

Top Ten Questions to Ask about Onboarding New School Board Members



1. What is the purpose of an onboarding process?
2. What is our current onboarding process for bringing new school board members into the governance team?
3. How can we avoid overwhelming new board members with information?
4. How can we familiarize a new member with board norms, practices, rights, and responsibilities?
5. What documents and systems do board members need to access?
6. What do new members need to learn about our district/charter and schools?
7. How can new members build relationships with the admin team and other board members?
8. How can we help a new board member feel comfortable in board meetings and encourage them to participate appropriately?
9. How can we promote board and superintendent/charter administrator stability?
10. Boards are designed to have changing membership. How can we make that as smooth as possible?



Top Ten Questions to Ask about Onboarding New Board Members



1. **What is the purpose of an onboarding process?**
 - a. Increased board member knowledge and skills lead to increased public trust and satisfaction and to board stability. Best for student success.
 - b. Bring them into your culture, build trust and respect: Productive disagreements can lead to better decisions and better community satisfaction.
 - c. Conflict undermines trust and psychological safety which are essential in high-functioning teams.
 - d. Explain the impact school boards have on student achievement.
 - e. Clarify expectations—need to focus on all students, not have a single-issue mentality.
 - f. Clarify the role of board members and the board (finances/budget, policy, legal, negotiations, manage superintendent/charter administrator).
 - g. Empower them to participate effectively.
 - h. Prevent open meeting law violations.
 - i. Avoid embarrassing emails in public record requests.
2. **What is our current onboarding process for bringing new school board members into the governance team?**
 - a. [handout] Onboarding checklist.
 - b. Encourage attending ISBA training and conferences.
3. **How can we avoid overwhelming new board members with information?**
 - a. Group topics into related sections.
 - b. Have different people present information.
 - c. Keep all meetings to less than 1.5 hours.
 - d. Spread them out over time.
 - e. Have board clerk keep process moving forward at a pace the board member is comfortable with.



4. **How can we familiarize a new member with board norms, practices, rights and responsibilities?**
 - a. [handout] ***Best Practices of School Board Members.***
 - b. [handout] ***Budget Guiding Principles.***
 - c. How agenda is set.
 - d. How board advisory committees are used, board member role.
 - e. Confidentiality.
 - f. Who responds to emails from the public and the press (board chair).
 - g. How to respond to questions in the grocery store (direct to the right person in the chain of command: as board member may be adjudicator, don't want to have to abstain due to bias).
 - h. Share this mindset:
 - i. Suspend all preconceived notions about the district/charter, the staff, and the board. Get curious. Stay curious.
 - ii. Get up to speed in a reasonable amount of time.
 - iii. Be mindful of confidentiality, the special nature of boards, and relationships with organizations.
 - iv. Avoid conflicting interests.
 - v. Accept the realities of governance.
 - vi. Understand that time is your best friend.
5. **What documents and systems do board members need to access?**
 - a. Have board clerk onboard these things.
 - b. Email, agendas, policies.
 - c. Provide a document with a list of links to useful documents (PolicyTracker, AgendaBuilder, School Liaison schedule).
6. **What do new members need to learn about our district/charter and schools?**
 - a. Finances.
 - b. Policy.
 - c. Legal.
 - d. Negotiations/Master agreement.
 - e. Differences in schools—size, special programs.



7. **How can new members build relationships with the admin team and other board members?**
 - a. Onboarding.
 - b. Appointments to ask questions going forward.
 - c. Create opportunities to work together in less formal settings: team building, retreats, work sessions.
8. **How can we help a new board member feel comfortable in board meetings and encourage them to participate appropriately?**
 - a. Review agenda with board chair prior to first few meetings.
 - b. Explain basic rules of order.
9. **How can we promote board and superintendent/charter administrator stability?**
 - a. Have a thorough evaluation process for the superintendent/charter administrator.
 - b. Treat members with respect.
 - c. Encourage participation, opinions and feedback.
10. **Boards are designed to have changing membership. How can we make that as smooth as possible?**
 - a. Reduce unnecessary turnover: Help board members to feel valued, know that their contribution matters.
 - b. Develop an onboarding process.
 - c. Codify what works well in policy and support documents for the next board chair and board clerk.

