

A Check List for New School Board Members



As required by the Georgia Department of Education, newly elected members of local boards of education shall participate, as a minimum, in 15 hours of training within one year of taking office. Newly elected members may participate in such training for new board members after being elected as a member and before being sworn in to the post. At least---

- Six hours required. Five from training provided by the Finance and Budget Office of the Georgia Department of Education. In addition, one hour to be included in local district orientation focused on the local district's most recent audit, financial statement and budget.
- Three hours in district orientation training (see above for hour on district finances) and four hours required from approved training credit course(s) by DOE approved providers.
- Three hours required from approved credit courses by DOE approved providers. * Three hours of annual Whole Board Governance Training is required by DOE which may fulfill this requirement.
- Fifteen Hours within one year of taking office

Orientation to the Board:

These items are generally the school board's areas of expertise and, therefore, should be the board's responsibility in the orientation process. Often, the board president will take the lead for this part of the orientation process with the assistance of the superintendent and other members of the board. New board members should have access to the following items:

- Policy manual with an explanation of its use
- A copy of current district goals
- An explanation of school board organization (bylaws, officers, standing and ad hoc committees, if any)
- An explanation of any policies governing board member conduct and activities (i.e., board code of conduct, travel expenses, conflict of interest, professional development, calendar of important events)
- An explanation of how board meetings are conducted, including rules of order used, Open Meetings Act requirements, placing items on the agenda, superintendent's informational packets
- Information about the board speaking with one voice, the authority of the board versus the authority of any individual board member, the chain of command, etc. An explanation of board processes: gathering community input, monitoring district progress, self-evaluation, communication with the media
- A historical perspective of the board's current work, including minutes from the past year's board meetings
- An explanation of the board packet
- A list of board development opportunities throughout the year
- Swearing in (talk with county election office)

Orientation to Board/Superintendent Roles and Relationship:

These items are generally shared areas of expertise between the board and superintendent, and, therefore, should be a joint responsibility in the orientation process. New board members should have access to the following items:

- An explanation of the authority and responsibilities of the board, superintendent, administrators and individual board members
- An explanation of how communication occurs between the board and the superintendent
- Explanation of how authority is delegated to the superintendent
- A copy of the superintendent's job description and contract
- An organization chart of the school district's management structure
- A copy of the superintendent's evaluation tool Link
- An explanation of how communication flows between board members and the superintendent and how to use the chain of command

Orientation to the District:

School Finance

- A copy of the district's budget and an explanation of how, when and by whom it is prepared
- An explanation of the state's financial plan and what it means in terms of local district budget
- Data on district per-pupil cost and expenditures
- An explanation of the funding process for the school district
- A description of the district's student enrolment trends and projections
- Data on the existing bond indebtedness of the district
- Information on federal aid to district's education program

Facilities

- A list showing the number, location and conditions of schools and other buildings
- An explanation of construction projects contemplated and in process
- An explanation of the student transportation system
- A description of the geographic boundaries and attendance zones of the school district

School Curriculum and Instruction

- An explanation of curriculum standards required by state law

- Copies of recent state report cards
- A description of the district's overall curriculum
- An explanation of school improvement initiatives
- Student dropout statistics
- Information on recent test results and how they are utilized.
- Data on the percentages of students who go onto college or other post-high school programs
- Documents showing teacher-pupil ratio and median class size for the district and for appropriate subgroupings
- An explanation of the district's program for exceptional children
- Data on the age and condition of textbooks, technology and school equipment
- The district's technology plan
- A list of extracurricular activities in the district

Administration and Staff

- An explanation of personnel recruitment and hiring procedures
- A copy of staff salary schedules and fringe benefit programs
- A copy of the district's collective bargaining agreements
- An explanation of the district's evaluation criteria and procedures for administrators and teachers
- An explanation of the district's professional development program

Questions New Board Members Might Ask

- » Who prepares the agendas for board meetings and how do I get an item included?
- » What do I do if I need additional information?
- » What are the guidelines of the Open Meetings Act?
- » How does the board respond to controversial situations?
- » When is it appropriate to raise concerns about staff?
- » How do I deal with questions from the media?
- » How do I respond to community members when I'm on the losing side of a close and carefully watched vote?
- » What relationship should board members have with central office, principals and teachers?



Overview of the Open Meetings Act

Open Meetings

All meetings of a public body (i.e., school board) must be open to the public.

1. A “meeting” is defined as the convening of a public body at which a quorum is present for the purpose of deliberating toward or rendering a decision on a public policy.
2. The Act does not apply to a social or chance gathering or conference where a quorum is present as long as board members in attendance do not collectively discuss matters of public policy.
3. An advisory committee composed of less than a quorum of the full board can also be a “public body” subject to the Act’s requirements.

All decisions of a public body must be made at a meeting open to the public.

All deliberations of a public body constituting a quorum of its members must take place at a meeting open to the public unless a closed meeting exception applies.

Overview of Closed Meetings

Closed Meetings

Closed meeting exceptions to the open deliberations requirement:

- Considering the dismissal, suspension or disciplining of an employee or student if a closed meeting is requested by the employee or student;
- Hearing complaints or charges brought against an employee or school board member per his or her request for a closed meeting;
- Considering a periodic personnel evaluation of an employee if he or she requests a closed session;
- Conducting strategy and negotiation sessions connected with a collective bargaining agreement;
- Considering the purchase or lease of property;
- Consulting with legal counsel regarding pending litigation;
- Reviewing applications for employment or appointment when the applicant requests confidentiality; and
- Considering material exempt from discussion or disclosure by law.

A public body can’t hold a meeting without first giving public notice of the meeting at its principal office.

Minutes must be kept of all meetings, whether open or closed, and regardless of whether the meeting is identified as a regular or special meeting, study session, committee of the whole or by some other name.

Members of the public have the right to attend all open meetings and to address the board during the meeting according to rules adopted by the board.