

# School Board Member Job Description

Serving on American school boards is a vital and important aspect of our democracy. The governance of our local school boards by democratically elected men and women remains at the heart of our democracy and public education system. Every two years board members are elected by voters to serve four- or six-year terms on local school boards. These elected members are charged to sit in trust for all of their local communities. Our public schools are the ties that bind this diverse and pluralistic society into a nation. Only our public schools are prepared to serve, without reservation, all students in America and continue to enable Americans to be active participants in one of the world's oldest existing democracy.

So what is the "job description" of a school board member? What does he or she actually do? To understand what a school board member does also requires knowledge of what a school board members does *not* do: no single board member has any power outside of a legally called school board meeting. When a legally called school board meeting occurs, the school board sits in trust for its entire local community. Subject to some exceptions, a school board has all powers granted by the Michigan School Code, along with those that are necessary for the maintenance and development of the schools that the board controls.

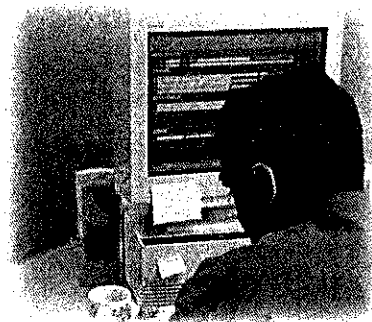
The board must also adopt and enforce all necessary rules for the management and governance of its school district. The board, however, can and does delegate many of its powers and duties to the superintendent through its board policies. With limited exceptions, each board must employ a superintendent who shall have charge of the school district's administration.

Michigan School Code directs that a school board shall make all decisions pertaining to the employment of the superintendent and direct through policy the superintendent in his or her charge of the administration of the school district. When a school board delegates its powers and duties in this way, it should ensure that the superintendent understands the board's policy directives and must be prepared to support the superintendent's recommendations. The school board will monitor this process as it evaluates the superintendent's performance.

In addition to duties enumerated in the Michigan School Code, good governance imposes the following responsibilities on the board:

1. The board clarifies the district's purpose
2. The board connects with the community
3. The board employs a superintendent
4. The board delegates authority
5. The board monitors performance
6. The board takes responsibility for itself

For more information on these responsibilities, please refer to the *Board Duties Under the Revised School Code*, which is available for purchase in our Online Store at [www.masb.org](http://www.masb.org).



# Why Board Members Serve

When MASB asked current Michigan school board members why they serve on school boards, they gave many reasons:

- "I can make a difference for the children of our district."
- "I serve to be fully accountable for what our school provides and doesn't provide."
- "I serve to be a voice in my community."
- "I serve because I want to see my district not only survive, but thrive in these hard economic times."
- "I serve to shape the lives of our future."
- "I serve, not only for the children, but for the taxpayers and the community. Good schools lead to good jobs and a secure community."
- "I serve because I like the challenge of finding ways to save money."



*School board members  
are important!*

More than 1.5 million Michigan schoolchildren enrolled in public schools depend on school board members who understand the importance of public education and are willing to serve their communities and sit in trust for those interests.

# Characteristics of an Effective School Board Member

While most school boards will be comprised of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, individual school board members can be more effective when they exhibit:

- **A thoughtful, sincere and deliberate approach to the position.** The effective school board member seeks first to understand the issues, knowing that their decisions have a tremendous impact on their communities.
- **A constructive attitude toward teamwork.** The effective school board member understands that he/she has no legal authority as an individual. It's only around the board table that decisions are made and a board member exercises any authority.
- **The willingness to spend the time necessary to be well-informed on the issues** coming before the local board and to remain reasonably knowledgeable about local, state, national and global education.
- **The ability to represent the entire community** and not surrender to special interest or partisan political groups. The "entire community" includes citizens who may not have a direct relationship with its public schools.
- **The temperament to respond accordingly and appropriately through challenging events.** Board membership is an immense responsibility, so the public actions and words of its members will impact the district, its image and integrity.
- **The willingness to listen thoughtfully to others.** Although board members can't be expected to agree with everything colleagues and constituents say, they're expected to listen respectfully to their opinions and concerns.
- **The willingness to express one's own opinion and participate in discussions openly and honestly** while encouraging and respecting the free expression of opinion by colleagues.
- **The maturity to respect the confidentiality of privileged information** and to take no private action that would compromise the board or administration.
- **The willingness to model continuous learning** by taking advantage of professional development opportunities, such as those offered by state and national school board associations.
- **The willingness to abide by and support the board operating procedures** as adopted by the board.
- **The ability to identify, recommend and encourage prospective candidates** and mentor new board members to become effective school leaders.

