

## A Board Member's Guide to Handling Complaints and Concerns from the Community or Staff

Listening to complaints and concerns is part of serving on a school board. The question is how should a board member respond? To begin, let's start with the board member's role in these situations. First, board members must remember that they have a duty to remain "fair and impartial" in all situations. A complaint or concern may start off as something passed in casual conversation, but ultimately will require investigation and corporate board action. As this is the case, individual board members need to be very careful in terms of how they respond to complaints or concerns. We rarely know the path issues will take and thus a standard of care is always necessary when addressing issues which come before us.

It might be helpful for board members to think of themselves as the "judges" of the school district. In other words, the board is oftentimes the last stop if a complaint or concerns moves through the process. If an individual board member becomes involved prior to a board level hearing it is likely the public will see them as biased.

To prevent a charge of bias, or having prejudged the facts of a situation, a method must be employed which will protect individual board members from criticism. One such option is the LAST method for handling complaints and concerns (Associated School Boards of South Dakota).

- Listen to the person
- Acknowledge their complaint or concern
- Send them to the correct person (lowest level in the organization where the issue can be resolved), and
- Thank them for their interest in the district.

Use of the LAST method protects both the individual board member and the school district when the board must corporately consider a complaint or concern. Although it may feel rigid and bureaucratic, rather than customer service oriented, it ultimately ensures all involved are treated in a fair and impartial manner.