Organizing the meeting agenda

This planning guide can assist presidents and superintendents in considering what to place on a board meeting agenda, how to handle items, and in what order to place them. Items listed in each category are just examples of the type of items the board may want to consider including in board meetings. It is not necessary, however, or recommended that various categories of agenda items be labeled in the official meeting notice posted 72 hours before the meeting.

This can restrict the board’s flexibility to act once it is in the meeting. For example, if any item is listed under a “Discussion” category, and the board’s discussion reveals that a decision is clear and the board is ready to act, will it appear that the board acted improperly if they vote on the item? Or if an item is listed under “Reports” but the report raises questions related to the issue, does the “Report” label preclude the board from discussing it? For purposes of the official meeting posting, listing only the topics that will be addressed provides the most flexibility to act on any item in the most appropriate manner without second-guessing.

If the meeting notice only lists topics and not categories, it becomes important that other background information about agenda items clearly state what the purpose is for placing the item on the agenda, and whether the board must take action, can take action, or has no authority to take action on the item but is simply being provided information.

Parts of the meeting to consider:

Opening

This section generally includes the call to order and the declaration that a quorum is present. This is also an appropriate time for the pledge of allegiance.

Sample items:

- Call to order
- Roll call
- Declaration of quorum
- Pledge of allegiance
- Invocation

Decision points:

1. Will we conduct a roll call, or simply have the president announce the number of members in attendance and whether a quorum is present?
2. Will we include the pledge of allegiance?
3. Will we include a moment of silence or an invocation?

Recognitions

Districts often include a time for announcements about student, staff, and volunteer achievements. This may include presentation of awards or resolutions honoring individuals or programs as well. If you’d like for members of the staff and public to feel welcome to attend when friends or family members are being honored, you might want to place this section at or near the beginning of the meeting so that they can leave after the presentations rather than staying for the entire business meeting. If you want to encourage members of the public to listen to discussions about important district issues, you may choose to delay recognitions so that members of the public in attendance for that purpose will also be able to hear discussion and decisions about critical issues.
Sample items:

- Announcements of achievements by student groups (e.g. athletic or academic teams)
- Announcements of individual honors received by students at the district level or beyond
- Presentations of service awards to staff members or volunteers
- Brief presentations by students
- Introductions of visiting dignitaries

Decision points:

1. Will we include a period for recognitions?
2. Will we impose a time limit on the recognitions period?
3. At what point in the meeting will recognitions be made? Beginning? End? Some time in the middle?

Public comments

Most districts offer a time at regular board meetings during which community members may address the board. BED (LOCAL) policy typically defines limitations and restrictions the board has previously established for this segment of the meeting.

Decision points:

1. At what point in the meeting will public comments be permitted?
2. Who will keep time to ensure equity and notify speakers when their time is up?
3. How will the presiding officer respond to questions or to complaints against district employees?

Consent agenda

This portion of a meeting should be reserved for routine or non-controversial items. A list of two or more items that fit this description can be listed together as one agenda item upon which the board votes at one time.

Sample items:

- Minutes of April 1 Meeting
- Resolution to Participate with Cactus City in Child Safety Month
- Monthly Financial Report and Disbursement of Funds
- Resolution to Refund Overpayment of Taxes of Over $500
- District Transportation Routes for Next Year

A motion to act on the consent agenda should be worded to be clear that the board is approving each item listed on the consent agenda, rather than “approving the consent agenda.” (For example, “I move to approve the items listed on the consent agenda as presented in the Board agenda packet.”)

Decision points:

1. Do we have items that appear routinely on our agenda that could be grouped into a consent agenda to save time?
2. Do we want to include a consent agenda at each regular meeting?
3. Which routine items will we include on the consent agenda?
4. How and when will the president explain to board members’ their option to remove items from the consent agenda if they have questions about an item on the list?
5. Will we place the consent agenda at the beginning of the meeting to get routine items handled quickly, at the end of the meeting when members are too tired to deal with long discussion items? Should it be at some other point in the agenda?

**Items for board discussion, deliberation, and/or action**

These are the “meat” of the meeting, but it is important for the team to consider the most efficient time to address them. For example, placing important or complex issues late in the meeting when board members and administrators are tired may not be the best time for a thoughtful, productive discussion. Items that are critical to parents and community may be better placed early in the meeting before families need to take children home for homework or bed. You may want to place some items late enough in the meeting to allow commuters time to arrive and hear discussion. Regardless of when discussion and action items are addressed during the meeting, the board should avoid labeling items as “discussion,” “action,” “open,” or “closed,” in order to provide the most flexibility to handle items appropriately.

For purposes of the posting of the meeting, listing on the topics that will be addressed, rather than the categories such as those described above, provides the most flexibility to act on any item in the most appropriate manner without second-guessing.

**Sample items:**

- District vision and goals
- District and campus performance objectives
- District budget
- Tax rate Land purchases and sales
- Bids or contract outside the scope of the adopted budget and administrative authority
- School calendar
- DEC(LOCAL) policy revision
- Appraisal instruments, graduation requirements, courses of instruction, curriculum objectives, and test instruments

**Decision points:**

1. In what order should the items be placed to best focus attention on critical issues?
2. Are there individuals who will be asked to present relevant information to the board? If so, when will they be available to present?

**Reports**

Sometimes, agenda items don’t require any action but are provided to give the board an update on district goals, implementation of plans, or status of other district operations. Although the meeting notice should list these items by topic only, the supplemental information should make it clear that no action is needed or required so that the board is free to ask any questions, but move along quickly to matters that do require their attention.

Reports also provide a useful way to handle items that are administrative and within the authority of the superintendent or a staff member to decide, but which the board or superintendent believe are important to address publicly because of their importance to the community. They allow a forum for information without the expectation that the board will do anything about them. However, should a report indicate that perhaps a policy needs to be revisited, or raises a question about the status of a priority goal, the board could request that a follow-up item be placed on a future agenda to focus on any action the board does have authority to perform. Reports can also provide updates implementation of goals and plans, and area
over which the administration has authority but about which the board needs to remain informed in its oversight role.

Sample items:

- Reports highlighting successful district programs or improvement efforts
- Routine administrative reports such as financial statements, enrollment or attendance status, number or type of discipline incidents, construction updates, etc.
- Reports from board members about training sessions attended, information received from citizens, and community events at which the board may want to be represented
- Administrative follow-up reports on concerns raised or information requested
- Progress reports on district goals and plans
- Evaluation reports on achievement of district goals or results of special programs

Decision points:

Do we want to hear oral presentations of reports at the meeting, or request that routine progress reports be provided in writing?

When reports are scheduled on an agenda for presentation or discussion at the meeting, do we want to see the report or a summary in writing before the meeting?

When reports are provided in advance of the meeting, would we prefer to hear an explanation of the report by staff at the meeting as well, or would we prefer only a question and answer time at the meeting if board members still have questions after reading the report provided in advance?

Would we prefer to hear reports early in the meeting so that members of the staff and community can hear them as well, or at the end of the meeting when board members’ energy levels are lower, since no decisions or actions are required?

Grouping items allowed in closed meeting

Although it is not necessary or recommended that “Closed Meeting” be identified as a separate part of the meeting, you may wish to group items the law allows to be discussed in closed meeting together at a particular time during the meeting. For more information about closed meetings, see policy BEC (LEGAL) and the sample notice in BoardBook® resources.

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