

## The Local School Board: Challenges and Rewards

The education of students is an extremely important priority for any community. Citizens have strong beliefs about what should or should not occur in the schools. Dealing with these challenges, as well as with limited resources, changing demographics, and ever-increasing expectations requires tact, patience and a strong commitment to the education of the children in the community.

But the rewards of serving on a local board of education are also great. Board members bring their unique experiences and beliefs to the board table and the work that they do can influence the lives of children, even after these board members are no longer on the board.

Setting the vision for education in the local community, making curriculum decisions, allocating resources and establishing student performance standards are just a few of the types of issues that boards must face. And decisions on these issues will influence what happens in the school district well into the future.

In Connecticut, many good things are taking place. The Connecticut Mastery Test and Connecticut Academic Progress Test are highly respected assessment models across the nation. Greater numbers of students are taking more difficult and more advanced courses than ever before.

This is not to say that everything is perfect – much work is still to be done. A school board

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member should try to learn as much as possible about education in their community, as well as across the state and nation in order to maximize their school board effectiveness. School board service is an incredible learning experience.

Serving as a school board member demands time, energy and a willingness to listen. If you talk to most school board members, they will tell you it is also one of the most rewarding experiences they have ever had. Giving back to their communities, influencing the lives of children and carrying out an essential democratic responsibility can be one of the high points of any citizen's life.

## It's All About Student Achievement

Local board of education members are besieged with numerous competing issues; student discipline, budget, problems with school buses and negotiating teacher contracts are just a few examples. It is easy to forget that the primary purpose of a board of education is to see that it happens. Board members must keep this in mind to ensure that board meetings stay focused on student learning and that other discussion do not overshadow the most important task.

## What Does a School Board Do?

Boards of education have several functions:

- Building public support and understanding of public education. This means communicating and interpreting the school district's mission to the public, listening to the com-

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munity, and when appropriate, incorporating citizens' views into the discussions of the Board.

- Implementing state and federal legislation on the local level.
- Developing, implementing and monitoring the district's policies, including short- and long-term goals. These policies serve as the road map for the school district. They give direction to the administration and staff and become the foundation for accountability.
- Selecting, retaining and evaluating the superintendent of schools, who serves as the district's chief executive officer and implements board policy. Perhaps no single decision a board makes has more impact than the selection of the superintendent.
- Serving as the impartial hearing panel on such issues as termination, expulsion and grievance.
- Developing, approving and monitoring implementation of the budget. The budget provides resources for the educational priorities of the school district.

Effective boards and board members establish good working relationships with the superintendent and refrain from becoming involved in the day-to-day operation of the schools. *They remember that board members have no individual authority other than their vote at a formal board meeting. Outside of an official meeting, or unless otherwise designated by the board, an individual board member is an ordinary citizen, with no more authority than any other citizen.*

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## CABE Code of Ethics for Boards of Education

This is an abridged form of the CABE Code of Ethics, based upon "Standards of Leadership for Members of Boards of Education" recommended by the CABE Board of Directors.

*I will* be a staunch advocate of high quality free public education for all Connecticut children.

*I will*, as an agent of the state, uphold and enforce all laws, rules, regulations and court orders pertaining to public schools.

*I will* strive to help create public schools which meet the individual educational needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, gender, physical condition or social standing.

*I will* work unremittingly to help my community understand the importance of proper support for public education, whether it be in providing adequate finances, optimum facilities, staffing and resources, or better educational programs for children.

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*I will* join with my board, staff, community and students in becoming fully informed about the nature, value and direction of contemporary education in our society.

*I will* strive to ensure that the community is fully and accurately informed about our schools and will try to interpret community aspirations to the school staff.

*I will* recognize that my responsibility is not to "run the schools" through administration but, together with my fellow board members, to see that they are well-run through effective policies.

*I will* attempt to confine my board action to policy-making, planning and appraisal, and will help to frame policies and plans only after my board has consulted those who will be affected by its actions.

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## CABE Code of Ethics for Boards of Education

*I will* arrive at conclusions only after discussing all aspects of the issue at hand with my fellow board members in meetings. I will respect the opinions of others, and abide by the principle of majority-rule.

*I will* recognize that authority rests only with the whole board assembled in a meeting, and will make no personal promises nor take any private action which may compromise the board.

*I will* acknowledge that the board represents the entire school community, and will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interests or partisan political groups.

*I will* refer all complaints through the proper "chain of command" within the system, and will act on such complaints at public meetings only when administrative solutions fail.

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It is important to remember that decision-making authority is vested in the board of education, not in the individual members. Therefore, it is essential that members of the board of education be able to work well together to achieve their goals.

- Put children first
- Believe in public schools
- Maintain high standards of conduct
- Strive to reach consensus on difficult issues
- Accept criticism well
- Work out interpersonal conflicts appropriately
- Treat all individuals with respect
- Manage stress and stressful situations
- Maintain channels of communication
- Take responsibility for actions
- Focus on important issues
- Demonstrate honesty and sincerity
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills
- Value and seek challenges
- Maintain a sense of humor, and
- Above all, have the capacity to learn and grow as they recognize the scope of the responsibilities of service on a local board of education.

the common goal of providing the best possible education for the children in the community. There are certain skills and attributes which are consistently present in successful board of education members. Good board members:

School boards exercise their authority at board meetings. The effective school board member should exhibit a strong commitment to working with others on the board toward

### What are the Essential Attributes of a Good School Board Member?

To enhance your knowledge about the duties of a school board member and become better acquainted with public education in your community, you should attend board meetings, speak with board members and members of the community and/or attend to PTA/PTO meetings.

To become a school board member you must be a registered voter and not be employed by the board of education on which you serve. Your town officials can provide you with further information on candidacy. School board members serve anywhere from two to six year terms. Aside from approximately 10 districts which hold elections in May, school board elections are held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of odd-numbered years. In Connecticut, local and regional school boards vary in size from 5 to 13 members.

### So You Want to be a School Board Member?

#### Local Boards and CABE Services

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education provides professional development, legal information, policy development and maintenance, publications and advocacy for local and regional boards of education.

#### Board Development

CABE offers professional development opportunities for school board members through workshops and seminars conducted throughout the state, as well as facilitation for boards at the local level.

#### Policy Service

CABE's knowledgeable staff provides accurate, up-to-date information you need to develop and maintain a comprehensive manual of school board policies, administrative regulations and bylaws.

#### Advocacy

CABE is an advocate on behalf of boards of education in all legislative and regulatory arenas at the state and federal levels.

#### Publications

CABE's various publications provide school board members with information to enhance skills and to increase knowledge of the complex issues facing school boards.

#### Negotiations Service

CABE collects and provides salary and benefit information on superintendents, administrators, teachers, and other school district employees.

#### Legal Resource

CABE can provide answers to legal questions regarding laws and issues facing school districts and their board members.

CABE is an invaluable resource for candidates and new board members. We encourage you to take advantage of our extensive knowledge and experience.

For more copies of this information on how to become a candidate and the responsibilities of a school board member, contact: Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, 81 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109; Phone: 860-571-7446 or 800-317-0033; Fax: 860-571-7452; Email: admin@cabe.org; http://www.cabe.org

More than 1400 dedicated citizens guide Connecticut public school districts as school board members. Our public schools serve over 570,000 children and employ more than 60,000 people. Unlike some school board members in other states, Connecticut school board members receive no compensation for their service, receiving only the satisfaction that comes from providing an indispensable public service.

The local school board is a uniquely American institution. School boards derive their power and authority from the State Constitution and the statutes of the State of Connecticut. Accordingly, a local school board member acts as an agent of the state government with all the authority and limitations imposed by the General Assembly and the State Constitution. But, a board member also serves to connect the will of the community to the education of its children.

A local board of education has one of the most important responsibilities in our society – helping plan and deliver the education of the children in the community. Its decisions affect the lives of students and their parents, the livelihoods of those the district employs and the economic well-being of the community.

### The Local School Board - An Overview

*This publication will provide you with essential information and insights about the qualities and responsibilities of an effective board member.*

- *More than 1400 school board members serve their communities by working to improve the quality of education in Connecticut school districts. There are over 97,000 school board members in the U.S.*
- *If you believe you have the interest, dedication and competence to help guide your public schools, why not run for election to the school board? Now is the time to seriously consider it.*
- *School board membership is a challenging task, but an important one. For those of you who decide to accept the challenge, we wish you luck and offer our support.*

## So, You Want to Be a School Board Member?

### A Guide for School Board Candidates



*Our Mission: To assist local and regional boards of education in providing high quality education for all Connecticut children through effective leadership.*