



Beyond the Handbooks

Veteran Tips for New School Board Members

Tips & Tricks from the Trenches

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Setting the Stage

It's a Marathon

Welcome to the board. Your term is a long-distance run, not a sprint. You don't need to master 100% of the statutes on day one. Governance is about direction, not daily management.

- 🎓 **Governance Focus:** NMSA 1978, Section 22-5-1.1 clarifies your mandate is the education of children.
- 🎓 **Check politics and personal agendas at the door!** Every decision should come back to one question: *"How does this benefit the students in our district?"*

"Your biggest asset is the rest of the board. Lean on their experience."



Governance vs. Management

Understanding the distinction is critical. Blurring these lines is the #1 cause of organizational dysfunction.

🎓 Governance (The Board)

- Setting strategy, policy and oversight. The "What" and "Why".

The Driver with the Map, set the destination and choose the route.

- "Nose in, fingers out." (Oversight without micromanagement)

🎓 Management (Superintendent)

- Execution and operations. The "Who", "How", and "When".

The Mechanic with the Engine, keep things running smoothly and efficiently along the route.



Board Policy & Packet Pile

The Board Policy is your playbook. Be familiar with it!

Reading the Board Packet **thoroughly** before the meeting is your main homework assignment.

- 🎓 **Preparation:** Read materials *before* the meeting, not during it.
- 🎓 **Inquiry:** Highlight questions and send them to the Superintendent's office or Department Head *before* meeting day.
- 🎓 **Efficiency:** Public meetings are for decision-making, not catch-up reading.

"Don't waste public meeting time on questions that could have been answered via email."



Board Leadership: The Chair

👉 First Among Equals

The Board President/Chair runs the meeting, but they do not run the Board. They have one vote, just like every other member.

🗣️ Spokesperson

Typically, the Board President is the designated spokesperson for the Board. Respect this channel to avoid sending mixed messages to the press.

"Respect the gavel. A good Chair ensures all voices are heard before a vote is taken."



The "Rule of One"

Under New Mexico law, an individual board member has **zero authority** outside of a lawfully convened meeting.

Avoid "Serial Meetings"

Be cautious of "rolling quorums" or serial meetings (phone trees, email chains) that violate the Open Meetings Act. You act as a Body Corporate.

"You only have one vote. Don't promise a constituent an outcome until you've heard the full board discussion."



Executive Session

Closed sessions are for specific topics defined by law (e.g., threatened litigation, limited personnel matters, real estate).

Absolute Confidentiality

What happens in Executive Session **stays** in Executive Session. Leaking information destroys trust and creates massive legal liability for the district.

"Breaching confidentiality is the fastest way to lose the trust of your colleagues and the community."



CLOSED
MEETING IN
PROGRESS

The Superintendent Relationship

The Board manages only **one** employee: the Superintendent. This relationship is critical to district success.

- 🎓 **Evaluation Cycle:** Establish clear goals and a predictable timeline for evaluation.
- 🎓 **Accountability:** Good governance requires holding leadership to standards, and avoiding micromanagement.
- 🎓 **Trust:** Essential, but it must be verified through consistent data and reporting.



Disagreeing Agreeably

The "Team of Six"

The Board (5 members) + Superintendent = The Team of Six.
Debate is healthy and necessary, but toxic division kills progress.

- 🎓 **Focus on Issues:** Attack the problem, not the person.
- 🎓 **Unity in Action:** Once the vote is taken, the board speaks with **one voice**.
- 🎓 **Public Support:** You must support the majority decision publicly, even if you voted against it.



Understanding the Money



Fiscal Stewardship

You set the tax rate and budget priorities. You are the ultimate stewards of taxpayer dollars.

- 📅 **Fund Balance:** Monitor this key health indicator regularly.
- 📅 **Alignment:** Ensure the budget explicitly funds your strategic goals.
- 📅 **Clarity:** Don't just rubber-stamp the finance report.

"If you don't understand the financial reports, ASK! Schedule a meeting with the Business Manager."

Student Outcomes: "The Why"

It is easy to get distracted by buses, budgets, and buildings. But your primary job is student achievement. You must become data literate.

- 🎓 **Monitor the Data:** Regularly review literacy rates, graduation rates, and subgroup performance.
- 🎓 **Ask the Right Questions:** "How does this purchase improve student learning?"
- 🎓 **Equity:** Look beyond the averages. Who is falling behind?




"If you aren't talking about student learning at every meeting, you aren't doing the job."



Handling Complaints

Respect the Chain of Command

When a parent calls with a complaint, it is natural to want to fix it. However, your job is to set policy, not solve individual operational issues.

-  Listen with empathy and concern.
-  Refer them to the correct administrator (Teacher → Principal → Superintendent).
-  Protect the Board's role as a potential appellate body.



"If you try to solve it yourself, you undermine the staff and your own policy."

Communicating with the Public

Living in a Fishbowl

As an elected official, your words carry weight. You may be misunderstood, so clarity and protocol are essential.

- 🎓 **One Voice:** Use the designated board spokesperson (usually the President) for official comments.
- 🎓 **Media:** Never be surprised by your own comments. Assume everything is "on the record."
- 🎓 **Listening:** Be a good listener, but avoid making promises you can't keep alone.



Community Engagement



Go To Them

Don't just wait for people to come to the podium during public comment. Effective boards are proactive in their engagement.




- 🎓 **Listening Tours:** Hold town halls in different parts of the district.
- 🎓 **Advisory Committees:** Involve parents and staff in big decisions before they are final.
- 🎓 **Visibility:** Show up at football games, plays, and graduations.

"You represent the entire community, not just the people who voted for you."

Legislative Advocacy

The Voice of the District

In New Mexico, much of your funding and policy is determined in Santa Fe. The Board must be an active advocate for local needs.

-  **Relationships:** Know your local legislators personally. Invite them to your schools.
-  **NMSBA Resolutions:** Participate in the state association's resolution process.
-  **Data-Driven:** When you lobby, bring data on how legislation affects *your* students.

"If you aren't at the table in Santa Fe, you are on the menu."



Mentorship & Self-Care

Find a Mentor

Don't go it alone. Find a mentor on the board or through the NMSBA. Having a sounding board who understands the unique pressures of this role is invaluable.

Protect Your Balance

This job can take over your life if you let it. Set boundaries. Remember your family commitment and *why* you ran: for the students.




"You can't pour from an empty cup."



Questions & Answers

"There are no 'silly questions.' Ask us. That's why we're here."

Essential Resources

-  [NMSBA Handbook](#)
-  [Local Policy Manual](#)
-  [NMPED Board Resources](#)

Thank you for your service to our students.

