



# Eight Key Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents

## What Is the Role of a School Board Member?

Understanding the roles of a school board member and the superintendent and how they function as a team can be difficult to discern. Yet, it is vital for the success of the board-superintendent team to clarify the responsibilities between the work of the board and the work of the superintendent. At a high level, the role of the board is to steer the ship and set the direction to guide the district. The superintendent, with the help of their staff, will then follow that direction—planning the best way to reach the goals or destination the board, collectively with the superintendent, has set for the district.

Board members are often "doers" in their communities, having served in parent-teacher organizations, Boosters, Scouts, and other groups. These "doers" are accustomed to taking action and enthusiastically helping with issues and opportunities. However, the work of a school board is one of governance and oversight of a single employee: the superintendent.

For example, when a board member is approached by a community member with a concern, it is tempting to jump in and help with the best of intentions. Instead, it is important to understand what board policy says about how to best help, which often means directing the community member to the lowest level where the issue can be resolved. If board members unintentionally "jump in" to help, they can complicate a situation for the staff or the district because they may not have all the facts. Legally, there may also be confidential details a board member simply cannot know.

Each board-superintendent team is unique. Therefore, it's important to spend time learning about board and superintendent responsibilities, and how the team can best work together to help the district achieve its mission. This clarity can help avoid conflict, which tends to arise when the team hasn't clearly defined roles and expectations for one another.

The following pages include high-level examples of the work of the board and superintendent outlined in eight areas. Conversation between the board and superintendent around each area will help identify possible grey areas for both which sometimes can lead to confusion or even tension. Open and ongoing communication, clearly defined roles and positive intent between the board-superintendent team are key to a good team relationship!

Although these distinctions provide important clarity around roles and responsibilities, the most effective school districts are those where the board and superintendent function as true partners in leadership. Success requires ongoing collaboration, mutual respect, and a shared vision, with both parties working cohesively toward the common goal of ensuring every student reaches their full potential and the district thrives as a whole.

<b>Role and Responsibility Area</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Superintendent</b>
<b>1. General</b>	Functions at a governance level	Oversees the day-to-day operations
<b>2. Policy</b>	Adopts policies	Recommends, creates procedures that support policy, and implements
<b>3. Meetings</b>	In charge of	Serves as a resource
<b>4. Student Learning</b>	Establishes goals and criteria, supports, and monitors	Recommends, oversees, monitors, and reports staff's efforts
<b>5. Budget/Finance</b>	Adopts and monitors	Prepares, administers, and monitors
<b>6. Personnel</b>	Establishes criteria, approves or rejects recommendation	Interviews, recommends, hires, directs, evaluates, promotes, trains
<b>7. Community Engagement</b>	Creates a positive image for and within the district	Creates a positive image for the district and directs communications
<b>8. Facilities</b>	Visionary with a long-term plan	Takes a long-term plan and puts it into action

## 1. General:

### **School Board:**

- a) Board-superintendent team works together, with the board understanding their role at a governance level. The board must recognize that their work at the board table is a model for everything that will happen within the district.
- b) Sets the direction for the district by establishing (or affirming) and communicating the district mission, vision, and long-term goals.
- c) Reflects on their work carefully, and asks themselves often, “Do we have a board policy that covers this topic?”
- d) Demonstrates trust and respect for the superintendent and for their right to have differing opinions with each other.
- e) Commits time for informal and formal learning, both at and away from the board table, to strengthen governance understanding and skill.
- f) Board members send questions to the board president and/or superintendent before board meetings to avoid what can be seen by the community and felt by others as a ‘surprise’ at the board table.

### **Superintendent:**

- a) Responsible for the overall operation of the schools, supervision of the instructional program and management of all personnel.
- b) Delegates authority to other staff members but has final responsibility for carrying out mandates of the board.
- c) Implements board policy.
- d) Demonstrates trust and respect for the board and for their right to have differing opinions with each other.
- e) Participates in quality professional development opportunities to increase professional knowledge and skills.
- f) Monitors learning needs of the board and provides materials and progress updates on district and superintendent goals.
- g) Keeps the line of communication open with board members to avoid surprises at or away from the board table.

## 2. Policy:

### **Board:**

- a) Adopts policies for governance and management of the school district.
- b) Reviews board policy at least once every five years as outlined by Iowa law. Understands the process for reviewing said policies.
- c) Reviews administrative procedures, rules and regulations which implement the board's policy.

### **Superintendent:**

- a) Advises the board in areas of policy development and revisions.
- b) Maintains up-to-date policies and ensures policies are accessible to staff and community members.
- c) Implements district policies put in place by the board.
- d) Develops and implements rules and regulations necessary to implement board policies.

## 3. Meetings:

### **Board:**

- a) Understands and complies with Iowa's Open Meeting Law.
- b) Meets together to discuss topics within the authority of the board and/or transact business.
- c) Performs all duties at officially scheduled meetings after providing advance public notice.
- d) Establishes policy that outlines operational procedures for maintaining order in board meetings, such as using Robert's Rules of Order, etc.

### **Superintendent:**

- a) Serves as an advisor to the board.
- b) Advises the board on Open Meetings Law. Assures compliance with all legal requirements relative to posting of notices, the scheduling and holding of meetings and maintenance of meeting records.
- c) Identifies areas of business the board must address at meetings.
- d) Implements board decisions and instructions developed at meetings.

## 4. Student Learning:

### Board:

- a) Relentless commitment that ALL children can learn at high levels!
- b) Establishes an education philosophy and goals for instructional programs of the district.
- c) Regularly reviews and discusses student achievement data and monitors progress toward student learning goals.
- d) Periodically receives and discusses reports from staff relative to assessments and instructional initiatives.
- e) Identifies and adopts graduation requirements.
- f) Adopts instructional materials recommended by licensed employees, as outlined in board policy.

### Superintendent:

- a) Advises the board on the educational needs of the students.
- b) Provides leadership to staff and board in continuous improvement and evaluation of the instructional program.
- c) Schedules periodic staff progress updates to the board on student learning goals and key staff initiatives.
- d) Recommends appropriate graduation standards and methods to measure attainment.
- e) Recommends policies to the board for the selection and adoption of curriculum and instructional materials.

## 5. Finance/Budget:

### Board:

- a) Establishes priorities for fiscal management of the district.
- b) Approves, adopts, and monitors the annual budget, including setting the tax rate.
- c) Reviews and approves contracts, bills, and purchases in accordance with board policy.
- d) Receives and reviews the annual audit report.

**Superintendent:**

- a) Leads the budget-building process and prepares a detailed budget based on the board's priorities and parameters.
- b) Administers the budget and assures that expenditures of district funds are within legal requirements.
- c) Seeks board approval for expenditures according to board policy.
- d) Oversees monthly financial report and presentation given to the board.
- e) Reports to board on grants, local, state, and federal funding.

## 6. Personnel:

**Board:**

- a) Hires and empowers the superintendent as the district's educational leader, conducting an annual review as required by law to measure growth in agreed-upon goals and the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL).
- b) Promotes good working relations with the superintendent and staff by following the district's chain of command as outlined in board policies.
- c) Ensures effective hiring processes are in place, personnel files are properly documented, and policy is adopted for employee evaluation.
- d) Receives and acts on personnel recommendations from the superintendent (not specific to an individual but to the position being staffed).
- e) Remains unbiased and serves as a neutral arbiter during student expulsion or staff termination hearings.

**Superintendent:**

- a) Recommends to the board the employment, dismissal, or other changes to certified and classified staff (e.g., promotions, transfers, and retirements).
- b) Supervises and leads all employees in the district.
- c) Establishes procedures for the recruitment, hiring and assignment of staff, and defines expectations for staff.
- d) Provides the board with staffing levels, including information on open positions and strategies to hire for hard-to-fill roles.
- e) Supervises the evaluation of all staff and evaluates administrators who report to them.
- f) Delegates authority to staff members as appropriate.

## 7. Community Engagement & Advocacy:

### **Board:**

- a) Advocates for public education!
- b) Maintains awareness of community values and interests.
- c) Helps community members understand and follow the appropriate communication channels as outlined in board policies.
- d) Supports the district in engaging families in their children's education.
- e) Represents and advocates for public education serving as a liaison between the district and the community.
- f) Establishes relationships with local legislators. Showcases the positive impacts the district is making on student achievement, and the community as a whole.
- g) Celebrates the district at every opportunity.

### **Superintendent:**

- a) Advocates for public education!
- b) Helps to rally the community around district goals and priorities.
- c) Informs the community about its schools.
- d) Recommends community relations activities.
- e) Works with parent groups and other organizations to share district programs and activities.
- f) Establishes relationships with local legislators and provides specific district information, such as budget, enrollment, and success stories.
- g) Establishes a working relationship with the news media and other city leaders.

## 8. Facilities:

### **Board:**

- a) Establishes policies for the appropriate use, operation and maintenance of school district buildings and grounds.
- b) Adopts policy governing the use of district facilities, grounds, and equipment.
- c) Approves the hiring of architects and other consultants when necessary.
- d) Decides on school closings or building/district consolidations.
- e) Receives progress updates and monitors facility plan implementation.

**Superintendent:**

- a) Provides proper guidance for upkeep of facilities and maintenance of equipment.
- b) Prioritizes long-range plans for buildings, equipment, and grounds.
- c) Collects information and makes recommendations to the board.
- d) Acts as an advisor to the board on the prioritizing, planning, and construction of projects.