

A Blueprint for Better School Board Operating Procedures

Prepared for

Arlington Central School District

144 Todd Hill Road

Lagrangeville, NY 12540

Revised-July 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Team Communication

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Adding an item to a board meeting agenda | 4 |
| 2. Communicating with each other between board meetings and/or using email | 5 |
| 3. Visiting schools as a board member | 6 |
| 4. Responding to community or employee complaints | 7 |
| 5. Communicating with the media..... | 8 |
| 6. Communicating with the school attorney | 9 &10 |

Board Meetings

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 7. Preparing for meetings | 11 |
| 8. Requesting information about an agenda item..... | 12 |
| 9. Managing public comment sessions | 13 |
| 10. Participating in discussion, debate and voting | 14 |
| 11. Disclosing confidential information related to an executive session | 15 |
| 12. Electing board officers | 16 |
| 13. Selecting and operating board committees..... | 17,18 |

Team Development

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 14. Orienting new members | 19, 20 |
| 15. Planning professional development for the board | 21,22 |
| 16. Conducting a board self-evaluation | 23 |
| 17. Expressing opinions about another board member's performance or behavior..... | 24 |

Planning

- 18. Requesting information about a non-agenda item 25
- 19. Establishing and reviewing the district’s vision, mission and annual goals..... 26
- 20. Developing a process for adopting the district budget..... 27, 28
- 21. Developing and/or reviewing district policy 29, 30
- 22. Creating an activity calendar 31

Personnel

- 23. Evaluating the superintendent 32, 33, 34
- 24. Communicating opinions about the superintendent’s performance
(apart from formal evaluation process) 35
- 25. Hiring personnel other than the superintendent. 36

1. ADDING AGENDA ITEMS

1. An agenda will be mutually developed by the superintendent and board president¹ in sufficient time to allow the full board to receive it **three days**² prior to the meeting for which the agenda is being prepared. The superintendent and other administrative staff members will make every reasonable effort to provide sufficient and easily understandable information to support agenda items prior to the meeting so that board members can make informed decisions. Supporting materials will be provided, along with the agenda, **three days** prior to the meeting.
2. The agenda will include previously scheduled items, new business and any items required by law.
3. In the event circumstances arise that require immediate board attention, an item may be added to an agenda after its distribution. The superintendent, in consultation with the board president, will distribute an updated agenda and appropriate supporting materials as soon as possible.
4. Board members (*at least one*) may request an item for board consideration during the future discussion items portion of the agenda. That item will then be placed into the new business section of the following meeting's agenda (*or as soon as practical as determined by the Superintendent and/or Board President*) for discussion. The board will vote to discuss the agenda or dismiss it during the meeting it is placed on the agenda. If the majority rejects the item, discussion ends. If approved for discussion, the board may take any further action it desires that is the will of the board.
5. Use of a consent agenda⁵ to present items for a single vote without discussion will conform to the following guidelines:
 - a. Placement of items on the consent agenda will be at the discretion of the board president and superintendent
 - b. Any individual board member may ask questions or discuss an item on the consent agenda by asking the president to remove it from the consent agenda for individual consideration.
 - c. Following action on the consent agenda, the president will allow discussion on any item requested for removal from the agenda by a board member.
 - d. Examples of items on a consent agenda may include:⁶
 - i. Routine items, including certain personnel actions.
 - ii. Minutes of regular and special board meetings.
 - iii. Acceptance of financial reports.
 - iv. Routine bid recommendations in alignment with district policy.
 - v. Requests for use of facilities.
6. Supporting materials and records/information that will be discussed at the board meeting will be released to the public two days prior to the board meeting in compliance with the Open Meetings Law, except for those documents made confidential by law or not subject to release by law.
7. A running list of future board of education agenda items will be maintained by the district clerk and reviewed by the superintendent and board president when creating the agenda for a meeting. The board secretary will keep a record of items discussed & their disposition/status.

Related Policies:

2. COMMUNICATING BETWEEN BOARD MEETINGS

1. The superintendent will communicate with the Board through **weekly** Friday Reports that may include information such as:
 - a. Schedule of, or report on, district events.
 - b. Progress reports on board goals, policy initiatives and strategic directives.
 - c. Follow-up reports prepared in response to questions of the board.
 - d. Updates on significant administrative or operational matters & quarterly reports from cabinet members.
 - e. Meeting agenda and supporting materials, when applicable.
 - f. Safety & Health issues
 - g. OTHER
2. The superintendent will meet or communicate with the board president and vice-president **as needed** regarding issues that may need to come before the board for information or action. The president or vice-president will then email the board with a summary of that meeting.
3. The board president may direct the superintendent to distribute relevant, available documents to each board member for information. Such additional materials will be included in the **weekly** board information packet, unless extraordinary circumstances dictate an alternative delivery.
4. Board members may communicate directly or electronically with each other to ask questions, exchange knowledge or expertise, and gather clarifying information to enable greater participation and meaningful discussion at board meetings. Board members are also not precluded from socializing with each other. However, communications must not conflict with or circumvent the Open Meetings Law or give the appearance of impropriety. Questions about an agenda item should be directed to the Superintendent with a cc to the Board President. The Superintendent will send answers to emails from parents / community members to the entire board.
5. Consistent with the provisions of the Open Meetings Law, board members may not communicate with each other to secure or influence votes in support of, or opposition to, items of business that may come before the board. This would include the use of email, text messages or social media to secure votes or influence fellow board members.
6. The preferred method for board members who wish to share information relevant to district business or issues scheduled to come before the board is to relay the information to the board president for placement on a future agenda or to the superintendent for distribution to all members in the weekly board information packets. Board members are not precluded from sending relevant information directly to each other but should also provide the superintendent and the full board with this information. Board members must refrain from encouraging electronic or other discussion about such information in a manner that would violate the Open Meetings Law. Questions about school issues are first sent to the Superintendent. They may then refer you to the appropriate district employee for clarification. The answer should be then sent or copied (if asked in an email) to the entire board.

Related Policies

3. VISITING SCHOOLS

- 1.** Board members are encouraged to attend as many school events as their time permits. Board members are required to follow the board policy for visitors.
- 2.** When attending scheduled events within a building, board members should announce their presence to the principal in advance. The principal should take the opportunity to introduce the board member to those in attendance.
- 3.** When board members, in their official capacity, plan to visit any school building or athletic field, at times other than special events, they are required to notify the superintendent of their intentions prior to arrival. Board members that attend functions for their children are allowed to do so without notification.
- 4.** Board members may interact with any staff member or student in the same manner as any other visitor. The member will make every effort to manage interactions so they do not disrupt the learning process.
- 5.** Board members may go into teachers' classrooms or individual buildings to observe with Superintendent's coordination. They may not evaluate the teacher's performance. Teacher evaluation is an administrative responsibility.
- 6.** Board members may not give any directive to any district employees or students.
- 7.** When visiting with teachers, administrators, coaches, advisors or guidance counselors of their own children, board members will make it clear that they are acting as parents rather than as board members.
- 8.** Board members will not request or accept favors from any district employee that could lead to the perception (or reality) that the district's code of ethics has been violated.

4. RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS

1. A board member who is approached with a complaint outside of a board meeting is expected to listen respectfully. Remind the complainant of the board's responsibility to remain impartial and noncommittal because complaints may ultimately be brought to the board on appeal.
2. Complainants who desire a particular action to be taken should be referred to the appropriate board policy and informed of the steps listed in policy which are necessary to protect everyone's rights while following an orderly process.
4. Board members will ask if the complainant has followed the chain of command outlined in district policy.
5. If the complainant does not know the district's chain of command, the board member will provide the following information:
 - a. The complainant should first discuss the problem with the person in authority closest to the problem.
 - b. If not satisfied with the resolution of the problem, the complainant should go to the administrative supervisor of the person noted in "a."
 - c. The administrative supervisor will help the complainant initiate any correspondence or forms required by policy and attempt to resolve the complaint.
 - d. If still not satisfied, the complainant may appeal to the superintendent or designee for resolution.
 - e. If the complainant disagrees with the superintendent's decision, the formal complaint may be brought to the board in accordance with the applicable policy.
6. Board members should remind the complainant that they can get back in touch with the district if they have further questions about the process.
7. Board members will inform the superintendent of all complaints from staff and community but will not direct the superintendent to take specific actions. Board members may ask the superintendent for clarification of existing policies relevant to the complaint to determine if the policies are adequate and appropriate.
8. The superintendent shall inform the board of the resolution of complaints referred by board members if the complaint requires superintendent intervention.
9. The Superintendent & the Board President shall copy the board on any correspondence made initially to the entire board.
10. The board President shall respond to emails on behalf of the BOE.

5. COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

1. The board president or designee will serve as the board spokesperson to the media on issues regarding board actions.
2. The superintendent, or in superintendent's absence, a specified designee¹, shall be the official district spokesperson to the media on district administrative matters.
3. In the event of an emergency or special circumstance, such as litigation, the board may designate another spokesperson, such as the school attorney.
4. Any board member receiving a call from the media requesting information, comments or an interview regarding board actions or administrative matters will direct the media representative to the superintendent or to the board president, as applicable.
5. When speaking to a media representative, the board member will remind media representatives of the official position or action already taken on the issue by the board of education and refer them to the spokesperson for further information.
6. If a board member wishes to speak to a media representative, but the board member is not the designated spokesperson, the board member is expected to clarify at the beginning of the interview that they are speaking as individuals rather than as authorized representative of the board of education.²
7. When speaking as an individual and expressing an opinion on a matter that will be coming before the board, board members retain their right to free expression, but will also be mindful of the importance of communicating that they remain open to discussion and new information at the board table.
8. Board members are also free to participate in social media; however, it is essential that board members take care not to reveal confidential information or to appear to be speaking on behalf of the full board. Before posting on a social media site, board members should consider the impact of their posts on the school community and fellow board members and the permanence of social media posts.

Related Policies:

¹ The board may want to have the designee's title identified in this document (e.g., the district communications director).

² The Commissioner of Education has held that when expressing opinions to the media on matters to be decided by district voters (e.g., the annual budget or propositions), board members **must** distinguish their personal views from those of the board as a whole (Appeal of Wallace, 46 Ed Dept Rep 347 (2007); Appeal of Johnson, 45 Ed Dept Rep 469 (2006)).

6. COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL ATTORNEY

NOTE: The following specifies that the board president and superintendent are authorized to contact the school attorney on legal matters. Boards of education may have different policies and methods. The retainer agreement may include provisions regarding authorization to contact the attorney and this protocol should be consistent with that approach. The protocol below is based on the assumption that the school attorney is NOT a district employee.

1. The purpose of this procedure is to provide requested legal information to board members while avoiding duplication of efforts, controlling costs associated with legal counsel and ensuring that all board members are equally well-informed.
2. The selection of the school attorney should follow the district's policy for contracting for professional services. A retainer agreement will define the terms of the services provided and specify who is authorized to contact the school attorney.
3. The board of education shall appoint the school attorney at the annual organizational meeting. This appointment is for purposes of establishing the public record; it may or may not correspond to the dates of the retainer agreement that governs the relationship with the school attorney.
4. The school attorney will be consulted regarding activities such as: contracts, employee discipline, litigation, review of policies, and other matters that would benefit from legal guidance consistent with the terms of the retainer agreement. Contact with the school attorney will be initiated by the superintendent or the board president.
5. If a member of the board of education, other than the board president, has a question or concern that warrants the input of the school attorney, the following steps shall be taken:
 - a. Contact the superintendent and/or board president. The superintendent and/or board president may:
 - i. Forward the question to the school attorney and inform the entire board of the question and any subsequent response.
 - ii. Determine if the question is truly a legal inquiry or if it can be handled by district staff, consulting with NYSSBA or another professional association. Forward the question and subsequent response to the entire board.
 - iii. Decline to follow up on the issue and notify the board member that raised the question or concern.
 - b. If the superintendent and/or the board president declines to follow up on an issue, the board member, depending on the nature of the matter, may raise it with the full board. This can be in public, or if confidential in executive session. The board member may also request that the school attorney be contacted.

The board as a whole can then determine if the school attorney should be contacted. If the board agrees, then the board president or superintendent initiates the inquiry and all information provided by the school attorney is shared with the entire board. If the board determines the question does not warrant the time and expense of contacting the school attorney, the board member is not authorized to contact the school attorney.

- c. If the issue raised by a board member implicates the superintendent, the board member shall contact the board president to share their concerns. In the absence of the president, or if the issue involves the president, then the vice president is authorized to contact the school attorney if they deem it appropriate.

Related Policies:

7. PREPARING FOR MEETINGS

1. The district clerk and administrative staff will ensure that appropriate supporting information required for informed decision-making is supplied to each board member in the board meeting agenda packet.
2. Agenda packets will be distributed to board members at least **three** business days prior to scheduled board meetings.¹ Agendas and supporting material may also be made available electronically if using a paperless process.
3. All participants are expected to be prepared to address relevant agenda items.
 - a. Board members are expected to read and be familiar with agenda packet materials **BEFORE** each board meeting.
 - b. Board members who have questions will be expected to ask agenda item-related questions of the superintendent at least **ONE DAY** prior to scheduled board meetings², as described in “Requesting information about an agenda item,” found on page 12.
 - c. Board members are not precluded from asking relevant questions about agenda items during board meetings. **However, the right to ask questions should not serve as an excuse for not being prepared.**

Related Policies:

8. REQUESTING INFORMATION ABOUT AGENDA ITEMS

1. In order to be prepared and productively participate in board meetings, members are encouraged to ask for information related to meeting agenda items prior to the scheduled meeting. Requests for information or questions about any agenda item should be made at least **ONE DAY**¹ prior to the scheduled meeting or with sufficient time to allow for preparation of a response.
2. Any questions about agenda items or requests for additional information will be directed to the **superintendent**², the question and response will be copied to all the members of the board.
3. If a written report is provided in response to the request, all board members will receive a copy of both the request and the report prior to the opening of the meeting, if the request is deemed appropriate and the time frame in which the request is made permits such a response to be completed.
4. Board members maintain the right to ask questions at the board table **after being properly recognized by the chair**, board members may discuss the provided information or ask additional questions as they arise during the meeting..

Related Policies:

¹This time frame may be modified.

²The superintendent determines and directs board inquires to the appropriate staff member.

9. MANAGING PUBLIC COMMENT SESSIONS

NOTE: Although a public comment period is not legally required, the Commissioner of Education encourages school boards to allow citizens to speak on matters under consideration whenever possible. Before reviewing this procedure, the board should review its own policy manual to determine whether this subject matter is covered. In addition, since the Commissioner of Education and the Committee on Open Government differ in their respective opinions on the question of whether nonresidents must be afforded the opportunity to speak, it is best for boards to consult with their school attorneys. Please note that Committee on Open Government opinions are advisory, while the commissioner's opinions are legally binding.¹

1. Persons wishing to address the board during open public comment will comply with the provisions of board policy that outlines the specific times and procedures applicable to public comments during board meetings.
2. A copy of the board's policy or public comment procedures should be available for public review at the meeting site. The board president will explain the rules for public participation prior to each session.
3. During the public comment section(s) of the meeting, board members will listen to comments, but only the president, as the designated spokesperson, may respond if a response is necessary. The board president should always notify the community member of the proper follow up process, if necessary. If a response is indicated, it should be limited to:
 - a. Correcting misstatements of fact presented by the speaker.
 - b. Referring the speaker to applicable board policy and/or appropriate school official which relates to their comments.
 - c. Considering the item for a future board agenda item for discussion, if the board agrees.
5. Members of the public will be cautioned that personnel matters and individual student matters are not proper subjects for public comment. If the speaker's comments reflect a complaint about personnel, the president will prohibit the speaker from continuing and refer them to the appropriate channels to register a complaint.
6. The board must bear in mind that generally, persons who speak during public comment have First Amendment rights, though these rights can be impacted based upon the subject matter of the speech. In addition, boards have the legal responsibility to ensure that individuals do not engage in discussions pertaining to matters made confidential under provisions of state or federal law. The board should not disallow a speaker's contribution to public comment based solely on the viewpoint expressed.
7. The Board President or Vice-President has the right to end comments made by individuals who are not adhering to the decorum standards established by the board. This includes the use of obscene language, libelous statements, and statements advocating prejudice. The board president may briefly recess a meeting due to excessive disruption during a public comment session.

Related Policies:

¹The commissioner has ruled that a school board need not permit nonresidents to speak at public board meetings, even where the board has a policy of permitting residents to speak. (Matter of Martin, 32 Ed Dept Rep 381 (1992)).

10. PARTICIPATING IN DISCUSSION & VOTING

1. The board shall generally observe the parliamentary procedures in Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised [**or other parliamentary authority**], using it as a guideline in the conduct of the meeting, unless it conflicts with state law.
2. A copy of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* [**or other parliamentary authority**] must be available to the board president at every meeting.
3. Board Members wishing to speak during the board meeting must first be recognized by the board president.
4. Generally, board members shall make comments solely on the business currently under deliberation.
5. The board president shall:
 - a. Allow each board member to speak on each issue being considered for **three minutes**¹
 - b. Allow opposing viewpoints to be heard in turn.
 - c. Ensure that before a member is allowed to speak to an issue for a second time (for no more than three minutes), each member who has not spoken is provided an opportunity.
 - d. Ensure that discussion pertains to the current agenda item being addressed and halt discussion that does not apply to the business at hand.
 - e. Generally, halt discussion on issues raised that are not on the agenda. The president will ask if the issue should be placed on a future agenda for discussion and, if so, direct the district clerk to make a note to do so.
 - f. Have the same right as any board member to make motions and vote. The president will first provide an opportunity for other board members to make a motion before offering their own motion.
6. Voting will be by show of hands, roll call or voice.
7. Generally, each board member will exercise their right and obligation as an elected official to participate in deliberations and vote on each item brought before the board unless a conflict of interest exists ³
8. Board members will bear in mind that it is not helpful to repeat points that have already been made. Reasonable effort will be made to balance the need to express one's opinion with the goal of conducting an efficient and effective public meeting.
9. Board members maintain the right to ask questions at the board table **after being properly recognized by the Presiding Individual**, board members may discuss the provided information or ask additional questions as they arise during the meeting..

Related Policies:

¹ Some boards find it useful to set a time limit, others do not impose any limitations.

² If there aren't opposing views or if the board doesn't find this beneficial, this guideline need not be included.

³After notifying fellow board members of the conflict of interest, the member must recuse themselves from deliberations and voting

11. DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

1. Board members must not disclose confidential information that is either:
 - a. Provided in a confidential memorandum.
 - b. Discussed with the school attorney.
 - c. Properly discussed in an executive session.
2. Members may confirm that the board discussed a particular topic during an executive session if that topic was listed on the agenda and the presiding officer announced the board would discuss it in executive session as allowed by law.
3. In explaining a board member's inability to answer questions, members may state that the board is restricted by both law and its Code of Ethics from disclosing information relating to:
 - a. Medical situations.
 - b. Student records.
 - c. Personally identifiable data.
 - d. Personnel-related issues, including specific staff member evaluations and discipline.
 - e. Investigations.
 - f. Preparation, grading, or administration of exams.
 - g. Proposed, pending, or current litigation.
 - h. Collective bargaining negotiations.
 - i. Real estate transactions where publicity would affect the value.
4. Members should be familiar with the requirements of the Open Meetings Law so that they can explain to constituents the limitations on information that can appropriately be shared.
5. Members should be aware that public disclosure of information shared at a meeting with the school attorney may result in violating attorney-client privilege and open the board to liability. Disclosure of information from executive session may be grounds for removal.

Related Policies:

12. ELECTING BOARD OFFICERS

1. Generally, election of officers will be held at the annual organizational meeting.
2. Board members are encouraged to announce their interest in holding office prior to the meeting. The board may ask that candidates offer a public statement at the meeting in support of their nomination.
3. The board will elect a president and vice president in accordance with board policy.
4. Generally, members nominated for office are encouraged to have served at least one year on the board.¹
5. Elections will be conducted in accordance with the parliamentary procedures in place, most commonly, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.
 - a. Any board member may make a nomination.
 - b. Nominations will not be closed until all who wish to make a nomination have done so.
 - c. More than one person may be nominated for a given office.
6. Board members must avoid informally gathering a quorum of members to discuss member qualifications in preparation for the election of officers, as it is a violation of the Open Meetings Law.
7. The vote for officers must occur in open session; no vote will be taken by secret ballot.

Related Policies: ¹

This is not a legal requirement. However, the board may encourage board members to gain experience prior to serving as officers. The intent is not to have the inexperienced members in leadership positions until they have experienced at least one yearly cycle of events as a board member.

13. SELECTING & OPERATING BOARD COMMITTEES

NOTE: This procedure is not intended to address committees required by law which may have their own legal or regulatory procedures associated with their membership and duties.

1. The Board President may establish a committee any time an issue arises that requires more time and attention than the board feels can be provided during the course of a board meeting. They are established in response to a successful motion to refer the issue to a committee.
2. When appointing the committee, the board president provides the following guidance to the committee and ensures it is recorded in the meeting minutes. They will:
 - a. Designate the committee as either a standing or special (ad hoc) committee. Standing committees are ongoing and special committees dissolve upon completion of their appointed task.
 - b. Designate a committee chairperson and specify the committee membership.
 - c. Define the committee's fact-finding, deliberative, or advisory role and outline the outcome of the committee.
 - d. Provide a general timeline for the committee's work and for reporting to the board.
3. The board votes to approve the purpose and composition of the committee. At the discretion of the board, the membership of the committee may be comprised of board members only, board members and others (staff and/or community members), or only others (without board representation). Every effort shall be made to get a balanced representation of persons for the intended purpose of the committee.
4. The superintendent will provide appropriate staff and/or data support to permit the effective functioning of the committee.
5. The committee chair will extend an invitation by letter or phone to those members of the community whose service is desired.
6. Committee meetings will be conducted in the following manner:
 - a. The committee chair, with the assistance of assigned district staff, is responsible for setting a meeting time, preparing the agenda, arranging for a meeting site with necessary equipment, and notifying all members of the time and place for the meeting.
 - b. Committee meetings will be conducted in compliance with the Open Meetings Law and open to the public, if applicable.¹
 - c. Meetings will generally be conducted in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (§49, Procedures for Small Boards), using it as a guideline for the meeting.
 - d. An agenda listing the time, location, and specific subjects to be discussed will be prepared for each meeting. If applicable, the agenda and applicable supporting materials that must be made public shall be posted at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in the same location that the district board meeting agendas are posted.
 - e. The committee chair will coordinate with the superintendent to obtain district information required to complete the committee's task. The chair may designate committee members to obtain information that the committee needs to complete its job.

- f. The chair will notify the board president when committee recommendations or reports are ready and arrange to deliver a final report in the format and time determined when the committee was formed.
 - g. The board receives the report and may ask clarifying questions, but no motion to accept or approve the report is required. A record should be kept by a committee member.
 - h. If the report contains committee recommendations, the board will discuss and take action to accept any or all of the recommendations.
7. Members of standing committees will be appointed annually by the Board President at the organizational meeting or as soon as possible. The Board President will then provide each board member

a. List of Committees

b. Chair & members of each committee

c, The purpose & function of each committee

Related Policies:

14. ORIENTATION FOR NEW MEMBERS

1. New board members are legally required to fulfill the state mandated training within the first year of holding office, as well as the option to participate in other training opportunities to enhance boardsmanship.
2. New board member orientation at the local district should begin shortly after the date a new board member is elected.
3. The superintendent, the board president, and/or at least one incumbent board member participates in the orientation.¹ Additional administrative staff members may also be included to present specific information about the district.
4. Local orientation includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. General district information, such as:²
 - Geographic area included and number of square miles.
 - Campus attendance boundaries.
 - Number of students, teachers, and other employees.
 - Number of campuses and their enrollments.
 - Student demographics, including trend data.
 - Administrative structure and directory of key personnel.
 - Ongoing issues of interest to residents.
 - Organizational chart.
 - b. Overview of district programs and operations, such as:
 - District vision, mission, goals, and plans including:
 - i. District planning and evaluation process and board activity calendar.³
 - ii. Most recent school reports, report cards, and district annual financial report.
 - District budget overview including:
 - i. Current adopted budget summary.
 - ii. Recent trends in revenue, appropriations, tax rates, property values.
 - Overview of district curriculum objectives, standards, and instructional programs.
 - Copy of the policy manual or link to online access.
 - Superintendent performance goals, current superintendent evaluation instrument, process, and calendar.
 - Copy of district's strategic plan.³
 - c. Information about board operations, including:
 - Overview of roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent.
 - Calendar of training opportunities.
 - Current board goals.
 - Calendar of district events.
 - Current team operating procedures, meeting norms and ground rules.³

5. The board president will meet with new members to explain a typical board meeting and the board packet.
6. Newly elected board members will be supported throughout the first year of service with ongoing professional development and may include mentoring by a veteran board member.

Related Policies:

-
- ¹ The board may choose to have a mentor program for new board members. If so, this can be included here.
 - ² The team may wish to reduce or expand this list.
 - ³ Include if applicable.

15. PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. On an annual basis, the board assesses its current professional development needs and considers the following, in the context of budget constraints:
 - a. How will mandated training requirements for new board members be met?
 - b. What kind of professional development activity or subjects are most beneficial to the board or board-superintendent team? Professional development opportunities can be scheduled either as team activities or for individual members.
 - c. When should professional development activities and workshops be scheduled?
 - d. What is the best source or location for the training?
 - e. Who will be responsible for scheduling the professional development activities and workshops or making travel arrangements if the workshops are not local?
2. The board may choose to send members to a training with the expectation that the information gathered will be shared with the full team after attending the session. Those opportunities should be rotated to different board members in subsequent years unless there are no board members wishing to participate.
3. Based upon the board's identified needs, the administration develops an estimate of expenses. The board ensures that resources to support board development are discussed during the budget development process and included in the annual budget.
4. Board officers ensure:
 - a. Selected professional development workshops are entered on the activity calendar by the Superintendent or district clerk. If exact dates are unknown, they will be added to the calendar as soon as dates are confirmed.
 - b. A list of all team and individual professional development activities for the year is compiled and furnished to each board member and filed for future reference. This list constitutes the board's professional development plan for the year.
5. As the year progresses, the superintendent advises the board regarding the availability of funds for board training being considered and provide supporting information the board needs to decide whether to continue as planned.
6. Members are encouraged to attend training opportunities provided by the New York State School Boards Association and other entities. Training events located outside the state may be considered and included in the final budget only if more cost-effective training events are unavailable.
7. Members planning to attend continuing education events reflected in the budget should contact the board clerk to make arrangements. Expenditures for those training sessions that fall within the approved budget will be authorized by the board via the consent agenda.
8. The district pays reasonable and necessary expenses, in accordance with board policy, for mileage, commercial transportation, parking, lodging, meals, tuition, and other incidental expenses, but will not reimburse for items prohibited in the policy. Reimbursement of reasonable expenses occurs when attendance is authorized either as part of the budget approval process or as an unplanned exception to meet a specific training need that was recognized after budget approval.

9. Members requesting to attend continuing education events not reflected in the budget need to:
 - a. Seek prior approval from the board before registering for the event. The administration prepares an estimate of funds required to support the action item, and the board discusses and votes whether to provide additional funds to support the request.
 - b. Contact the district clerk to make arrangements once an unplanned event has been approved.
10. Expense reports, along with receipts, shall be submitted in a timely manner in accordance with district policy.
11. Board members are expected to be in attendance at training events for which they are registered, barring a family emergency. If an emergency occurs, or if a board member becomes aware that they have a conflict, every effort should be made to find a replacement to attend the session.
12. The board is the final authority for resolving any dispute regarding expenses related to professional development.

Related Policies:

16. CONDUCTING SELF-EVALUATIONS

1. The board¹ should conduct an annual evaluation in the month of June of its own performance in governing, overseeing district management, and conducting its business.
2. The board may use criteria contained in existing instruments or develop a local instrument to support the self-assessment process.² The instrument should be agreed upon on an annual basis. If there is no agreement. The NYSSBA instrument should be used.
3. The board president or designee facilitates the distribution of the selected instrument, with instructions, to each board member a week in advance of a workshop/retreat³ scheduled for a board self-assessment. Board members complete the instrument in accordance with the instructions and either bring it to the workshop or send it to an identified point of contact for scoring prior to the workshop.
4. Depending on the results of the survey, the board considers whether it would be advantageous to have the workshop/retreat facilitated by a consultant. The process of conducting a board self-assessment and discussing the path forward can be an opportunity for professional growth and fostering positive relations. If the board discovers it is struggling, it is wise to consider assistance from experts, such as staff from NYSSBA, BOCES, the school attorney or other resources.
5. During the workshop, the board focuses its discussion on those items in the instrument where responses indicate either a comparatively weak performance or there is disagreement about the board's current performance. The intent of the discussion is to identify areas requiring additional attention to improve board performance.
6. Based upon the results of the self-assessment workshop, the board may identify goals for improvement. The board should schedule a review of progress toward self-improvement goals **every six months** as part of a regularly scheduled meeting or workshop. The dates for the reviews are entered in the board activity calendar by the Board President or designee.

Related Policies:

- ¹ Although not required by law, successful boards engage in ongoing self assessment. The board may decide the self-assessment process will include the Superintendent. In that event, "team" should replace the term "board" in paragraphs 1-6.
- ² NYSSBA has sample self-evaluation instruments available on our website.
- ³ A board self-assessment can be discussed in private, such as during a retreat, as long as the topic relates to developing or improving team building or communication skills or discussing the manner in which the board of education interacts. Professional development, such as training or gaining education, is also permissible in a retreat. If a board self-assessment includes analysis or discussion of board or district goals, then the meeting would need to be in public as it concerns public business.

17. EXPRESSING OPINIONS ABOUT BOARD MEMBER PERFORMANCE

1. A board member who has an issue with a colleague's performance is encouraged to express those concerns directly to that individual. (If the matter relates to harassment or criminal activity, then the member should not attempt this.¹)
2. If addressing the issue directly with the member does not resolve the concern, then discussion with the board president is appropriate. If the concern involves the board president, a member may discuss the issue with the board vice president. During such discussions:
 - a. The board president shall discuss the concern with the individual in question on behalf of the reporting board member or shall moderate a discussion between the members.
 - b. If appropriate, the president shall remind the board member whose behavior is in question about the adopted code of ethics and the district's code of conduct and discuss how the questionable behavior does not comply with the codes. The discussion may also identify more appropriate alternatives to the questionable behavior or refer the board member to policies or procedures that outline approved ways to deal with the issue that prompted the questionable behavior.
 - c. If the board member in question does not believe their behavior is in conflict with the board's code of ethics, an item may be placed on the agenda to discuss the parameters of acceptable board behavior for an upcoming board meeting.
 - d. The board president may believe that the nature of the issue would best be addressed by scheduling a retreat for the entire board. The board as a whole would reach a consensus on the scheduling of a retreat.
3. Members should not take concerns about fellow board members to the superintendent for purposes of attempting to resolve disputes.
4. In order to preserve the integrity and credibility of the school district as a whole, members shall not speak negatively (for example, personal attacks or character assassination) about another member, superintendent, or staff in the community.
5. If the issue affects the member's ability to serve, the board may consult with the schools attorney to determine if removal proceedings should be considered.

Related Policies:

18. REQUESTING INFORMATION FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS

1. Board members do not have greater rights to access information unrelated to matters before the board than the general public.
2. Members should request information not related to a meeting agenda item directly from the superintendent.¹
3. The superintendent determines if the information requested is available from existing sources or records or if it requires that a special, one-time only report be developed.
4. If the requested information can be provided from readily available data with no diversion of staff time, then it will be provided as soon as reasonably possible.
5. In the event the request requires a special report that will divert staff time from established priorities, the superintendent will notify the requestor and the board of this fact. The board president will place the request for information on the next meeting agenda to determine if **at least four board members agree** the requested information is important for its future decision-making.
6. If the board agrees that the information is important for future decision-making, then the superintendent will direct that a report be developed and provide it as requested by the board.²
7. All team members receive a copy of any report generated by a board member's request in accordance with this procedure.

Related Policies:

¹The superintendent may allow designated subordinates to respond directly to requests for information from board members. In that case, this paragraph would be modified to reflect "...superintendent or a designated representative." The superintendent also may decide to delegate this authority to a specific position such as the board secretary (or clerk).

² If the board doesn't agree that the information merits a special report, the board member can still initiate a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request. While NYSSBA doesn't recommend this, it is important to note that the option is available.

19. ESTABLISHING VISION, MISSION, GOALS

- 1.** Recognizing that a vision and/or mission statement and district goals are powerful governance tools, the **board reviews the mission and vision statement every three (3) years** and either affirms its continued value, or changes it to reflect a new direction. In either case, to accomplish this, the board periodically engages the community, including staff, parents, and district residents, in this process.
- 2.** The superintendent proposes for board approval a method by which input from the community will be gathered.
- 3.** Based on an agreed upon process, the board sets new or continuing district goals annually by September and receives an action plan by the superintendent shortly thereafter.
- 4.** The board and superintendent agree on a progress review schedule regarding milestones of achievement of the annual goals throughout the year, with no less than a mid-year check-in in January.
- 5.** The board reviews the status of progress made toward the annual goals at its final meeting before July 1st.

Related Policies:

20. DEVELOPING A BUDGET PROCESS

- 1. To meet the board's statutory obligation to propose a budget in a timely fashion, the board's involvement in developing and adopting the budget begins in October when the board meets with administration to review the district's goals for the coming year. At this time, the board invites the community to offer comment on the current budget at a regular meeting of the board. The board will offer general parameters (e.g., fiscal constraints, academic priorities, district goals) to the administration to guide budget development for the next school year.**
- 2. In February, the board, superintendent, and staff meet to discuss and agree on budget assumptions for the coming year. The administration will, given current information, prepare a report on the estimated impact of the tax cap, assuming such information is available from the state.**
- 3. At this time, given public input and information about current fiscal conditions, the board also establishes relative funding priorities to guide further budget development, balancing earlier adopted district goals and any critical needs identified but not addressed in the district goals.**
- 4. The board will also have discussions with administrative staff in areas such as the following:**
 - a. Fund balance.**
 - b. State aid projections.**
 - c. Tax Levy Amount.**
 - d. Other local revenue.**
 - e. Staffing ratios.**
 - f. Specific budget categories such as salaries and benefits or other operating expenses.**
 - g. Tax cap implications, including consideration of exceeding the cap.**
- 5. These discussions will shape the priorities and targets used by the superintendent and staff in developing district performance objectives, improvement plans, and the draft budget. The board ensures that the budget aligns with district goals.**
- 6. We seek ongoing input from our community at board meetings via public comment, and via email, phone calls and district communications on the budget.**
- 7. During the budget development process, the board reviews periodic updates from the superintendent and administrative team including information such as the following:**
 - a. Fiscal impact of district plans on the proposed budget, including proposals for major additions or deletions of programs.**
 - b. Board-requested comparison or trend studies of various budget categories such as salaries, capital outlay, or other major spending categories.**
 - c. Estimated Tax levies.**
 - d. Student enrollment updates and/or trends.**
 - e. State aid estimates**
 - f. New federal or state requirements that impact the budget.**
 - g. Other changes that occur following the establishment of funding priorities and targets that may affect budget assumptions.**

20. DEVELOPING A BUDGET PROCESS

8. The complete proposed budget package is presented to the board sometime in March and at a minimum, includes the following components:
 - a. A budget overview that provides a summary of revenue and expenditures by major object code for the previous three years, current year and upcoming year's student enrollment.
 - b. An education plan that includes adopted district goals and a summary of major changes to instructional programs, staffing, and education support programs.
 - c. An expenditure plan that includes a list of the board's previously agreed upon funding priorities, a brief narrative summary of funds included to support specific goals and priorities.
 - d. Proposed expenditures by function and object code compared to the current year projected actual expenditures.
 - e. A revenue plan that includes a list of revenue from all sources compared to expenditures and reflects the expected effect on the district fund balance. The revenue plan should also address whether the proposed budget is within or exceeds the tax cap.
9. The board holds at least one workshop in March to review the proposed budget and the superintendent's estimate of the tax levy required to fund it. The board may request additional information related to the proposed budget and make adjustments to balance estimated revenue and expenditures according to funding priorities. The board may also schedule additional meetings as needed to review changes requested by staff or other members of the school community.
10. The board conducts a meeting in April to hear public comment on the proposed budget, in accordance with law.
11. The board shall adopt the budget in a timely manner which allows the district to comply with state law regarding the property tax report card and publication of budget notices.
12. The board then directs the superintendent to publish a summary of the adopted budget and the priorities it intends to fund for distribution to the public following the adoption of the budget, in accordance with state law and regulation.

21. DEVELOPING/REVIEWING POLICY

Policy review is a continuous cyclical process that takes four forms:

1. Comprehensive, periodic review of the policy manual:¹
 - a. At least every five years and no less frequently than seven years, the superintendent enters into an agreement with ERIE Policy Services or other entity to conduct a policy review project.
 - b. The superintendent or designee provides to NYSSBA Policy Services or other entity a copy of the official district policy manual, student handbooks and other relevant policy material.
 - c. ERIE Policy Services staff or other entity conducts an extensive review of the manual and identifies discrepancies between recommendations and the district's policies. The review further identifies internal discrepancies, unresolved legal issues, and the absence of policy required by law, regulation or best practice.
 - d. The board takes appropriate action on policy recommendations arising from this review. Policy manuals are adjusted to reflect the outcome of the review and board action.

2. A program of ongoing review:
 - a. The policy committee shall review the manual each year (as needed) to determine if the policies are consistent with current board goals and reflect current district practices.
 - b. If a policy does not reflect current board goals or district practices, the board will discuss whether the policy or the goals/practice need to change so they are not in conflict.
 - c. In addition, the board will annually review those policies required by law or regulation (or by the board itself) to be reviewed annually.

3. Emergent issue: whenever unanticipated circumstances prompt board action (e.g., changes in state or federal law, receipt of a policy update from policy service provider, emerging technology, a new district initiative, unique circumstance/challenge in the district):
 - a. The issue will be placed on a board meeting agenda and board members are provided with appropriate background information by the superintendent and/or administrative team. The superintendent consults the current policy manual for any relevant policies to guide board discussion and provide those as part of the board packet.
 - b. The board evaluates the agenda item and makes a decision within the framework of the relevant policies. If the circumstances warrant an exception to the policy, the board may act accordingly. However, if the board believes changes in policy are appropriate, it may refer the issue to the policy committee or request that the superintendent take appropriate steps to develop and recommend revised policy for review.

21. DEVELOPING/REVIEWING POLICY CONTINUED...

4. Routine governance in accordance with recurring annual cycles (e.g., budget development, recruiting and hiring, adoption of district goals and objectives):
 - a. Agenda items (such as approving the budget calendar, appointing committees or setting district goals) shall reference the appropriate policies and administrative processes underpinning the superintendent's recommendations.
 - b. The board makes its decisions within the framework of these policies. Hence, if changes in either policy or administrative procedures are desired before the next cycle, the board should request that the superintendent and/or policy committee³ take appropriate steps to develop and recommend revised policy for its review.

Related Policies:

¹The district's policy service or process should be described here.

² The board could choose a different fraction of the manual, such as one-third or one-fourth. The board should balance the need to review the manual on a regular basis with the ability of the board or policy committee to realistically undertake the actions.

³ This sentence should reflect the board's process. If a policy committee is not utilized, then that reference should be removed.

22. CREATING AN ACTIVITY CALENDAR

1. Annually, in the month immediately following board reorganization, the board officers will meet with the superintendent and establish a tentative board activity calendar.
2. The purpose of the board activity calendar is to identify in one document all important board tasks and schedule them at appropriate times during the year.
3. The format of the annual board calendar is selected and may be modified by a majority of the board to best meet its needs.
4. Tasks included on the activity calendar may include, but are not limited to, the following board activities and actions:
 - a. Activities and actions required by law or policy (listed in no particular order).
 - Review of district mission statement.
 - Approval of the district goals.
 - Public meeting on district achievement after receipt of results on district report card from the State.
 - Superintendent evaluation.
 - Approval of superintendent performance goals.
 - Renewal of administrative, teaching and other staff contracts.
 - Budget workshops, budget hearing and setting of the tax rate.
 - Review of annual district audit.
 - New board member orientation.
 - Review of policies that require annual examination, including the Code of Conduct, Title I Parent and Family Engagement, Investments, hiring and Purchasing policies.
 - Review of required plans, such as the Professional Development Plan and the Professional Performance Review Plan.
 - b. Additional activities desired for effective governance and oversight, which may include:
 - Board or team self-assessment workshop.
 - District goal progress reports.
 - District-wide planning session.
 - Visits to schools
 - c. Professional development opportunities.
 - d. Board presence at school events.
5. The **Superintendent, Board President & Vice-President will** present the annual board activity calendar to the board for review and approval.
6. Dates and events entered on the annual board calendar may be modified during the year by a majority vote of the board.

23. EVALUATING THE SUPERINTENDENT

NOTE: The superintendent's contract is a critical point of reference when crafting this procedure. The procedure must be consistent with the contract. The board may wish to factor this procedure into future contracts. Any inconsistencies need to be addressed in either the contract or this procedure.

1. Although evaluation of the superintendent is an ongoing process, a formal annual evaluation is legally required. In order to fulfill this responsibility, the board president will schedule a meeting to be held in **June**¹ to conduct the evaluation of the superintendent. In accordance with state requirements, the procedures to evaluate the superintendent must be filed by September 10th of each year in the district office and made available for any member of the public to review upon request.
2. The president distributes blank evaluation instruments to each board member and the superintendent at least **two weeks**² in advance of the evaluation meeting. Instructions for completion should be included. When needed, the board president will ensure that all board members have been trained on the evaluation instrument. The instrument should be previously agreed upon by the board and superintendent.
3. The board directs the superintendent to perform a self-evaluation using the agreed upon evaluation instrument. The instructions should include:³
 - a. Summary results with documented evidence on the superintendent's performance, including annual objectives, established following the previous year's evaluation.
 - b. Summary of progress on the district's current year goals supported by documented evidence.
 - c. A report on student performance (i.e., the district report card issued by the state) if applicable to district and superintendent goals.
 - d. Additional district or professional highlights that demonstrates effective performance over the past year.
4. During May or early June the superintendent completes the self-assessment and sends it to all board members to consider when evaluating the superintendent's performance. This occurs before the formal evaluation meeting with the board.
5. Members complete the evaluation instruments and return them to the president, or board designee, at least **one week**² prior to the board's evaluation meeting.
6. The president or board designee collects completed evaluation instruments from each board member and prepares a composite summary of all board members' ratings and comments for each instrument category.
7. The composite summary of evaluations is distributed to each board member at least **three days**² prior to the evaluation meeting.

23. EVALUATING THE SUPERINTENDENT (CONTINUED)

8. Board members meet in a properly convened executive session, without the superintendent present⁴, to discuss, and with consensus, determine the ratings. During the meeting, board members identify:
 - a. Agreements on areas of strength.
 - b. Agreements on areas that need improvement.
 - c. Specific improvements the board would like to see.
9. For areas in which there is no consensus rating on a performance indicator, the board discusses reasons for their varying ratings and tries to reach consensus about what, if any, changes the board would like to see regarding that indicator for the coming year.
10. After reaching either a majority or a consensus of opinion about the superintendent's performance ratings, the board prepares a draft summary evaluation that reflects the consensus or majority rating and comments. Written comments from members of the minority will not be included in the final document. If numerical ratings are used, a mean average will reflect the input of the entire board.
11. The draft summary evaluation is shared with the superintendent prior to meeting with the board in a properly convened executive session. The superintendent should be prepared to discuss the self-evaluation and respond to and ask questions about the board's ratings.
12. The president will call a special meeting for purposes of convening an executive session. **No other items should be placed on the agenda during an evaluation meeting.** The evaluation may be placed on the agenda of a regularly scheduled meeting when there is sufficient time for discussion.
13. During the meeting in executive session, the board president⁵ asks individual members to share concerns or ratings that differ from the majority of the board. However, the president clearly distinguishes between those ratings and directives that represent a majority of the board, and those representing individual members. The superintendent is not expected to take action based on individual comments.
14. At the conclusion of the evaluation meeting, the board and superintendent discuss a draft of the superintendent's annual performance objectives for the coming year. The board asks the superintendent to refine and present final objectives and outcomes to the board within **one month**.⁶
15. At the conclusion of the meeting, the president compiles a final, summarized evaluation that reflects any changes/adjustments made based on the meeting with the superintendent. This is presented in a written **document to ALL Board Members** that includes:
 - a. A summary of the evaluation.
 - b. Areas for developing performance objectives.
16. The board and superintendent review and discuss the draft that outlines the superintendent's performance objectives and identify specific target results to review at the next evaluation.
17. The board approves the final superintendent performance objectives and updates the superintendent evaluation instrument and files it in the superintendent's personnel record.

23. EVALUATING THE SUPERINTENDENT (CONTINUED)

18. The board may take action to extend or revise the superintendent's contract following the evaluation, in accordance with the provisions of the superintendent's contract. When applicable, the board and superintendent will formulate a development plan for the superintendent to address concerns raised in the evaluation.
19. In **January or February**⁷ the board conducts an informal mid-year evaluation for the purpose of reviewing progress on superintendent performance. The board meets with the superintendent in executive session to discuss their job performance and progress toward goals.
20. Board members who have concerns about the superintendent's performance in between evaluation meetings may request that the president post an item for interim evaluation on any regular meeting agenda that allows the board to go into executive session to discuss concerns with the entire team.
21. Each board member will be provided with a copy of the Superintendent's current contract by electronic means.

Related Policies:

- ¹ This schedule assumes that the board conducts its evaluation in June. The board may choose another month, as long as an evaluation is performed annually and in conformance with the superintendent's contract.
- ² This schedule may be modified. The board should determine the appropriate schedule.
- ³ The list of items included in the evaluation should be modified to reflect the agreement between the board and superintendent.
- ⁴ The board may choose to allow the superintendent to be present for this discussion. Check the superintendent's employment contract to see if this issue is addressed.
- ⁵ Some boards choose to designate a board officer as the spokesperson for the meeting to convey the evaluation results. If the board officers share the evaluation results, they should verbally explain the views of the minority members who are not present. Those views will be clearly identified as such but should be provided as information that may be useful to the superintendent.
- ⁶ Some boards may schedule a separate meeting to develop, through mutual discussion between the board and superintendent, the superintendent performance objectives for the following year.
- ⁷ The board may choose to modify this schedule.

24. COMMUNICATING CONCERNS REGARDING SUPERINTENDENT PERFORMANCE

1. The board-superintendent team should follow board policy and procedures concerning the evaluation of the superintendent.
2. Direction to the superintendent regarding professional performance will come from the board as a corporate body in an official meeting of the board. Individual board members have no authority to direct the superintendent.
3. Board members who have individual concerns about the superintendent's professional performance should express those concerns to the superintendent in a private setting. The purpose of this discussion is not to direct the superintendent to take any particular action, but rather to improve the communication between that individual board member and the superintendent.
4. If individual concerns continue to be an issue after private discussions, the board member will address concerns to the board president and request the issue of "superintendent performance" or "interim evaluation" be placed on the agenda for an upcoming board meeting.
5. Discussion by the board regarding the superintendent's performance and goals is held in a properly convened executive session.
6. Direction from the board to the superintendent regarding professional performance will be as specific as possible, stating the basis for concern and explaining how it isn't in conformity with the superintendent's established objectives, its adverse impact on the district or community, and the corrective actions the board desires.

Related Policies:

25. HIRING OTHER PERSONNEL

1. Hiring district staff requires joint action by the board and superintendent and is a core responsibility of the governance team. The board should annually review the process and criteria for decisions regarding the hiring of district personnel identified in board policy.¹
2. The board may establish supplemental qualifications for key positions, such as assistant superintendents and building principals. For these situations, the superintendent informs the board of the pending vacancy before the position is posted. The following steps should be taken:
 - a. The Board confers with the Superintendent on key vacancies to discuss the unique qualifications sought for the particular position.
 - b. The superintendent uses the new criteria during the search and hiring process to recommend qualified candidates for board approval.
 - c. In addition, the superintendent gives the board periodic updates regarding the search process and applicant pool.
3. In preparing hiring recommendations, the superintendent uses the board-approved criteria.
4. When the superintendent makes a recommendation for appointment, they present, for each position, the name and qualifications of the recommended candidate.²
5. The superintendent explains why they believe the recommended candidate is best qualified for the position.
6. Board members do not interview candidates for any position (other than superintendent), or select a finalist from a list.² The board's role is to set forth hiring criteria and hold the superintendent accountable for the performance of the staff.
7. The board may accept the recommendation and direct the superintendent to offer employment, or the board may reject the recommendation.
8. If the board rejects the recommendation, the board provides an explanation for its decision.
9. This process continues until the board accepts the superintendent's recommendation.

Related Policies: