



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 the team functions together 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 board's role 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 tend to be 'doers' in their communities. Many have served in parent-teacher organizations, Boosters, Scouts, etc. 'Doers' are accustomed to taking action and enthusiastically helping with issues and opportunities. However, the work of school board members is that of governance and to oversee one employee, the superintendent. For example, when board members are approached by a community member who has a concern or issue, 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 pointing the community member to the lowest level of where the issue has occurred. If board members 'jump in' to help, they can unintentionally make a situation more difficult for staff or the district, because they may not have all the facts necessary to address the issue. Depending on the situation, legally there may be details a board member simply cannot know.

Each board-superintendent team is unique, and it is important to spend time learning 1) board policy, 2) what the board's responsibilities are, 3) what the superintendent's responsibilities are, and 4) how the team can best function to support the district to reach its mission. Doing this can help avoid conflict, which tends to arise when the board-superintendent team haven't clearly defined their 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 will help identify possible grey areas, 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!

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

1. General:

School Board:

- a) Works together as a board-superintendent team, with board members 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) Represents and advocates for public education serving as a liaison between the district and the community.
- 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 which 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) Establishes relationships with local legislators. Showcases positive impacts the district is making for students, their achievement and the community as a whole.
- g) 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.
- h) Maintains relentless commitment that ALL children can learn at high levels!

Superintendent:

- a) Advocates for public education!
- b) Takes responsibility for the overall operation of the schools, supervision of the instructional program and management of all personnel.
- c) Delegates authority to other staff members but has final responsibility for carrying out mandates of the board.
- d) Implements board policy.
- 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) Establishes relationships with local legislators and provides specific district information, such as budget, enrollment and success stories.
- h) 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 that 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) Transacts all duties that must be performed at an officially called meeting with advanced public notice provided.
- d) Establishes, through policy, operational procedures for maintaining control of board meetings (i.e., Robert's Rules of Order).

Superintendent:

- a) Serves as an advisor to the board.
- b) Advises the board on Iowa's 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) Establishes an education philosophy and goals for instructional programs of the district.
- b) Regularly reviews and discusses student achievement data and monitors progress toward goals.
- c) Identifies and adopts graduation requirements.
- d) Periodically receives and discusses reports from staff relative to assessments and instructional initiatives.
- e) Adopts recommended instructional materials, from 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 development and evaluation of the instructional program.
- c) Recommends appropriate graduation standards and methods to measure attainment.
- d) Schedules periodic staff progress updates to the board on student learning goals and key staff initiatives.
- e) Recommends policies for the selection of curriculum and instructional materials as well as adoption of instructional materials to the board.

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 audit report from the auditor annually.

Superintendent:

- a) Leads budget process, preparing a detailed budget based on the board 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 to be the educational leader of the district. Conducts an annual review of the superintendent, as outlined by law, measuring growth in agreed upon goals, and 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, adequate documentation of employee personnel files and adopts policy for the evaluation of employees.
- 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 or dismissal of all certified and classified staff (promotions, transfers and retirements).
- b) Supervises and leads all employees in the district.
- c) Establishes procedures for the recruitment, hiring and assignment of staff, as well as defining expectations for staff.
- d) Provides the board with staffing levels, including open positions and strategies to hire staff for positions that may be difficult to fill.
- e) Supervises the evaluation of all staff and conducts or supervises evaluation of administrators under their supervision.
- f) Delegates authority to staff members as appropriate.

7. Community Engagement:

Board:

- a) Maintains awareness of community values and interests.
- b) Helps community members understand and follow the appropriate communication channels as outlined in board policies.
- c) Supports the district to meaningfully engage each family unit in the education of their children.
- d) Celebrates the district at every opportunity.

Superintendent:

- a) Helps to rally the community around district goals and priorities.
- b) Informs the community about its schools.
- c) Recommends community relations activities.
- d) Works with parent groups and other organizations to share district programs and activities.
- e) 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 use of district facilities, grounds and equipment.
- c) Approves the hiring of architects or other consultants as 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 in advisory capacity to the board in prioritizing, planning and construction.