

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

• *Where does the authority of a School Board originate, and what authority does it have in the district?*

Locally elected School Boards govern all school districts in Alaska. Boards have essentially the same kind of responsibilities and authority whether they are in REAAs or incorporated areas.

All School Boards operate under the authority and constraints of the U.S. and Alaska Constitution, federal and state statutes and regulations. Their ability to make decisions for their districts are impacted by the contents of those documents, as well as court decisions and local collective bargaining agreements with employees.

• *What is the primary function of a School Board and what are some of the powers and duties of the Board?*

The School Board's primary function is to provide each student with an education of the highest quality in keeping with his/her capacity to learn. The Board is ultimately responsible for school district operations, but the Board does **not** get involved with the day-to-day operations of the school. Rather, the Board sets the direction and goals and the administration decides how to get there.

The Alaska Legislature, through state statute, gives the Board power to oversee the schools. The Board has specific responsibilities to determine curriculum, employ a superintendent, and approve a budget. Policies outline additional responsibilities for Boards. Check your own district's policies to determine in what areas you should, and shouldn't be involved.

Boards have three primary functions: Governance, Executive and Judicial.

Governance functions provides for the Board to consider and approve or disapprove matters submitted to it by the Superintendent. In order to provide for continuity, and comply with laws and regulations, the Board establishes policies to govern district activities. Board bylaws provide a structure for the organization of the Board.

The Board exercises its executive functions through the superintendent who serves as the chief executive officer of the Board and is delegated the authority to carry out Board decisions. The Board retains ultimate responsibility for the performance of any powers or duties delegated.

The Board's judicial functions provides for it to serve as a body of appeal for grievances, complaints and criticisms in accordance with Board policies and negotiated employee agreements.

• *What is expected of a Board member?*

As a new Board member you will be asked to make decisions on major issues that affect the students and citizens of your community. You will be asked to vote publicly on matters that you may know little about. You need to take the time to learn about your job and the issues at the same time you are performing your job. Some of the activities you will be expected to do are: attend Board meetings, participate on committees, attend school functions, keep yourself informed about issues, pursue developmental

opportunities for yourself and interact with your fellow Board members and the superintendent. These activities require a significant amount of time, but it is time extremely well spent when you consider that you are helping to shape the future of the children in your community.

• ***How do I learn my job?***

A great deal of learning takes place “on-the-job,” as you prepare for, and participate in, each month’s Board meetings. Your local School Board should have an orientation process in policy. The superintendent and the Board president should arrange an orientation for newly elected Board members. The Association of Alaska School Boards also provides training opportunities, beginning in November at the Annual Conference where a daylong workshop geared to provide new Board members with a firm grasp of the fundamentals of Board service is offered. Other useful AASB workshops and academies are presented throughout the year and focus on such topics as labor relations, government relations, school law, school finance, special education, community engagement and Board leadership.

Most importantly, don’t hesitate to ask questions. Nobody expects you to have all the answers and most Boards and superintendents welcome the opportunity to get you up to speed. The AASB staff also serves as another resource to get answers to your questions. Our phone number (907-586-1083) and web site <http://www.aasb.org/> can get you pointed in the right direction and help you to sort out the issues with which you are wrestling.

• ***What do School Board members do?***

Lots. First, Your state and your community have entrusted you to provide for the education of children and youth. You are also responsible to oversee the financial well-being and operation of your school district. Everyone elected to the School Board has a responsibility to the community. Exactly what you do will be determined by how your Board functions. As a Board member, however, you are expected to take an active role on your Board, working with the other Board members to address education-related issues and make decisions.

To be an effective Board member you must first realize that you are part of a team. As a single member of the Board, you have no authority in the schools; the entire Board makes the decisions.

• ***What are the duties of the Board President?***

The Board president sets the tone for how the School Board will function. The president conducts the Board meetings, interacts with the superintendent and other Board members, serves as the Board spokesperson to the media and the public (unless someone else is identified to be spokesperson) and appoints standing and ad hoc committees and chairs. The president has all the rights of any member of the Board, including the right to move, second, discuss, and vote on all questions before the Board.

Other duties of the President include:

1. Call the meeting to order at the appointed time;
2. Announce the business to come before the Board in its proper order;

3. Enforce the Board's policies relating to the order of business and the conduct of meetings;
4. Recognize persons who desire to speak, and protect the speaker who has the floor from disturbance or interference;
5. Explain what the effect of a motion would be if it is not clear to every member;
6. Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the Board;
7. Rule on parliamentary procedure;
8. Put motions to a vote, and state clearly the results of the vote.

• *How do the School Board's responsibilities differ from the superintendent's?*

The School Board governs and the superintendent administers the district. The Board is responsible for setting policy and establishing goals for the school district. The superintendent works for the School Board and is the person who translates the policy into action. The superintendent and staff run the schools, making the day-to-day decisions that affect the operation of the school consistent with the goals and established by the School Board.

• *Where, or who, do I go for information about my role?*

The superintendent is a great source of information. The superintendent can usually provide answers to your questions on protocol or procedure, as well as issues facing the Board. Other Board members are also good resources, particularly the Board president. Board Bylaws and policy provide specific information about how your Board, and the District, works. AASB also is a good resource for information and has specialists on staff who can answer some of your questions, or point you in a direction where you can get answers. Check out AASB's web site www.aasb.org for in-depth information on issues affecting Alaska's schools.

• *How much time can I expect to spend on School Board responsibilities?*

The amount of time Board members spend carrying out their duties varies greatly from district to district. Some Boards hold regular meetings once a month, others meet twice or more each month. In the metro area, it is not unusual to have several functions a week to attend. Board members are also called upon to attend committee meetings, special meetings, and hearings as required, and to spend time reading Board materials and participating in professional development activities. On average, a Board member in Alaska can expect to spend 10-20 hours a month on Board activities, but some members will spend twice that. The amount of time you spend will be dependent on your district's meeting schedule and your own commitment to service. Like in a new job, the first few months will be a steep learning curve.

• *What guidelines should I follow to help me be an effective Board member?*

To be an effective Board member you must first realize that you are part of a team. As a single member of the Board, you wield no authority at all; the entire Board makes decisions. As a team member, you can increase your (and the entire Board's) effectiveness if you: 1) contribute ideas and solutions; 2) recognize and respect differences in others; 3) value the ideas and contributions of others; 4) listen and share information; 5) ask questions and get clarification; 6) participate fully and keep your commitments; 7) are flexible and respect the partnership created by a team – strive for the “win-win”; and 8) use Board Standards as your guidepost.

• *Some Boards have military delegates and student representatives. How are they selected and what do they do?*

If a city or borough school board operates a school on a military reservation, the Board is required to appoint one nonvoting **military delegate**. The delegate should receive non-confidential Board materials, attend public sessions of the Board, and advise the Board relating to the management and control of military schools. The military delegate may cast and have recorded in the Board minutes a preferential vote that is not counted in the Board vote.

A Board can appoint a **student member** in order to provide for student input and involvement. Student Board members would receive all non confidential Board materials, attend public sessions of the Board and cast and have recorded a preferential vote that is not counted in the Board vote.

• *How do I decipher all the educational jargon and acronyms I hear at each Board meeting?*

It is true there are a lot of abbreviations and acronyms for educational terms. A guide to education's acronyms is included in the [Alaska School Board Member Handbook](#) and the Annual Conference Program. For jargon or acronyms that are not included here, consider asking your superintendent or other Board members.

• *What is micromanagement?*

Micromanagement is a term used in business that describes a manager who is overly involved in tasks or details that should be handled by those who report to him. In the case of a School Board, "micromanagement" is used to describe a Board that becomes involved in the day-to-day operations of the school district rather than setting direction through goals and policies and letting the administration determine how to accomplish the goals. The Board's job is to **macromanage** by following Board Standards and holding itself, and the superintendent, accountable to Policy and the goals of the district.

• *What is the role of the Board when there are problems with an administrator or teacher?*

The only employee who answers directly to the School Board is the superintendent. If there is a problem with the superintendent, the Board needs to address the problem through its adopted evaluation process. If there is a problem with one of the administrators who reports to the superintendent, it is the responsibility of the superintendent to handle the issue. You should certainly let the superintendent know what you've seen or heard, but be very careful not to overstep the line into micromanaging the relationship with this administrator. If you don't feel that the superintendent has addressed the situation satisfactorily, you should raise the issue with your fellow Board members during the superintendent evaluation process.