

August 25, 2011

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Priority Briefing

NEW TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

For the first time, three new provisions of law have placed requirements on school board members to obtain professional training as part of their public duties.

OPEN MEETINGS ACT TRAINING

Earlier this week, the Governor signed into law P.A. 97-504, which will require that all board members (including incumbents) complete an elective training course on compliance with the Open Meetings Act offered online through the Public Access Counselor of the Illinois Attorney General's Office. This is the same short online course which employees designated by the Board must complete annually. However, board members will have to complete the course only once. Incumbent board members have to complete the course no later than January 1, 2013, one year after the effective date of the law. Any members newly elected or appointed after January 1, 2012, will have just 90 days to complete the course. The law allows the Illinois Association of School Boards to offer an alternative course to the one offered by the PAC.

This law also makes it clear that failure to complete the course in a timely manner is not a criminal violation and will not invalidate any actions taken by a school board. Furthermore, completion of the online course satisfies the member's obligation with regard to any board committee or ex officio position. Once the member has completed the course, the PAC or IASB will provide the member with a certificate, which must be filed with the District office.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING

The most comprehensive training provision is found in Section 10-16a of the School Code, added as a part of the provisions in the Education Reform Act (Senate Bill 7). This provision mandates training for school board members elected or appointed for a term beginning after June 13, 2011. (Incumbent members, therefore, do not have to obtain training.) The deadline to complete the training is one year after the beginning of the new member's first term, if the member is elected, or within one year of appointment, if the member is appointed after June 13, 2011. The training will be for a minimum of four hours and will cover the following topics:

- education and labor law
- financial oversight and accountability
- fiduciary responsibilities of a school board member

The District must list on its website the names of those members who have successfully completed the training.

Training will be offered by the Illinois Association of School Boards.

PERA TRAINING

As we reported last year, the Performance Education Reform Act ("PERA") established a new system for evaluating teachers which is being implemented over time through regulations of the Illinois State Board of Education. As we reported earlier this year, the Education Reform Act provides for an alternative tenured teacher dismissal process which is premised on PERA-based teacher evaluations. Remediations and dismissals under this alternative process are greatly streamlined. However, before any school board member may vote to dismiss a teacher under this process, that member must have completed a training program on PERA evaluations. This training program must be one administered or approved by the Illinois State Board of Education.