

# Roles and Responsibilities

## of Board of Education Membership

Your acts may have an impact on the lives of thousands.



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

81 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242  
800-317-0033 • 860-571-7446 • Fax 860-571-7452

[www.cabe.org](http://www.cabe.org)

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**roles** (rɒl) *n.* The characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual.

**re-spon-si-bil-i-ty** /ri-,span(t) -s-'bil-t-e *n* **1:** the quality or state of being responsible: as **a:** moral, legal, or mental accountability **b:** RELIABILITY, TRUSTWORTHINESS **2:** something for which one is responsible: BURDEN

**re-spon-si-ble** /-'s pan (t) -s b / *adj*  
**1 a:** liable to be called upon to answer as the primary cause, motive, or agent **b:** liable to legal review or in case of fault to penalties **2 a:** able to answer for one's conduct and obligations: TRUSTWORTHY **b:** being a free moral agent **3:** involving responsibility or accountability **4:** politically answerable; *esp:* required to submit to the electorate if defeated by the legislature - **re-spon-si-ble-ness** *n* - **re-spon-si-bly** /-ble/*adv*

**syn** RESPONSIBLE, ANSWERABLE, ACCOUNTABLE, AMENABLE, LIABLE mean subject to an authority that may punish default. RESPONSIBLE implies holding a formal organizational role, duty, or trust; ANSWERABLE suggests a relation between one having a moral or legal obligation and a court or other authority charged with oversight of its observance; ACCOUNTABLE suggest imminence of retribution for unfulfilled trust or violated obligation.

- We urge every school district to affirm that all children can learn and accept the challenge to educate each child to his/her fullest potential;
- We support the State's efforts to address and solve the issues of social and economic isolation in the areas of housing, transportation, employment, access to health care and social services and to make the necessary funding to school districts to develop and sustain integrated educational programs and exchanges that create educational excellence; and
- We believe in local control and that the best decisions are made by boards of education, which know best how to solve the challenges faced in their communities.

We exist as an organization to serve our members. It is our hope and expectation that all school board will join with us in support of these goals for increasing achievement for all of Connecticut's children.

## CABE'S Positions and Core Values

Pursuant to our Bylaws, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) sets its positions and policies through a democratic process. We ask member school boards to provide us with resolutions, which are reviewed by our Resolutions Committee and then voted upon at our Delegate Assembly. All member Boards of Education are entitled to at least one vote in the Delegate Assembly and larger districts are entitled to two or three votes depending on their size.

These policies and positions are then put into effect by our Board of Directors, which includes Area Directors, Associate Directors and City Representatives. The five largest school districts in the state, as long as they are CABE members, are each entitled to one Director of the city's choosing. The State Relations Committee, which any board member from a member board can join, sets our legislative priorities for the upcoming Legislative Session.

The Board and committees work with staff to develop legislative strategies and all board members are encouraged to get involved in Day on the Hill and meetings with their legislators to explain our priorities for the Legislative Session.

Our positions include the following:

- Each child must have equal access to effective, free public education and to the services of well-educated and skillful teachers;
- All public schools should provide a quality education for each student;

Connecticut's school boards are one of its greatest strengths. Since the establishment of the Connecticut Code in 1650, the citizens of Connecticut's towns and cities have governed their own schools. Through local control, all citizens have the opportunity to have a direct impact on the tone and direction of their local or regional school district. Strong leadership by boards of education is critical in raising student achievement and creating a school climate that fosters academic and personal development. They are also considered "agents of the State" and are thus also responsible for carrying out laws, regulations and other requirements of the State.

School board members are elected\* by the citizens of their community. Therefore, they are responsible to those citizens.

School boards provide community input into its schools. It ensures that the needs and desires of the community, both ordinary and extraordinary, will be met by the schools. Board members achieve this through the policies they develop to lead the system and through the professional administrators/educators they employ to translate the policies into action.

*\*Most boards of education in Connecticut are elected. The New Haven school board is appointed by the Mayor except for two members; Hartford's board is composed of five members appointed by the Mayor and four elected. In special circumstances, the State Board of Education has authority to intervene and reconstitute school boards.*

## Forward

# PART ONE

## Responsibilities of board of education members

The roles and responsibilities of a board member serving on a board of education are varied and complex; the following pages offer an outline and discussion.

Further information and insight is offered by CAFE through the annual CAFE/CAPSS Convention, workshops and its biannual regional board candidate orientation sessions and new board member workshop.

*Boards of education serve the state and the local district, and are thus state and local officials.*

1. The Connecticut Constitution requires that ...  
“There shall always be free public elementary and secondary schools in the state. The Connecticut General Assembly shall implement this principle by appropriate legislation.”

The General Assembly has delegated much of this responsibility to local boards of education. Connecticut always has provided for considerable local autonomy.

2. The local school district has been created as a unit of the state government.

This means that a local board is responsible both to the local community and to state government.

3. A board of education member is a “State official functioning at the local level.” Thus board members must carry out responsibilities as set out in law or regulation.

which emphasize the fundamentals of school board membership. The highlight of the association’s meetings is the annual Convention at which experts analyze, discuss and debate the problems and challenges confronting our public schools.

The CAFE website, webinars, Facebook, Twitter, and various electronic listserves are also used to help board members be informed on many topics important to the fulfillment of board member responsibilities.

# The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) serves local boards by promoting public education and by working for adequate state support of education and enactment of legislation that favors the interests of the public schools. Its broad communications program is designed not only to build support for public education on state and national levels but also to help local school districts create support in their communities. Approximately 90% of the school boards in Connecticut to belong to CABE.

CABE programs include in-service education, liaison and individual consultation with school districts, legislative and legal services, research, public relations, publications, insurance, computer, communications, administrator searches and policy services. CABE exerts influence on national education policy through its affiliation with the NSBA an association of state school board associations, and by testifying at governmental hearings on matters pertaining to education.

CABE maintains liaison with the State Department of Education, other state agencies and the state legislature. CABE's headquarters are in Wethersfield. CABE houses an information center with extensive research files, a library and sample policy files. The *CABE Journal*, CABE's principle periodical, is sent to all member board members, administrators and other education leaders in the state.

Each year CABE sponsors a variety of meetings and conferences for school board members. These include intensive workshops on board service and leadership, board/superintendent relations and negotiations. Included are sessions

4. General supervision and control of public education is vested in the State Board of Education.

Throughout the years, the State Board, working through the State Department of Education, has discharged its supervisory functions by both working with local school districts to improve school programs and by providing regulatory oversight of school districts.

5. Boards perform acts for which authority exists in the statutes and in court decisions. State law also gives each board discretionary powers to exercise responsibility and initiative locally.
6. The local board of education should function independently of other local government bodies, except as provided by state law and town charter.

The deliberate division of authority between the local board of education and other governmental bodies is intended to make school boards directly responsible to the people. Local selection of board members, either through election or appointment, is intended to keep schools close to the people. ***Boards connect the will of their community to the education of their children.***

## An effective board member meets legal and personal qualifications

1. The State sets few legal qualifications for board membership, requiring only that members: (a) be electors in the town in which they serve; and (b) not be employed by the district.
2. Before beginning board service, board members must take an oath of office.
3. High ethical standards are necessary in the men and women who serve on boards of education.

Board members should be men and women who hold universal public education in the greatest esteem; who believe that America's future rests primarily on the superior development — physical, mental, moral, spiritual — of all our children and youth; and who will work to provide, defend and support the highest degree of public education for their communities.

1. Board members should view themselves as “team” members, able to work harmoniously with other members.

Board members require some time to become fully informed about the work of the board. As members of the board of directors of multimillion dollar enterprises, school board members must continually seek to enhance their knowledge and skills in the interest of serving their school districts.

**tions** are key to the successful operation of the school district.

- Board members and Superintendents will always carry out their respective roles with the highest levels of **professionalism, honesty and integrity**.
- Board members recognize that they represent the **entire** community and that they must ensure that the community remains fully informed on school-related matters.
- Superintendents and Board members recognize that the Superintendent serves as the Board of Education's **agent** and will, in that role, **faithfully apply** the policies and contracts adopted by the Board.
- Board members adhere to the principle that they shall confine the Board's role to **policy-making, planning and appraisal** while the Superintendent shall **implement** the Board's policies.
- Board members and Superintendents both recognize that they serve as a part of an educational team with **mutual respect, trust, civility and regard** for each other's respective roles and responsibilities.
- Board members are committed to the concept that the strength of the Superintendent is in being the **educational leader** of the school district.
- Board members and Superintendents practice and promote **ethical behavior** in the **Boardroom** as a **model** for all district employees.
- Board members and Superintendents consider and decide all issues **fairly and without bias**.

## The board, not the individual, has authority thus the board of education must work as a team

## PART THREE

# Connecticut Code of Ethics for Boards of Education

of studies for the public schools, and several statutes impose specific requirements. This responsibility should be interpreted as the broad duty to create teaching positions and to establish courses. Development of specific curriculum has traditionally been left to the professionals. Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 10-220(e) provides that boards of education are required to appoint a “school district curriculum committee” that shall “recommend, develop, review and approve all curriculum for the district”.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Board of Directors on April 17, 1997 as a model for school boards. The success of every school system depends on an effective working relationship between the Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools. This code incorporates those standards and responsibilities most critical to productive Board and Superintendent relations.

- Board members and Superintendents ensure the opportunity for high quality education for every student and make the well being of students the **fundamental goal** of all decision-making and actions.
- Board members and Superintendents are **staunch advocates** of high quality free public education for **all** Connecticut children.
- Board members and Superintendents **honor all** national, state and local laws and regulations pertaining to education and public agencies.
- Board members and Superintendents recognize that **clear** and **appropriate communica-**

2. The individual board member has no more authority than any other citizen when the board is not in session unless granted more authority by the board.
3. Board members speak and vote in accordance with their convictions, but once an official decision has been made, they should support that decision.
4. Board members should make no promises or commitments on educational issues unless they are fully discussed and acted upon in the board meeting.
5. Board members should encourage teamwork, including effective communication and support and adherence to appropriate roles and responsibilities between school administrators and the board.
6. Board members should learn the “chain of command” in the district, and encourage business to be conducted through proper channels.
7. Board members must understand that their primary responsibility is the improvement of student achievement through the adoption and monitoring of board policy.

## Boards of education make policies, ensure policies are carried out, and judge the results

1. The most important function of a board of education is to improve student achievement. This is done by developing, adopting, monitoring and evaluating the effects of board policies. The board develops and adopts policies to provide a broad guide for action by school personnel so that schools may operate efficiently. *Board members should recognize that their responsibility is not to run the schools, but to see that the schools are well run.*
2. Policies give direction to administrators and staff by clearly defining staff authority and responsibility. They permit discretion when appropriate and provide the ability for school district personnel to respond to a variety of situations.
3. The board should be assisted in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies by written and oral reports through appropriate administrators, by direct feedback, and recommendations from the superintendent.
4. Written policies provide for delegation of authority, thus maintaining control and reducing the need for board discussion on many matters. Policies help avoid having decisions made on a case-by-case basis.
5. Written policies permit development of administrative guides, procedures, rules and regulations, where deemed appropriate.
6. In conjunction with the superintendent, each board should establish and maintain efficient methods of judging the effectiveness of policies and the district's schools.

guesses, and emotion, but by analysis of facts and information, and calm, selective judgment. In seeking sources of information, board members may and should look to their professional administrators for the material which will assist them to build their own conclusions as well as outside sources, such as CABA or NSBA, as appropriate. They should strive to learn enough about the subject so that they “ask the right questions” and rest only when their questions have been answered. Board members should continually examine their own opinions and perceptions and strive to find the “best” answers to the issues they face.

No responsibility of the school board requires more clearly reasoned judgment than that of deciding policies on the content of the school curriculum, or the kind of educational experience it should provide. The question of “who should be taught what” is a basic area of education decision-making — and yet it is fairly common for board members to express surprise when informed that defining and adopting curricular policies is an inescapable obligation.

Curriculum is the means by which decisions on education philosophy and goals are implemented. Philosophy and curriculum are two parts of a whole. Goals are of little use unless steps and means are taken to carry them out; and the effectiveness of any curriculum is greatly dependent upon how closely its contents have been oriented to expected results.

The Connecticut General Statutes provide that boards of education are to establish the program

## The curricular role of board of education members



## Positive attitudes in meeting basic responsibilities

Effective board members realize, however, that educational decisions are made in the best interests of the children they serve only when the alternatives are examined in the light of basic beliefs about public education and what it should be trying to accomplish. The effective use of resources, both material and human, depends directly upon the clear definition of purposes, and the determination of priorities in working toward specific goals. This idea is reflected in state law requiring boards of education to set goals for the local district.

Only when board of education members examine alternatives and make decisions on the basis of a carefully defined set of fundamental educational principles and beliefs will they fulfill the central function of school board membership. In carrying out this responsibility for developing a philosophy of education and helping to determine the goals which public education in the district should try to attain, the board of education bears responsibility as to how it will be accomplished.

Board members represent the entire community, and not special groups or interests within it. They must exercise their best judgment on a fair and objective basis. It is essential that each board member approach responsibilities with a genuine desire to reach conclusions only upon the basis of facts and through examination of all points of view.

The problems of public education are difficult ones, for which there are seldom easy solutions. The best decisions are not made by hunches,

7. Board policies should avoid administrative details as much as possible, unless determined to be necessary.

1. Board members should represent impartially all the people of the district rather than any political, social, religious, economic, or other special interest or geographical area.

Board members should recognize that at times special interests and pressure groups may attempt to exert undue influence on them. Board members must weigh all proposals in terms of the greatest good to the children in the district.

2. The board should consider the views of citizens and staff members and involve them in formulating school policies. However, final decisions on policies are the legal responsibility of the board.

One means of considering other viewpoints is through the appointment of advisory committees, which may be set up to consider a specific problem. The committee's responsibilities and authority should be carefully delineated in advance.

3. The policies and programs of the board need to be communicated to the community, in various ways.

Keeping the public informed involves various media, including the press, radio and television, school bulletins, websites, public meetings, conferences, and other methods of communication.

## The board of education represents and works with the people

## Funding of the schools

4. Good planning on the part of the board requires cooperative effort between the board and other community agencies, such as those concerned with health, recreation, safety, welfare and community development.

5. All meetings of the board must be held in public except where the board meets to discuss matters exempt under the Freedom of Information Act.

1. Securing adequate financial support is one of the most important responsibilities of the local board. This requires public understanding of the present and future educational needs of the community.

The public schools are funded from local property taxes, and state and federal aid.

2. The board is responsible for developing a school budget including the cost of operating the public schools, and an annual report which shows costs, income and net cost to the town.

3. Public money is a public trust; therefore, every board should insist that all of its business transactions be ethical, open, and straightforward.

17. To “perform all acts required of it by the town or necessary to carry into effect the powers and duties imposed by law.”

18. To “prepare a statement of educational goals for the school district” and to develop student objectives which relate directly to the statement of educational goals.

19. To evaluate annually the superintendent in a manner agreed upon by the board and superintendent.

20. To provide for the annual evaluation of all personnel.

Boards of education must also prescribe rules for the management, studies, classification, and discipline of the public schools, approve the selection of school library books, approve plans for public school buildings, and adopt and implement written policies concerning homework, attendance, promotion and retention.

It is the primary responsibility of each board of education to develop a set of basic beliefs as to what constitutes a comprehensive educational program in its district.

Board members are pressed by decisions dealing with the direct and practical problems of school buildings, staff recruitment and retention, budgets, bond issues, and other specifics. Under these pressures, questions of educational philosophy may seem remote from their immediate obligations and concerns.

## The importance of philosophy and goals

7. To “employ and dismiss teachers... subject to the provisions of Section 10-151 and 10-158a.”
8. To “designate schools which shall be attended by the various children within the school district.”
9. To make provisions to enable children residing in the district to attend school “for the period required by law.”
10. To annually establish, with the superintendent, educational priorities for the school district.
11. To consider and adopt an annual budget.
12. To provide an appropriate and safe learning environment for students.
13. To develop and implement a written plan for minority staff recruitment.
14. To provide for transportation where “reasonable and desirable.”
15. To “arrange with the board of education of an adjacent town for the instruction” of pupils who can more conveniently attend school in their district.
16. To furnish school accommodations so that children “five years of age and over and under eighteen years of age who is not a graduate of a high school” to attend school.

1. The board should give adequate time to addressing educational issues concerning student achievement, rather than limiting attention to financial and logistical problems. Some boards make a conscientious effort to devote a portion of each meeting exclusively to student achievement.

2. The board should study its own procedures and methods and have appropriate bylaws and policies to ensure effective and efficient use of meeting time.

There are many good ways to expedite the board’s business. Among these are: having the agenda and all materials duplicated and mailed, emailed and/or available on the internet to board members sufficiently in advance of the meeting to allow them to be read beforehand; the use of a consent agenda; and placing more important matters earlier on the agenda. Board members should read their materials before the meetings and be prepared to discuss the issues they contain.

3. Board members should keep informed concerning educational ideas and trends.
4. Boards should examine and discuss annually the roles of the board and the superintendent in order to maintain a strong and effective partnership and leadership team in the educational process. For a more in-depth discussion of roles and responsibilities, see the CABE/CAPSS School Governance Position Statement. (see below)
5. Board members should take full advantage of Connecticut Association of Boards of Educa-

## **Boards of education grow in service**

tion (CABE) and National School Boards Association (NSBA) meetings, workshops, and Conventions. Board members should devote time to their own professional development to improve their skills and to increase their effectiveness on the board.

In addition, CABE has worked with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) to provide a detailed listing of board and superintendent responsibilities as well as those that are jointly shared. This document, the *CABE/CAPSS School Governance Position Statement*, can be found together with the *CABE/CAPSS Success Strategies for Leadership Team Evaluation: Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools* on the CABE website under the “Leadership” banner on the top of the page.

These two documents are “best practices” in the view of the two organizations. They serve as excellent discussion material for boards and superintendents on expectations of each and provide for better understanding of roles and responsibilities.

6. Board members also may benefit from attending meetings of the parent-teacher groups and other relevant school groups, including school governance councils, as well as other community groups.

Boards are required by law to maintain “good public elementary and secondary schools,” and to “implement the educational interests of the state” as defined in Section 10-4a. The statutes include the need to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation by providing educational opportunities for students to interact with students from other racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds as among the state’s educational interests. These and other requirements are contained in Title 10 of Connecticut’s General Statutes. Boards may provide additional educational activities to serve the interests of the school district as they see fit. The following duties of local and regional boards of education are primarily outlined in Section 10-220 and 10-221:

1. To secure, if necessary, educational opportunities in other school districts.
2. To “give all children in the school district as nearly equal advantage as may be practicable.”
3. To “have charge of the schools” in the school district.
4. To “make a continuing study of the need for school facilities and a long term building program” and to make recommendations to the town.
5. To care for, maintain and operate “buildings, land, apparatus and other property used for school purposes.”
6. To “determine the number, age and qualifications of pupils admitted to each school.”

## PART TWO

### Basic responsibilities of school boards