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## What Are a Texas School Board's Roles and Responsibilities?



The main function of the school board is to provide local, citizen governance and oversight of education. Though ultimate responsibility for education rests with the state, Texas has delegated much of the authority to local communities who elect their local school trustees to govern the school district.

The idea behind this structure of shared responsibility is that, while some education policy issues are best addressed at the state level, others are far better addressed by your local community.

Within the framework of state and federal law and State Board of Education and commissioner of education rules, your school district has significant latitude in shaping the educational programs of your schools.

The operation of the school district at the local level is also a shared activity. The role of the school board members and the role of the superintendent are different:

- Your school board governs the district, but it does so with the advice of the superintendent.
- The superintendent manages the district, but he or she must do so with the oversight and management of the board, and within the framework of policies and priorities your board adopts.

### Local school board responsibilities

Local school board responsibilities can be grouped into five categories:

- Adopt goals and priorities and monitor success
- Adopt policies and review for effectiveness
- Hire and evaluate the superintendent
- Adopt a budget and set a tax rate
- Communicate with the community

Let's explore what each of these means for your school board.

### Adopt goals and priorities and monitor success

Truly effective boards often refer to their district's vision and goals when preparing for meetings or making decisions. Developing a strong vision and goals helps a board have a North Star to refer back to when it's time to make tough decisions. Vision and goals keep school governance focused on top priorities like student achievement.

Research on effective school governance points to two board functions with a strong connection to student achievement:

- The board holding high expectations for student learning and communicating those expectation through the district's vision and goals
- The board staying engaged with the student learning goals through regular goal progress monitoring

To that end, the board reviews regular reports from the administration on district operations and progress toward goals. Some goals in your district may be stated in terms of measures included in the state's [Texas Academic Performance Reports \(TAPR\)](#).

TAPR can help your district gauge student achievement and other districts measures. It helps your district compare its performance to other districts and campuses of similar size, wealth, and student populations.

## **Adopt policies and review for effectiveness**

A key responsibility of the board is to adopt local policies that guide how the district operates. Your administration and district staff make important decisions based on district policies. Local school boards must adopt policies that are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations and should ensure they match district practice.

Your district's policy manual will have two types of policies (Legal and Local) in many areas.

- Legal policies contain any statements of state or federal law or other legal authority on a topic and are not adopted by the board
- Local policies include governance provisions that the local board has put in place

By distinguishing these two, the board and the public can clearly see what part of district operations are mandated by state and federal law, and which are adopted at the board's discretion.

Learn the [basic steps to developing and adopting school district policy](#) and find out the [difference between school board policies and regulations](#).

## **Hire and evaluate the superintendent**

The board sets goals and priorities and adopts the policies by which the district is run. The board also hires a superintendent to execute on the board's decisions.

The role of the superintendent is to:

- Act as chief executive officer of the district
- Ensure that the board's policies are implemented fairly and appropriately
- Move the district forward on the board's goals and priorities
- Be accountable for the progress made toward successful school operations

While the board's focus is oversight of management, policymaking, planning, and evaluation, the superintendent's focus is on implementation and managing day-to-day operations.

The board must also develop superintendent performance goals and evaluate the superintendent's progress. [Read more about how to conduct a superintendent evaluation](#).

## **Adopt a budget and set a tax rate**

The school board's role in adopting a budget is an ongoing activity. The superintendent and staff crunch the numbers for the school district budget and present it to the board for approval.

- Examine budget assumptions, broad guidelines and targets that administration uses in preparing a budget
- Study the budget proposal to make sure it reflects the goals and priorities the board established
- Hold required public hearings
- Adopt a budget and approve an appropriate tax rate to fund it
- Monitor the district's fiscal activity throughout the year and amend the budget if necessary
- Hire an independent auditor and approve the report from the annual financial audit

School board members who want to exercise responsible stewardship of district finances should be armed with two tools:

- Basic information about the district's budget, so they can anticipate the district's revenue profile in coming years
- A habit of asking about the long-term fiscal impact of board decisions, so they can begin to understand the complexities of budget decision and avoid making decisions that put the district in a difficult position down the road

[Find out the right questions to ask about your school district's budget.](#)

## Communicate with the community

Your board's final major responsibility is to serve as an advocate for public schools. One of the key things trustees can do is to listen to their community. It's one of the best ways for trustees to build trust between the district and community.

Keep your community involved by informing them about:

- District plans
- Actions
- Accomplishments

Board members are the link between the school system and the public. As advocates for public education, board members help [grow community support for public schools](#) and report district progress by communicating with the community, students, staff, parents, and the media.

Once your board makes a decision, the board's role is to engage the community in ways that:

- Promote continued constructive discussion
- Generate positive community interest in the efforts of the public schools

It's a difficult job, but serving as a school trustee carries a much greater burden than simply being a representative.

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