

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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The board has 4 key responsibilities

While the definition of a board as policy-maker is certainly correct, and makes a very important point, it tells you little about what you actually do as a board member. Within your policy-making role, there are four specific areas of responsibility that you will oversee. They are:

1. The board hires, supervises, evaluates, and, if necessary, fires the superintendent. The board's first responsibility, and some say most important one, is to hire a competent administrator to run the district by managing all aspects of its day-to-day affairs. The superintendent works for the board of education, while all other district employees work for the superintendent.

By hiring a superintendent, you are adding a competent education professional to your board team.

Most board members have little inclination, not to mention the time necessary, to manage the day-to-day business of the district. By hiring, and then supporting a professional who keeps things running smoothly, you ensure that the district is well managed, and in a position to fulfill its mission.

2. The board is responsible for the school district's future. Because the board delegates the management of the district to the superintendent, it frees itself up for giving the district a strategic direction that ensures its future is a healthy one.

Strategic, long-range planning is a key board responsibility.

Social, regulatory, and economic changes mean

that boards must anticipate and plan for what the future will bring.

Once the board approves a strategic plan for the district, it should monitor the progress the superintendent makes toward meeting the plan's goals and objectives. Short-term operational planning is necessary to achieve your plan, and this is the administrator's responsibility.

3. The board monitors and evaluates. A board cannot watch every detail and every activity that takes place in the school district, nor should it. That's called micromanagement and is interfering with the superintendent's responsibility.

But a board must monitor and evaluate bottom-line results.

You should monitor the district's performance in two key areas: financial health and progress toward the board's strategic, long-range educational plan for the district.

4. The board serves as an advocate. Because you are an elected official, you are in a unique position to advocate for your school system.

You're not being paid for your service, and you have a higher motive: service to the community at large. This gives you instant credibility, which is the key to any advocate's success.

As an advocate, you might lobby local, state, and federal lawmakers, or communicate your district's goals to constituents and the community.

Hiring a superintendent, planning, monitoring, and advocating are the four primary responsibilities of the board. ■

Your superintendent has 5 key responsibilities

Your board hired the superintendent to oversee the district's daily operations. There's a lot that goes into this, so here's a more complete listing of the duties that make up the superintendent's job description:

1. Managing staff and making personnel decisions. Any decision affecting payroll, hiring, firing, evaluating, or promoting employees is the domain of the superintendent. After all, this is what you hired her to handle.

2. Making day-to-day operating decisions. You could say that this is the natural complement to the board member's job. Why? Because the board makes policy and the superintendent carries it out in the hundreds of day-to-day decisions that must be made in the school district. This can include anything from delegating to employees to work on the district's long-range goals to deciding whom to call to fix the heating system in a building to making spending decisions within the budget.

3. Completing short-term objectives based on the board's long-range plan. This is where close partnership and teamwork between the board and superintendent bear fruit. The superintendent is responsible for completing yearly objectives based on the district's three- to five-year plan's goals and is evaluated annually on how successfully he accomplishes this task. He is also responsible for giving the board regular progress reports on objectives.

4. Working with the board to better the district. Your superintendent is a professional whose expertise and experience are invaluable assets to the board. He will often serve as an in-house expert who analyzes, summarizes, and recommends action on complex issues. Be sure to include the superintendent in all board business.

5. Developing a budget and spending within it. The superintendent and his staff will submit a proposed budget to the board for approval. Board members should study it, ask questions if needed, before voting to approve it. ■

Case studies reinforce board's proper role

A Mississippi board heads off potential role confusion through the use of "cases studies."

During special "problem-solving" sessions, board members focus on cases studies from other districts that show what is and isn't appropriate board behavior.

"The board divides into three groups with each reviewing a different cases study," says a board member. "The groups decide what actions, if any,

the board needs to take in each case. They report back to the board on their decisions."

One case study involved a strained board-superintendent relationship caused by a board member who attempted to override the superintendent on a personnel matter. The group studying the case reported back to the board that the administrator alone has the authority to manage personnel. ■

Public censure is last step in discipline of a board member

Board members whose behavior is egregious have a lot to lose. They are subject to public censure by the full board (and the attendant embarrassment), using a process that starts with a meeting with the president of the board. Remember:

- Public censure requires a vote by the full board.
- The vote should be made in closed session.

- After the closed session, a statement should be made in public session to censure the offending board member.

Editor's note: Censure should be the last step in the progressive discipline of a board member. Before censure, the board member should first meet with the board president to discuss how the member's conduct is harming the perception of the school board. ■