

What does a school board member do?

A school board sets educational goals and establishes policy for the school system based on state laws and community values. Perhaps the most important responsibility of a school board is to employ a superintendent and treasurer and hold them accountable for achieving those educational goals and managing the day-to-day affairs of the district in accordance with the school board's policies.

Board members make decisions on a wide range of issues, such as hiring and evaluating a superintendent and treasurer; setting district policy; planning student services; goal-setting and long-range planning; adopting curriculum; establishing budgets; engaging parents; being good fiscal stewards; acting in the best interest of the school district and within the scope of their legal authority; and creating community relations programs. A board member should be a skilled decision-maker. However, decisions are only made by the board as a whole at a public meeting.

Another important part of the board's work is its public relations role. School board members help build public support and understanding of public education and lead the public in demanding quality education. The school board serves as a link between its schools and the public.

Board member responsibilities

The board is a policymaking body and members are the chief advisors to the superintendent and treasurer. Board members do not manage the day-to-day operations of a school district; they see to it that the system is managed well by professional administrators.

Board members do not evaluate staff, other than the superintendent and treasurer, nor do they typically become involved in employment interviews, other than those of the superintendent, and treasurer. Board members may be consulted during the hiring process for other positions, such as assistant superintendent.

A successful board member

- Knows that he or she can legally act as a board member only when the board of education is in session. No one person, unless authorized, should speak on behalf of the board.
- Avoids administrative decisions or attempts to second-guess the administration. The superintendent is the chief administrator, the treasurer is the chief financial officer. The board has no administrative function.

- Is well acquainted with school policies.
- Should vote at all times in the best interests of the children of the school district.
- Is flexible and realizes there are times when changes must be made, when tradition cannot be honored and when pressure must be ignored.
- Remembers that board business often requires confidentiality, especially in processes involving students, personnel, land acquisition, negotiations and security.
- Is interested in obtaining facts, but also remembers that the administration has responsibility for operating the schools, rather than spending all its time making reports to an individual board member.
- Is a good listener at board meetings, on the street corner, in the community or anywhere else approached, but never commits himself or herself, the board or the administration.
- Knows that the reputation of the entire school district is reflected in his or her behavior and attitude.
- Is able to support a decision when it is made.