

# Top tips for new board member success

by Sara C. Clark  
deputy director of legal services

Congratulations newly elected board members! In a few short weeks you will join the ranks of one of the largest groups of elected officials in the state.

As a member of that group, you will be responsible for organizing, overseeing and controlling the public schools within your jurisdiction. You will attend an endless string of meetings and school functions and read reams of reports, agendas, resolutions and other information. You will render decisions in a host of complex areas, including curriculum, finance, transportation, food service, legal issues, legislation and personnel matters. This, of course, will be in addition to your already time-consuming commitments as a lawyer, homemaker, real estate agent, scuba instructor, parent and more.

So how can you prioritize your busy schedule before January? What do you *really* need to know before you take the oath of office? This article highlights what I believe are the top seven things you can do now to ensure a more successful transition onto the board in January.

## Be a board groupie

Attend as many board meetings as you can between now and the time you take office. At its discretion, the sitting board may also invite you to observe its executive sessions. Only current board members are entitled to attend executive sessions, but the board may decide to invite others to attend, as well. If invited, you are encouraged to attend, as these meetings can provide additional opportunities for you to observe the issues and concerns facing the current board members.

Before taking office, you also may meet with other board members-elect without violating the Open Meetings

Act — Ohio's Sunshine Law. Newly elected board members are not members of a "public body" until they take office, so meetings with other board members-elect are not subject to the Open Meetings Act. If, however, you meet with a majority of the current members of the board to discuss board business, Ohio's Open Meetings Act will govern your meeting and you will be required to comply with its requirements.

## Get yourself trained

Ohio Revised Code Section 3315.15 allows a board to use its service fund to pay any training and orientation expenses incurred by newly elected board members prior to taking office. Many boards take advantage of this opportunity by offering newly elected board members training opportunities, such as attendance at the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show. Your educational service center (ESC), the Ohio School Boards Association or the National School Boards Association also may provide additional training opportunities. If you find something that looks interesting and you want to attend, consider asking your board if funds are available.

## 'Friend' OSBA

OSBA has joined the social media revolution and is now on Facebook. If you are one of the 750 million active users of Facebook, we encourage you to "friend" OSBA's page to take advantage of all the latest news, resources and upcoming events that are available to you as a board member. OSBA's Facebook page is online at: <https://www.facebook.com/OHSchoolBoards>. You may also follow OSBA on Twitter.



Sara C. Clark

We also encourage you to get to know us "offline" and become familiar with our staff and services. We would love to sit down with you to discuss your needs, what we can offer and what we can do to make your member association a stronger resource for you. As an example of an available resource, OSBA provides its members and members-to-be with access to attorneys who every day field legal questions from board members, treasurers and superintendents from across the state. Although OSBA attorneys cannot provide legal advice, we do

provide information on a variety of school-law related topics. We have many resources available and often can point you in the right direction, even if that means telling you it's time to work with your board's counsel to represent you or to provide you with a formal legal opinion.

## Bring on the bookmarks

Bookmarking websites can save you valuable time when you're trying to track down the answer to a question. Here is my list of recommended websites to bookmark:

- Ohio attorney general's office ([www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov)). The "Legal" tab has an index of opinion letters written since 1993, a copy of the "Sunshine Law Manual" and the "Compatibility of Public Offices of Positions" index.
- Ohio Department of Education (ODE) ([www.ode.state.oh.us](http://www.ode.state.oh.us)). ODE's website contains a number of useful documents, including financial information, statewide reports, licensure and testing information, and more.
- Ohio Ethics Commission ([www.ohioethics.com](http://www.ohioethics.com)).

**ethics.ohio.gov**). This website includes copies of the commission's formal ethics opinions and several helpful fact sheets that give an overview of the ethics laws and financial disclosure requirements.

● Lawriter (<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc>). Lawriter is the official Web publisher of both the Ohio Revised Code and the Ohio Administrative Code. Users can search by word or by code section number.

● OSBA's legal services division page ([www.ohioschoolboards.org/resources-by-topic](http://www.ohioschoolboards.org/resources-by-topic)). This website is designed to help you do your job more effectively. The "Resources by Topic" page contains resource materials on more than 40 different legal topics. Once elected, you will receive a user name and password to access these members-only resources.

● National School Boards Association (NSBA) ([www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)). NSBA provides information and resources to support local school boards in governing and leading their communities to improve student learning.

● Current/pending legislation ([www.legislature.state.oh.us](http://www.legislature.state.oh.us)). This website allows you to search for legislation that is currently pending. It also provides summaries of each bill, synopses of amendments and committee reports, fiscal notes and a status report that tracks the bill through the legislative process.

### Become friends with Robert

Many school boards have adopted Robert's Rules of Order to govern their school board meetings. As a board member, your ultimate goal should be to learn how to apply those rules correctly and effortlessly. Does that mean you need to become a certified parliamentarian? No. But I would recommend that you invest in a good resource manual or guide that can help you at board meetings. My favorite resource is *Webster's New World Robert's Rules of Order: Simplified and Applied*. The editors of the book do a fantastic job of explaining the principles and concepts behind each rule so you can understand why a particular rule is important. The book also provides scripts and everyday examples of how the rules are applied to bring order and

help members get things done in a timely manner.

### Keep current on HB 153 and Issue 2

The introduction of House Bill (HB) 153 and Senate Bill (SB) 5 have rocked the school law world in recent months. HB 153, the biennial budget bill, was

signed by Gov. **John Kasich** in July and made significant changes that undoubtedly impacted your district. Although most of the bill became effective in July and September, it contains numerous provisions that will take effect in the years to come. As a result, it is imperative that you

# PayForIt.net

... loved by parents ...

### Registrations

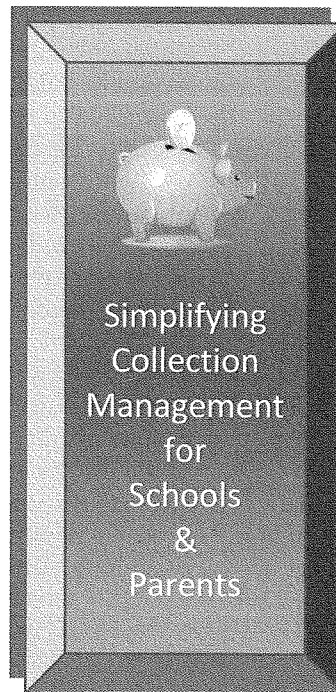
- Fees
- Activities
- After School Programs

### Fees

- Tuition
- Book Fees
- Class Fees
- Etc.

### Activities

- Swim Classes
- Prom Tickets
- Etc.



### Lunch Service

- Student Accounts
- Auto Replenishment
- Adult Menus

### After School Programs

- Tutoring
- Child Care
- Etc.

### Fundraisers

- Flowers
- PTO Donations
- Etc.

... needed by schools ...

Contact: **Bob Reolfi, Esber Cash Register,**  
1-800-669-0792 or [Bohr@ecrpos.org](mailto:Bohr@ecrpos.org)

Endorsed By:



understand what the bill provides and how it changed the educational landscape of your district. A summary of the bill's provisions is available online at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/83382>.

SB 5, the collective bargaining reform bill, was signed by the governor in March. SB 5 restricts collective bargaining rights for public workers across the state. It allows unions to negotiate wages and certain working conditions, but not health care, sick time and certain other benefits. Merit raises or performance pay replaces automatic pay increases, and public workers are banned from striking under the bill. Opponents put a statewide referendum — Issue 2 — on the November ballot in an attempt to repeal the law. As of the *Journal's* press time, the results of the November election were unknown. However, if Issue 2 passes, school districts are in for significant changes to collective bargaining. To help prepare school districts for some of these changes, OSBA has created a website that provides additional information about the potential affects that Issue 2 may have on your district. Access the website at [www.ohioschoolboards.org/sb5](http://www.ohioschoolboards.org/sb5).

### Establish your library

Each district has documents that govern its day-to-day operations. These documents are the chief means by

which a school board manages the district, and include the following:

- Policies — Policies are the principles adopted by the school board to chart courses of action. A soundly constructed policy will have at least two major elements: It will tell what the board wants to happen and explain why it should happen.

- Regulations — Regulations are detailed directions usually developed by the administration to put policy into practice. They tell how, by whom, where and when things are to be done. Regulations flow from and are supported by policy.

- Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) — Collective bargaining agreements are written contracts between the district and its unionized employees. Typically, CBAs identify and define conditions of employment (wages, working hours and conditions, overtime payments, holidays, benefits, etc.) and procedures for dispute resolution.

- Student and staff codes of conduct — Many districts adopt codes of student and staff conduct to inform their students, staff and parents of the district's expectations about behavior and conduct.

Your district may have adopted other documents that also govern the affairs of the district or its employees.

Collectively, these documents are probably hundreds to thousands of pages long. Are you expected to

memorize the documents and be able to cite them verbatim? Of course not.

However, you should know that the documents exist and be able to reference relevant provisions throughout the course of your term. My suggestion would be to keep all of the documents in one place, familiarize yourself with the table of contents of each document so you know generally what each of them includes and read provisions as they become relevant to your board. For example, if one of the items on the March agenda is to discuss an employee discipline issue, it would be beneficial for you to read any policies or regulations that discuss the district's expectations and obligations in such a matter.

So that's it! Those are my top seven suggestions for what you can do now to ensure a more successful transition onto the board in January.

Congratulations once again. Please remember that OSBA is *your* association and we are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to assist you in your new role. If you ever need help or can think of something that we might be able to do to make your job easier, please let us know. □

*"According to law" is designed to provide authoritative general information, sometimes with commentary. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If legal advice is required, the services of an attorney should be obtained.*



The advertisement features a dark background with the text "fes.com" in a large, white, sans-serif font at the top. Below the text, there is a stack of three books, an apple, and a pencil. In the bottom right corner of the image area, the "FirstEnergy Solutions" logo is displayed, with "FirstEnergy" in a bold, italicized font and "Solutions" in a smaller, plain font below it.

## We Majored in Savings.

We have helped Ohio schools save millions of dollars on their electricity costs. And we can help your school too. It's never too late to get an education.

fes.com or 1-888-254-4769

**FirstEnergy**  
Solutions