substantially interfering with a student’s education; (ii) creating a threatening environment; and (iii) substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school. 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A

CHARTER SCHOOL: An independent public school designed by local citizens, established and operated under a charter from the local board of school directors. A charter school must be organized as a public nonprofit corporation. Charter schools are exempt from most state mandates except those ensuring the health, safety and civil rights of students.

CERTIFICATION: A document issued by PDE signifying the subject matter or assignment areas an individual may work in at a public school.

COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE: The period of a child’s life from the time the child’s parents elect to have the child enter school, which shall be not later than at the age of eight (8) years, until the age of seventeen (17) years. The term shall not include kindergarten students and any child who holds a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited senior high school.

CYBER-CHARTER SCHOOL: Independent public school established and operated under a charter from the Department of Education in which the school uses technology in order to provide a significant portion of its curriculum and to deliver a significant portion of instruction by electronic means.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: The negotiation of employment matters between employers and employees through the use of a bargaining agent designated by the majority of the employees within the bargaining unit.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION: A legal remedy providing for educational hours for special education students that may be awarded when the school district fails to carry out the student’s IEP.

EXPULSION: The exclusion of a student from school in excess of 10 school days.

FARMSTEAD EXCLUSION: The exclusion from taxation of a portion of the assessed value of the buildings and structures on a farm that are used in commercial agricultural production.

FISCAL YEAR: The period of 365 days commencing on July 1 of each year and ending on June 30 of the following year; school districts of the first, first class A and second class may establish a fiscal year to coincide with the calendar year by a majority vote of the board of school directors.

FUND BALANCE: An accounting term referring to the difference between assets and liabilities.

FURLOUGH: A suspension or layoff from employment.

HOMESTEAD EXCLUSION: The exclusion from taxation of a portion of the assessed value of an individual’s primary residence and the lot on which it is situated.

IMMUNITY: Exemption from legal liability.

INDEX: A percentage calculated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education that establishes a limit on the authority of Act 72 school districts to raise taxes.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP): The plan written by the IEP team (including parents) that specifically describes the programs and services necessary for a free appropriate public education for the eligible child.

JOINT OPERATING COMMITTEE: The governing body of a vocational-technical school or career and technology center.
LETTER OF ELIGIBILITY: The document issued by PDE signifying an individual may work as an assistant superintendent or superintendent in Pennsylvania.

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA): A board of education or other legally constituted local school authority having administrative control and direction of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or political subdivision in a state, or any other public educational institution or agency having administrative control and direction of a career and technical education program. This term includes state correctional education agencies.

MILLAGE: The rate of measurement by which school district real estate taxes are levied.

NONPUBLIC SCHOOL: A school that is privately controlled by a nonpublic entity and is financed from sources other than public taxation.

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEE: A certificated employee who has acquired tenure pursuant to the Pennsylvania School Code.

PUBLIC RECORD: A record that must be disclosed to the public under the conditions and requirements of the Right-To-Know law.

REFERENDUM: A question put on the ballot in an election where voters decide a particular action. In the school law context, this normally takes the form of increasing local taxes or incurring debt.

TEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEE: An employee who has been employed to perform for a limited time the duties of a newly created position or of a regular professional employee whose services have been terminated by death, resignation, suspension or removal.

TENURE: The status granted to a teacher after a trial period protecting against summary dismissal.

WEIGHTED AVERAGE DAILY MEMBERSHIP (WADM): The term used for the assignment of weight by grade level to ADM. The current weighting is half-time kindergarten at 0.5, full-time kindergarten and elementary (grades 1-6) at 1.0, and secondary (grades 7-12) at 1.36.
Common Acronyms

AVTS – Area Vocational Technical School
CTC – Career and Technical Center
IU – Intermediate Unit

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING/ARBITRATION/LABOR
ACP – Administrative Compensation Plan, Act 93 Agreement for administrator compensation
CBA – Collective Bargaining Agreement
PERA – Public Employee Relations Act, 43 P.S. § 1101.101 et seq.
PLRB – Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board

COURTS
3rd Cir. – United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
C.C.P. – Court of Common Pleas
E.D. Pa. – United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
M.D. Pa. – United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
Pa. – Pennsylvania Supreme Court
Pa. Cmwlth. – Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court
Pa. Super. – Pennsylvania Superior Court
U.S. – Supreme Court of the United States
W.D. Pa. – United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BEC – Basic Education Circular
CSPG – Certification and Staffing Policy Guidelines
PDE – Pennsylvania Department of Education
USDOE – U.S. Department of Education

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE
CPSL – Child Protective Services Law
CYS – Children and Youth Services
DPW – Department of Public Welfare

EMPLOYEES
FTE – Full Time Equivalent
PSERS – Public School Employees’ Retirement System
SERS - State Employees’ Retirement System
TPE – Temporary Professional Employee

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION
ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.
EEOC – Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
PHRA – Pennsylvania Human Relations Act
PHRC – Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
PIAA – Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association
Title IX – Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681-1688

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)

IMMUNITY/SUITS AGAINST LOCAL AGENCIES
PSTCA – Political Subdivision Tort Claims Act, 42 Pa CS § 8541 et seq.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND
AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress
HQT – Highly Qualified Teachers
NCLB – No Child Left Behind Act

RECORDS
RIGHT-TO-KNOW ACT; PUBLIC RECORDS
OOR – Office of Open Records
ORO – Open Records Officer
RTKL – Right-to-Know Law, 65 P.S. § 67.101 et seq.

SPECIAL EDUCATION; SECTION 504; EARLY INTERVENTION; ADA; GIFTED EDUCATION
ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.
ALJ – Administrative Law Judge
BIP – Behavior Intervention Plan/BSP – Behavior Support Plan
Chapter 15 – Regulations of Pennsylvania Board of Education Implementing § 504
DPH – Due Process Hearing
EI – Early Intervention
ELL – English Language Learner
ER – Evaluation Report
ESL – English as a Second Language
ESY – Extended School Year
FAPE – Free Appropriate Public Education
FBA – Functional Behavioral Assessment
GIEP – Gifted Individualized Education Plan
IEE – Independent Educational Evaluation
IEP – Individualized Education Program
LEA – Local Educational Agency
LEP – Limited English Proficiency
LRE – Least Restrictive Environment
MAWA – Mutually Agreed-upon Written Arrangement
MDE – Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation
MDT – Multi-Disciplinary Team
NORA – Notice of Recommended Assignment
NOREP – Notice of Recommended Educational Placement
OCR – Office for Civil Rights
OSEP – Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS – Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
OT – Occupational Therapy
PT – Physical Therapy
PTE – Permission to Evaluate
PWN – Prior Written Notice
RTII – Response To Instruction and Intervention
RTF – Residential Treatment Facility
SEA – State Educational Agency

STUDENTS
AED – Automated External Defibrillators
AUP – Acceptable Use Policy (for Internet/computer network)
CIPA – Children’s Internet Protection Act
GED – General Education Diploma
LGBTQ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning
PSSA – Pennsylvania System of School Assessment
STEAM – Science Technology Engineering Arts Math
STEM – Science Technology Engineering Math
Title IX – Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681-1688

TAXATION
Act 1 – Act 1 of 2006, Taxpayer Relief Act, 53 P.S. § 6926.301 et seq.
EIT – Earned Income Tax
### Acronyms of Well-Known Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASA</td>
<td>American Association of School Administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTE</td>
<td>Association for Career &amp; Technical Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASBO</td>
<td>Association of School Business Officials</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASCD</td>
<td>Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DECA</td>
<td>Distributive Education Clubs of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRN</td>
<td>Federal Relations Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEOP</td>
<td>National Association of Educational Office Professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAESP</td>
<td>National Association of Elementary School Principals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASSP</td>
<td>National Association of Secondary School Principals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSBA</td>
<td>National School Boards Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSPRA</td>
<td>National School Public Relations Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PACTA</td>
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<td>PASPA</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Association of School Personnel Administrators</td>
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<td>PDE</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Department of Education</td>
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<td>PIAA</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association</td>
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<td>PMEA</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Music Educators Association</td>
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<td>PSADA</td>
<td>Pennsylvania State Athletic Directors Association</td>
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<td>PSLA</td>
<td>Pennsylvania School Librarians Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTAP</td>
<td>Pupil Transportation Association of Pennsylvania</td>
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