

The General Purpose of a School Board

The school board exists to represent the community in the oversight to the activities of the school system. They are the PUBLIC's connection to public schools. The school board's purpose is to ensure that the school district operations in the best interest of the community at large, particularly the parents and students in the school district.

It may not be obvious to casual observers that the school board has jurisdiction over ALL school age children within its jurisdiction. While the school board is primarily concerned with students enrolled in traditional public schools, its decisions can impact students attending parochial, charter, private, and home-schooled children.

School Board Responsibilities

SET AND MAINTAIN GOVERNANCE STANDARDS.

One of the school board's primary responsibilities involves establishing the mission, the vision, the rules and policies that will be used to govern the school. This could be anything from adjusting start and dismissal times, to addressing staffing issues in administration. Your school board will need to rely on legal, human resource, and educational professionals on occasion to be sure all information is gained to make best executive decisions. The governance standards of a school district are called policies.

MANAGE THE SUPERINTENDENT AND TREASURER.

The school board's executive authority is delegated to the Superintendent and Treasurer. The board is responsible for hiring, evaluating and terminating as well as giving the Superintendent and Treasurer. Their authority comes from the school board and they are responsible for upholding the responsibilities delegated to them through policy and those required of them by law. The Superintendent is generally responsible for overall operations of the district and executing the board's policies and directives. The Treasurer is responsible for informing the board regarding the district's financial status, executing the board's financial policies, and reporting to the Ohio Department of Education.

SET AND REVIEW POLICIES.

The school board should review new and established policies on a regular basis to determine whether changes are necessary. School districts often use policy consultants to advise them changes to state law that may require new policies or policy revisions. School board members will need to do their homework by reading policies, seeking to understand them using advice from experts when necessary, considering their personal experience, and incorporating community values into district policies.

It is up to the school board to make sure that all policies are legal, constitutional, and reflect the principles of the community. This may include using outside consultants to evaluate student safety and policy and curriculum fairness, academic rigor, financial restraint, policy compliance. School board members can accomplish this effectively with or without outside assistance.

Policy is the Board's legislative authority. It is up to the school board to ensure its policies are adhered to. School Boards should take all violations of policy seriously; otherwise it will have no control over district operations. If a policy is problematic change it, but do not allow violations to persist.

ESTABLISH DISTRICT BUDGET AND MONITOR FINANCES.

The school board is responsible for guiding the school or district's operations and future plans. This entails approving appropriations, financial forecasting, approving expenditures, and guiding spending priorities. Before tax revenues can be spent, the board must appropriate funds it receives. Depending on the district, appropriations direct funds to pay bonds, support district operations, and meet other obligations the district may have. Appropriations is the Board's tool for controlling spending. The Treasurer is responsible for assuring that expenditures never exceed appropriations.

Establishing a financial forecast, or budget, is one of the most challenging responsibilities of a school board. It requires listening to and balancing the priorities and needs of the community, students, and staff. The Treasurer and Superintendent will be instrumental in helping the board develop a sound forecast. However, the board will need to establish the spending priorities and approve the forecast. The board is also responsible for deciding when to ask voters to pass levies.

EVALUATE INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION.

Another of the school board's most important functions is related to instruction. The school board is responsible for developing instructional philosophies and goals, assessment and competency standards as well as the educational program/curriculum. To be clear, boards delegate most of these responsibilities to the Superintendent; however, Ohio law assigns responsibility for curriculum to the school board, not the Superintendent. The board controls the curriculum through policies that govern the development of curriculum and that require the board's approval of the components of the educational program.

To monitor the effectiveness of the educational program, the board must (or must require the Superintendent) review student achievement data on a regular basis. Of course, school board members are not expected to be educational experts individually, but an ability to review research and consult knowledgeable people is crucial.

Not an Easy Job

These are just a few of the specific responsibilities of the average school board. In order to be as effective as possible, it is important for every member of the board to understand these responsibilities and take them seriously. In addition, voters electing members of the school board should also be aware of the board's responsibilities so they can select the best possible candidates for the job.

There are several options to help school boards organize and communicate for a more effective and efficient school district guidance system. For example: Want to know how your educational board and staff can focus more on teaching and less on chasing emails, hunting for documents, and waiting for board members to respond to discussions? With Boardable's board portal, you can centralize board information and communications, where everything (and everyone) is just a couple of clicks away. Click below to get started with Boardable.

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