

## School Board Service

### **The Local School Board - An Overview**

A local board of education has one of the most important responsibilities in our society - helping plan 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 is a uniquely American institution. Serving on a board of education is a crucial aspect of grass roots democracy and a heavy responsibility for the more than 97,000 individuals who serve on boards nationally.

School boards derive their power and authority from the State Constitution and the statutes of the State of Connecticut. Accordingly, a local school boards acts as an agent of the state government with all the authority and limitations imposed by the General Assembly and the state constitution.

More than 1400 dedicated citizens guide Connecticut public school districts. School districts serve nearly 500,000 children and employ more than 60,000 people. Unlike school board members in many other states, Connecticut school board members receive no compensation for their service, receiving only the satisfaction that comes from providing an indispensable public service.

### **So You Want to be a School Board Member!**

To become a school board member you must be a registered voter and not be employed by the district in which you live. Your town officials can provide you with further information on candidacy. School board members serve anywhere from 2 to 6 year terms. Aside from approximately 10 districts which hold elections in May, school board elections are held the first Tuesday in November of odd-numbered years. In Connecticut local and regional school boards vary in size from 5 to 13 members.

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 go to PTA/PTO meetings.

### **The Essential Attributes of a Good School Board Member**

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 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:

- Keep children first
- Maintain high standards of
- Manage stress and stressful

- Maintain high standards of conduct
- Accept criticism
- Treat all individuals with respect
- Maintain channels of communication
- Focus on important issues
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills
- Maintain a sense of humor
- Believe in public schools
- Strive to reach consensus on difficult issues
- Work out interpersonal conflicts appropriately
- Take responsibility for actions
- Are honest and sincere
- Value and seek challenges
- Get the information necessary to make good decisions
- 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.

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.

### **The Local School Board: Challenges and Rewards**

Serving on a school board is sometimes a challenge. The education of students is an extremely important issue for any community, so people 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-higher 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.

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 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.

## **What Does a School Board Do?**

Boards of education have several functions:

- Developing, implementing and monitoring of 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.
- Effective board members establish good working relationships with the superintendent. The board and individual members should refrain from becoming involved in the day-to-day operation of the schools and 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 citizen.
- Serving on various hearing panels on such issues as termination, expulsion and grievance.
- Building public support and understanding of public education. This means communicating and interpreting the school district's mission to the public and vice versa.

## **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, sex 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 finance, optimum facilities, staffing and resources, or better educational programs for children.
- 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.
- 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 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 interest 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.

### **Local Boards and CABA Services**

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education helps school board members by providing training, legal information, policy development and maintenance, publications and advocacy for local and regional boards of education.

- *Board Development*  
CABA offers professional development opportunities for school board members through workshops and seminars conducted throughout the state.
- *Policy Service*  
CABA's knowledgeable staff provides accurate, up-to-date information you need to develop and maintain a comprehensive manual of school board policies, regulations and bylaws.
- *Advocacy*  
CABA is an advocate on behalf of boards of education at all legislative and regulatory arenas at the state and federal levels.
- *Publications*  
CABA'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*  
Information on all aspects of school district labor and employee relations is collected and disseminated by CABA staff to strengthen a board's negotiating position.

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