Question of the Month: A look at states in Midwest with laws that require school board members to receive training

By Tim Anderson [1]
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Question: Which states in the Midwest require training for school board members, and what does the training entail?

Answer: Illinois, Minnesota and North Dakota are among the 21 U.S. states that require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards, according to the National School Boards Association [3].

Over the past decade, several states have either adopted new training requirements or strengthened existing statutory provisions.

A mix of factors has contributed to this national trend — the increased complexity of the job (due to more state and federal regulations and larger local school budgets, for example), the push for greater accountability in education, and concerns about student performance.

Illinois is one of the latest U.S. states to adopt a requirement. As part of SB 7 [4], a comprehensive education-reform bill signed into law in 2010, anyone elected to or appointed to a local school board after June 13, 2011, must complete a minimum of four hours of training.

The Illinois statute spells out specific topics to be covered during training: education and labor law, financial oversight and accountability, and the fiduciary responsibilities of a school board member. The Illinois Association of School Boards is offering online and in-person training to help its members fulfill the requirement.

In Minnesota, the School Boards Association provides training in school finance and management to each newly elected school board member.

North Dakota requires each newly elected school board member to receive in-service training within a year of taking office. That training, led by the North Dakota School Boards Association, must include presentations on finance and on the role and duties of a school board member.

Some states, such as Minnesota and North Dakota, allow only a school board association to conduct the training; others, such as Illinois, open it up to other providers approved by the state.

Most mandatory-training states require training for all board members, but others only mandate it for newly elected officials. It is most common for school districts to pay for the training.

States also have varying ways of enforcing the requirement — removing the nonconforming school board member from office, for example, or simply listing nonconforming members on a website. Some states report having no mechanism for enforcing the training requirement.

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