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DWK's Brown Act Survival Training
Preparing for and Holding Meetings
Snap Dragon Unified School District

Scenarios and Issues for Discussion

Part 1:
Preparation for regular meeting:
"Everything was going so well until … snap"

Cast of Characters

Jade, Executive Assistant
Jules, Superintendent
Jamie, Board President

It is January 30, 2023, 4:15 pm, in the Superintendent's office at Snap Dragon Unified School District. The Superintendent's Executive Assistant, Jade, has just put the finishing touches on the agenda for the Board's upcoming regular meeting (this Thursday). Minutes later the Superintendent, Jules, completes a final look through and exclaims, "Jade, it's absolutely perfect, as always, let's get the agenda posted before 5 pm!"

Jade posts the agenda. A few minutes later, at 5:05 pm, Jules and Jade gather their things and walk out to the parking lot. Jade says, "I love Snap Dragon, everything is so calm and organized, students are all exceptional, and oh I just love each of our five board members, and our entire certificated, classified, managerial and confidential staff! Oh, and our families and volunteers! We are amazing, we are Snap Dragon USD!"

Then, Jules' cell phone rings, oh snap, it's the Board President, Jamie. "Jules, it's Jamie. We've got some problems. About 200 families are marching at the city library. They all reside in our district and they're angry about certain young adult books! Today they're marching at the city library. Tomorrow afternoon they plan on marching at our schools' libraries until Books A, B and C are pulled from the library shelves."

- Jamie wants Jules to agendize an emergency meeting for 9 am tomorrow so that the board can "get ahead of the issue." Jamie shares that some marchers were violent at the city library, and they are threatening violence tomorrow if those books are not removed!

- Jamie shares that he has spoken with two other board members and they support the emergency meeting idea, but they want to attend remotely because they're afraid.

- Jamie suggests that for safety reasons the emergency meeting should be held at the Moose Lodge, located just outside of Snapdragon's boundaries.

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Notes:

Part 2:
Board workshop scheduled before regular meeting:
"Illegal Board Meeting?"

Cast of Characters

Jamie, Board President
Jules, Superintendent
JP, Legal Counsel
Jade, Executive Assistant
Jackie, Leader of "People Against School Libraries"

After some further discussion between Jamie and Jules and a quick call to legal counsel JP, it was agreed that the Board should hold a "workshop" two hours before the regular meeting to provide the Board a focused opportunity to study the library book issue and hear from parents about their concerns with books in each high school library. Jamie thinks that by announcing a workshop on this topic, the disruption and upset of the planned march and protest can be avoided. JP has explained that a workshop can be held on only 24 hours' advance notice.

Jade gets busy preparing the agenda. She pulls up the regular meeting agenda to use as a base for the workshop agenda. She changes "Regular Meeting" to "Board Workshop" and adds the following content to the agenda:

- Superintendent Welcome
- Public Comment on Non-Agendized Items
- Presentation: "Materials Selection in High School Libraries"
- Discussion: Parent Complaint Policies for Library Materials

At 2:45pm on Wednesday, Jade posts the agenda on the bulletin board in the lobby of the District office next to the regular meeting agenda. On Thursday morning, after (finally) receiving the final Powerpoint presentation materials for Item 3 from JP, she emails the presentation to Board members and makes 30 hard copies for the table in the lobby of the Board room. At 2:00pm, Jules receives a phone call from Jackie, who identifies herself as the leader of a group called "People Against School Libraries." Jackie has heard that the Board is holding a workshop on this issue, but she has been unable to find the agenda or any supporting materials online. She demands that the meeting be cancelled and rescheduled (which would be better for Jackie because she doesn't actually live anywhere near the District and needs more time to get everyone organized to protest Snap Dragon's library policies).

Notes:

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Part 3:
At the board workshop:
Lights, camera, action/abstention

Cast of Characters

Jamie, Board President
Other Board Members
Jules, Superintendent
Jade, Executive Assistant
Jackie, Leader of "People Against School Libraries"
Jackie's talented daughter

The Board Workshop starts at 3 p.m. sharp. At 3:01 pm, Jade provides Jules with a letter that she received 30 seconds prior. The letter informs the District that the deadline is today for the Board to approve the necessary paperwork to obtain $2.3 million in grant funds for early childhood education, which could be used to purchase library materials. Failure of the Board to approve it today will result in loss of the grant funding. Jules, the Superintendent, announces receipt of the letter and the immediate deadline during his remarks. The Board quickly votes (unanimously) to add this action item to the agenda.

At the same time, Jackie's 9-year old daughter has set up sophisticated cameras and lighting to record (audio and video) the meeting. Jackie is the first speaker called during the public comments section. She insists that the meeting must stop because neither the agenda nor the supporting materials were posted online. A board member makes a motion to move into closed session to determine whether the meeting may lawfully proceed. The vote is split 2-2 with the remaining board member abstaining (she went to college with Jackie and feels internally conflicted).

Jackie's daughter then turns the camera on her mom and, on cue, Jackie starts yelling from her seat that the meeting is illegal, and they cannot go forward with the presentation. Jackie's comments incite other parents to start arguing with the Board. Two other members of the public begin cursing at each other and displaying physically threatening hand and body gestures. Oh snap!

Notes:

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Part 4
After the meetings:
"A moment of calm, and then …"

Cast of Characters

Jamie, Board President
Jackie, Leader of "People Against School Libraries"
Jackie's friend Jennifer

After returning from closed session and regaining control over the special meeting, Jamie announces to the crowd that the meeting will continue as planned. The special meeting is followed by the agendized regular meeting and concludes without further disruption.

About ten days after the meeting, two things happen:

1. Jackie writes a letter to Jules demanding that the District provide her with all public documents related to the meeting, including agendas, minutes, meeting materials, and emails by and among district staff, board members, and third parties pertaining to the regular and special meeting and topics on the agendas.

2. Someone named Jennifer, a friend of Jackie's who did not attend the meeting, sends a letter to Jamie alleging that the special meeting was illegal and demanding that the board immediately cure and correct the legal violations and re-agendize the library topic for a future meeting. She copies the letter to the local District Attorney.

At Jules' direction, Jade sends the materials to legal counsel JP with a one-word email, "HELP!" followed by a frowny face emoji.

Notes:

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