



**LITTLEFIELD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT #9  
GOVERNING BOARD TRAINING  
Administrative Services Site  
3490 East Rio Virgin Road  
Monday, March 16, 2026  
9:30 A.M.**

### **Mission Statement**

The Littlefield Unified School District is committed to excellence. Therefore, we are committed to providing opportunities for all students to learn and develop socially, emotionally, and academically. We are committed to providing resources to our students, parents and teachers in an ongoing effort to help students transition from childhood to adulthood.

### Arizona School Board Association Training

Board President Cobb called the meeting to order at 9:50 p.m. There were no people in attendance. Board Member Hogan and Board Member Wright were absent from the meeting.

#### Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Board Members introduced themselves and told why they ran for the board.

#### 1. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Individual board members** have no authority alone; decisions are made **collectively by the board**.
- **Superintendent** reports to the board as a whole; board + superintendent = **Governance Team**.
- Board authority is broad; superintendent handles day-to-day operations.
- Policies and regulations from **ASBA** do not require board approval unless specified.

Mr. Heaton said when he took this job 3 years ago he presented the board with a 3 year plan. If the Board renews his contract then he will give an updated 3 year plan. Mrs. Goessman said she would send the board the current 3 year plan and the goals.

#### 2. Board Member Duties

- **Handling complaints:** Listen, express empathy, and refer to superintendent. Keep legal



counsel involved if escalating to the board.

- **Closed sessions:** Protect rights of individuals and staff.
- **Public communication:** Outside the board room, members are ambassadors but have no official power.

Board President Cobb asked what if a person goes to the principal/superintendent and doesn't like the response to their complaint and wants to take it to the board. He then tells them to call the superintendent and appeal it. Sarah Jones said it takes a long time to get to the board level and policy says the board can choose to send it back to the superintendent. She said to make sure your legal counsel is consulted when something is referred to the board. Ms. Jones said she can hopefully give the board some tools to build the trust of the board.

### 3. Board Meetings

- Every meeting is a **PR opportunity**.
- **Agenda walkthrough:** Introduce and explain each section to guide public understanding.
- **Public comment:** Not legally required but recommended. Responses should stay within boundaries:
  - Do not debate issues not on the agenda.
  - Address personal attacks carefully; defer to superintendent when necessary.
- **Staff support:** Refer specific concerns to the superintendent; this builds trust.

Mr. Heaton said one of the best ways is to support our staff. A parent or someone will come in to give a piece of mind, if they are mentioning a specific staff members name, that's not appropriate, and if they say something, best answer is to refer to the superintendent. Nine times out of ten your staff will feel supported. If the issue ever comes to the board you will want to make sure it was looked into and investigated. Andrew Merrill noted outside of the board room the Board has no official power but are an ambassador. The Superintendent has significant responsibility to run district operations.

### 4. Board Leadership & Communication

- **Board President:** Must balance hard skills (policy, procedures) and soft skills (communication, diplomacy).
- **Trust building:** Transparency, consistent communication, and following process are essential.
- **Community engagement:** Consider using social media, community events, and newsletters to keep all stakeholders informed.

### 5. Governance Practices

- **Effective boards:** 8 characteristics reviewed (not detailed here).
- **Data review:** Track student performance, recruiting, retention, and professional development. Summer retreats or study sessions can help review data and set priorities.
- **Hardest lessons:** Emphasize importance of sharing information among the board and proper communication with legal counsel.

Board President Cobb stated that, as a board, they are committed to keeping teachers informed,



though the teachers themselves are often hesitant to come forward. Mr. Heaton added that communication has been challenging in his role as superintendent because he doesn't have a designated person to relay information, and the small community makes it even harder. Board Member Johnson noted that the district lacks a platform to share information or keep the community updated. Mrs. Jones mentioned that ASBA provides a communications toolkit. Mr. Heaton clarified that there is a method of communication for parents, but Board Member Johnson pointed out that much of the community is elderly and may not have children in the schools, suggesting they promote the district's Facebook page.

Board President Cobb reflected that the last three terminations created significant negativity but feels that things are improving. Board Member Johnson asked what data the board should be reviewing. Ms. Jones suggested looking at board self-evaluations, K-12 performance, student groups, and issues like recruitment and retention. She also noted that many boards hold summer retreats to review data. Mr. Heaton said he plans to include testing data at the next board meeting. Ms. Jones recommended holding a study session to decide which data to focus on. Mr. Heaton explained that the data he currently has is from last year and asked the board if they would like to hold a retreat to review the current year data.

Board Member Johnson said she feels she is lacking the knowledge of what is available for professional development, noting that the board has been so busy they haven't had the chance to dive into these areas. She described the volume of information as overwhelming.

## 6. Best Practices

- Provide choices and guidance to the superintendent while respecting their operational authority.
- Stay informed and prepared for meetings.
- Build community trust through transparency, structured communication, and responsiveness.

Mr. Heaton noted we had an issue in the past where a board president was visiting quite extensively with the school attorney and told us that is between him and the attorney. He was supposed to be sharing the information with the board but he wasn't.

Lunch Break: 12:05 p.m. – 12:33 p.m.

## Effective Meetings & Board Calendar

Ms. Jones reviewed strategies for effective meetings. A Board Calendar can help schedule when topics will appear on agendas and identify who will present.

## Relationship Leadership – Teamwork & Trust

Ms. Jones emphasized the importance of building trust and maintaining communication grounded in trust. Board Member Johnson expressed that she has never worked with a group so aligned in goals and committed to the schools' success. Board President Cobb noted that the board



operates as a team; it is not about individual members.

Andrew Merrill asked what trust enables in their roles. Board Member Johnson shared that she feels safe and valued as part of a team focused on students, trusting that members' intentions are genuine. Andrew Merrill acknowledged leadership involves risk, as mistakes can happen. Board Member Fagnan added that honesty is key, but opinions should not harm others; without trust, board members cannot be effective.

### **Challenges in Building Trust**

Board President Cobb noted that rumors, hearsay, and social media can undermine trust.

Key points:

- Trust takes time to build.
- Trust can be broken and must be rebuilt.
- Complex or “wicked” issues—where definitions, causes, or solutions are unclear—impact trust.

### **Wicked Issues in Education**

Ms. Jones asked whether education qualifies as a wicked issue. Board Member Fagnan said there's a definite problem and believes we can clear up those issues. Mr. Heaton said parents say schools the problem, and school saying parents not reading to the kids at night is a wicked issue. Ms. Jones illustrated how to map wicked issues.

### **Civil Discourse – The Four C's**

- **Curious**
- **Charitable**
- **Conscientious**
- **Constructive**

Goal: foster understanding and reasonable solutions.

Board Member Johnson said she feels supported in sharing her perspective and feels they try and educate each other. Board Member Fagnan acknowledged he sometimes dismisses others' input too quickly but can apologize and say he was wrong. Ms. Jones said defining what you mean is vital.

### **Communication Protocols**

- **Documented Practices:** Once agreed upon, practices should be shared with the community.
- **Superintendent Updates:** Mr. Heaton provides legislative updates and notifies the board of agenda items. Board members may request information if not immediately available. Mike's monthly updates from the Business Manager are sufficient; the current communication schedule is working.



Mr. Heaton said he was once told by an older superintendent that a board member once told him that he hated getting asked what occurred at a school by a community member before hearing it from the superintendent. Board Member Fagnan said he tries to stop by the Superintendent's office and the district office once a week to see what's going on. Mr. Heaton noted he is willing to meet with board members as his schedule allows.

Mr. Heaton usually updates the Board on legislative issues. Board Member Fagnan said the Business Manager updates them once a month on financial issues. Ms. Jones asked the board if there is anything they would like to see weekly, quarterly, or monthly. Board Member Fagnan said it's fine the way it is with all the hats the Superintendent and HR director are having to wear.

Mr. Heaton said he notifies the entire board about questions that have come up regarding agenda items. Ms. Jones suggested if a board member has a question and can ask ahead of time, please do. Mr. Heaton said it's okay for the board to request information the next day. Board Member Johnson said often questions they ask might come up right then. She noted the superintendent always says he will check on that and will get back to them.

### **Emergency Communication**

- **Definition:** Emergencies include grounded buses or power outages requiring school closure.
- **Board Notification:** Email blasts are used; Sheree will maintain a board contact list in the dialer.
- **Point of Contact:** The Principal or Sheree during emergencies.
- **Emergency Management Plans:** Reviewed in executive session; Karen would like annual review.
- **Emergency Board Meetings:** Called when urgent matters arise that impact school operations, such as major repairs or expenditures.

Ms. Jones asked what constitutes an emergency in our district. Mr. Heaton said our buses were grounded for almost a week that was an emergency and he notified the board immediately. There was another time the power went out and we had to cancel school. Those to him are emergencies. Mr. Heaton said in those circumstances we generally send an email blast to the board. Ms. Goessman noted she can create a board group in the dialer so they can receive a call, email, and text for emergencies.

Ms. Jones asked who the board would contact if they have a question during an emergency. She asked if that would be Sheree. Board President Cobb said they would call the Principal or Sheree.

Ms. Jones asked if the Board has executive sessions to review Emergency Management Plans. Mr. Heaton said if we do go over that it would be in executive session. Board Member Johnson



said she would like to review the emergency management plans once a year.

Ms. Jones asked under what circumstances would an emergency board meeting be called. Mr. Heaton said in another district they had to have an emergency water pump put in and it was over a certain amount of money. If they didn't get it taken care of, they wouldn't have been able to have school that week.

### **Superintendent/Board Communication**

- Board members communicate directly with the superintendent for non-emergency items.

### **Current & Future Agenda Items**

- Discussion ongoing; no specific items listed in these notes.

The training was adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

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Mark Cobb, Governing Board President

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Troy Heaton, Superintendent

Respectfully Submitted by:

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Sheree Goessman  
Human Resources Director