



2023-24

Board Member Handbook



2023–24 Board Member Handbook



Vision & Voice for Public Education

Iowa Association of School Boards

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Vision & Voice for Public Education



CHAPTER 1: Getting on Board

Serving on your board is one of the most rewarding and important roles you'll ever play in your community.

Iowa board members tell us that being a school board member is a challenging and rewarding responsibility. This handbook can help you meet those challenges and realize ways you can contribute your time and talents to fulfill that responsibility. Please prioritize the time during your first year to work through each chapter and ask your superintendent and board team for help as you have questions.

As an elected board member, you are entrusted with the task of providing the direction for the education of the future citizens of your community. The board of education is a uniquely American institution dating from the earliest days of our country. It has made public schools flexible and responsive to the needs of students. Today's school board represents a continuing commitment to local citizen decision making in education.

School districts may choose to join the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB), a nonprofit membership association for Iowa public school districts and school board members. Membership in IASB provides many benefits, outlined on p. 81.

School Boards and Area Education Agency Boards in Iowa

Nearly 1,850 individuals serve on local boards in Iowa, guiding the education of more than 487,000 students in 325 school districts. Nearly 80 people serve on nine area education agency (AEA) boards, helping guide the future of these same students.

K–12 school boards may have five or seven members. They may be elected at-large, from director districts, or in several combinations of at-large and director districts, depending on the system locally adopted.

K–12 school board members serve four-year terms, and elections are held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in odd-numbered years. School board members in Iowa receive no pay. Their reward is the satisfaction they receive from public service.

Area education agency boards are made up of seven or nine members. The school boards from each member district vote to elect their representative AEA board members. Board members serve four-year terms, and elections are held subsequent to the November general election in odd-numbered years. AEA board members receive no pay. As for school board members, their reward is the satisfaction of public service.

Iowa board members come from all walks of life. They are business owners, working professionals, farmers, retirees, young parents and community members. They are Iowans. The common thread among them is their desire to serve the students, families and taxpayers of their communities.

Orienting to Board Work

If you are new to board service, this book will be a useful resource in learning about boardsmanship. If you are an experienced board member, it will be a good refresher or provide an opportunity to seek answers to questions. In addition, your superintendent/AEA chief administrator and experienced board members can acquaint you with your district's or AEA's unique strengths, challenges, programs and issues.

These discussion questions can serve as a basis for learning your role as a board member during your first year on the board and stimulate your board's thinking about school board service at any time.



Questions for Your Board

1. How does your board go about setting goals and objectives for the district or AEA?
2. What are the ground rules in your district or AEA for determining what is 'board business' and what is 'staff work'?
3. What process does your board use to evaluate the superintendent or AEA chief administrator?
4. How does your board ensure compliance with Iowa's Open Meetings Law when it addresses matters in closed sessions, and what types of information can legally be discussed in closed sessions?

Commit to Your Own Learning

As these questions show, the learning curve of boardsmanship is steep! To make the most of your time on the board, commit early to your own learning and development as a board member. Encourage your fellow board members to help you by engaging in discussions around any of the four questions.

Learning together is a great activity for any board. IASB offers many resources for building your skills and knowledge, from this handbook to the IASB website at www.ia-sb.org, to learning opportunities designed just for board members. IASB offers opportunities for board members to learn individually (conferences and webinars) and as whole boards at the board table (local board development, At the Board Table discussion tools, etc.). Your commitment to developing your own skills will be a model for the students and staff in your district or AEA.

The IASB Annual Board Awards Program acknowledges the extensive time and effort required of school board members who continually strive to expand their knowledge and skills for better board governance. Annual Board Awards highlight commitment to professional growth. Individual board members, board teams and superintendents/chief administrators/community college presidents can earn hours for awards through participation in IASB-led learning opportunities. Hours are earned from participation in educational activities and events, with 15 hours qualifying for an award. See www.ia-sb.org/annual-board-awards.

Where to Find Help

Whether you are a newly elected board member just learning the ropes or an experienced board member facing a new challenge, remember that you are not alone. IASB is your membership association. We are here to support you with guidance, information, services, advocacy, and learning opportunities. Your IASB team can help you or refer you to someone who can. Fellow board members can share their experiences about what worked and what didn't. Call us at (515) 288-1991 or email iasb@ia-sb.org.



CHAPTER 2: Being an Effective Board Member

The responsibilities of a board member require a wide variety of skills, knowledge and abilities.

Becoming a board member is the beginning of a learning process that will continue throughout your term. Some of the skills you'll learn through experience, others from fellow board members and the administration, and still others through workshops and seminars sponsored at the local, state and national levels. Being an effective board member requires a good understanding of the authority and responsibilities attached to school board service. This chapter highlights some of those major areas.

Local School Boards' Legal Authority

Board members are locally elected, non-salaried public officials. Satisfaction and respect are the rewards for helping to meet the educational needs of students and your community.

A school board operates as a corporate body. Individual members acting independently have no legal status or authority and cannot commit or bind the board by their actions. The courts have been called on many times to clarify the authority of local boards and have been consistent in determining that the powers and duties of the board must be exercised by the board as a whole. Both in theory and in practice, you are a member of a team.

As a corporate body, the board may conduct business only with a quorum present during a regular or special meeting.

Under Iowa law, the school board has the authority to appoint a School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) to make recommendations to the board (*Iowa Code 280.12*). Among other things, the board may utilize these recommendations to:

- Determine major educational needs.
- Evaluate progress toward educational goals.
- Maintain adequate administration, school staffing, personnel assignment policies,

teacher qualifications, licensing requirements, facilities, equipment, grounds, graduation requirements, instructional requirements, instructional materials, maintenance procedures and policies on extracurricular activities (*Iowa Code 280.14*).

- May include in the educational program additional courses, subjects or activities that fit the needs of students (*Iowa Code 280.3*).
- Maintain attendance centers based upon the needs of students and determine attendance centers for the district and the particular school each student will attend (*Iowa Code 279.11*).
- Employ a superintendent, teachers, principals, other licensed professional personnel and support personnel, and determine their salaries (*Iowa Code 279.12; 279.20; 279.21*).
- Act on recommendations to terminate the contract or immediately discharge any employee subject to the provisions of any applicable law (*Iowa Code 279*).
- Appoint a secretary and a treasurer (*Iowa Code 279.3*).
- Expel a student from school for violation of the rules established by the board or when the presence of a student is detrimental to the best interests of the school (*Iowa Code 282.4*).
- Fix the time and place of regular and special meetings (*Iowa Code 21.4*).
- Fill by appointment board vacancies occurring between elections (*Iowa Code 279.6*).
- Develop and adopt board policy governing all school district operations (*Iowa Code 279.8*).
- Become members of IASB and pay dues to the association (*Iowa Code 279.38*).
- Employ legal counsel (*Iowa Code 279.37*).
- Allow all just claims against the corporation (*Iowa Code 279.29*).
- Insure against loss of property (*Iowa Code 279.28*).
- Provide transportation services (*Iowa Code 285*).
- Acquire, hold, convey, lease, rent and manage property, real and personal (*Iowa Code 297*).
- Incur indebtedness when authorized by the voters of the school corporation (*Iowa Code 296.1*).
- Negotiate in good faith with representatives of local employee associations (*Iowa Code 20*).
- Comply with open meetings and public records laws (*Iowa Code 21; 22*).

Although the list is not comprehensive, it illustrates the authority vested in Iowa school boards.

Key Responsibilities: The Standards of Board Work

A school board is entrusted with one of the most important responsibilities—helping to shape the education of our children. Public schools across the country are being asked to raise the bar of academic achievement while remaining good stewards of the public’s investment in education. That responsibility demands sound knowledge and sets of skills in several areas

including leadership, school improvement, school finance and others. To help, IASB developed the Standards for Effective School Boards that describe the work of high-performing boards in six key areas. See the Standards on p. 8.

Traits of Effective Board Members

Effective board members have a number of traits in common, yet it is important to realize that these characteristics are not acquired instantly.

Knowledge, skills and experience are not enough. Board members must be open to learning new information and gaining new knowledge and insights. An effective board member understands the importance of representing and serving all of the district's students. Board work is not always easy; board members must possess courage and a conviction toward public education and the democratic process. Serving on a board takes a commitment to making important decisions and fulfilling responsibilities in all areas of board work.

In addition, an effective board member must have time and energy to devote to the work of the board, the ability to accept the will of the majority, respect for education as a profession and the ability to communicate well with others.

Another way to identify the effective board member is to observe the way in which board responsibilities are carried out. An effective board member makes every attempt to attend all board meetings and prepares for the meetings in advance by reading and analyzing the agenda and supporting information. Effective board members resist springing surprises at board meetings, abide by board policies and rules, and wait to make personal decisions until all the evidence is in and board discussion is over.

An effective board member strives to foster unity and harmony among the board and differentiates between problems that require board action and those which should be solved by the administration. This board member supports the superintendent's or chief administrator's authority, shares responsibility for board decisions, accepts and evaluates criticism and advice objectively, avoids personality conflicts and strives to improve personal boardsmanship qualities.

Teamwork Counts

Effective board members understand their role as a member of the governance team—the team that includes the board, the superintendent/AEA chief administrator, the board secretary, and others. Working together as a team means no one person is responsible—everyone is responsible—for the success of the governance team. Effective teams share these essential elements:

Common Goals: Members of a successful team share and understand common goals. The boards that get the most done are those that know they have a mission to accomplish together. They have discussed and agreed on a common understanding of why the board exists and the function it serves. Moreover, they share a common vision of the future they want for the district. While individuals on the board may not always agree on the best path to get to that future, their shared vision and mission help draw them together and aid decision making.

A Game Plan: Good teams are organized and know how they will deal with specific situations. Clear, specific strategies and tools make up a board's game plan. Your game plan might include specific goals for the year, adequate data and information upon which to base decisions, focused meeting agendas, policies, committee assignments, timelines for board responsibilities, and other tools.

Clearly Defined Roles: Every team member has an important role to play. Any good team knows the strengths of each member and takes advantage of those strengths. Some people are good at expressing themselves; others are good at organizing and conducting meetings; others might have a keen understanding of a complicated area such as school finance. And yet, the whole board has a shared responsibility in each of these areas. A board that is split into factions and focused on each other's weaknesses can fall into the trap of needing to win personal victories over important issues. Take some time to identify your board's strengths and agree on roles, relationships, and responsibilities. Some boards like to put this in writing. They make a list of what the roles of the board will be and agree on how they will operate well together.

Regular Board Self-Assessment: Effective teams assess how well they're doing and analyze what works and what doesn't for their team. That's why sports teams often watch post-game videos—to evaluate how they can improve for the next game. How can your board know how well it's functioning? The board can use a variety of options to review team performance; everything from a quick reflection at the end of a board meeting to a more formal self-assessment process conducted at the end of the year. Your board might use one of the IASB self-assessment tools and/or work with an IASB staff member to help select the appropriate tool and board self-assessment process.

Trust and Confidence: High performing teams have high levels of trust among their members. A few ideas to promote trust and confidence on your board team are to:

- Practice honest, open communication. Be tactful and non-threatening when disagreeing. Study how body language and phrasing can inhibit or promote teamwork.
- Avoid surprising each other, especially during board meetings. Send questions to your superintendent/AEA chief administrator before the meeting so they can be answered during the meeting in front of community members in attendance.
- Support each other! For example, in conversations, mention the contributions of others and be sure to thank them for their efforts.
- Find ways to work together on common educational goals. Committee work and discussion groups can build unity on the board.
- Take advantage of board development activities so your team can learn together and work from a shared understanding.

IASB Standards for Effective School Boards

The Standards for Effective School Boards provide a framework to describe excellence in school governance focused on student achievement as the board's primary responsibility. Based on

research and best practice, the standards can be used to guide board decision making at the board table, board team learning and board self-assessment in six governance areas.

Visit www.ia-sb.org/boardstandards for competencies and key indicators to help clarify your work.

The Standards

In pursuit of world-class education that results in high achievement for all Iowa students, effective school boards commit to these six standards:

1. **Visionary Team:** Operate as a visionary governance team in partnership with the superintendent.
2. **Student Learning:** Provide effective leadership for quality instruction and high, equitable student learning.
3. **District Culture:** Foster a culture that enables excellence and innovation.
4. **Policy & Legal:** Lead through sound policy, ensuring transparent, ethical, legal operations.
5. **Fiscal Responsibility:** Sustain and enhance district resources through planning and fiduciary oversight.
6. **Advocacy:** Advocate for public education and the needs of Iowa students.

Role of the Board President

The president is elected by the members of the board during the organizational meeting in odd-numbered years or at the annual meeting in even-numbered years to serve a one-year term of office. The fact that the person has been elected president does not remove their responsibility to vote and participate in the meetings and decisions. The president takes an active role in board decisions and is entitled to vote on all issues (*Iowa Code 279.1*).

The *Iowa Code* sets forth the legal duties of the president: “The president of the board of directors shall preside at all of its meetings, sign all contracts made by the board, and appear on behalf of the corporation in all actions brought by or against it, unless individually a party, in which case this duty shall be performed by the secretary” (*Iowa Code 291.1*).

As it is an extremely important position, the president of the board should be a leader who can draw the board together to function as a unit. The board president is often the spokesperson for the board with the media and community groups. The board president normally participates in creating and reviewing the agenda with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator prior to each meeting. The president, like all board members, must set-aside their own self-interests if the board is to function effectively and responsibly.

Electing a board president is a key responsibility for school boards and not one that should be taken lightly or ‘passed around’ based on seniority or popularity. Your board might consider setting criteria for electing the board president well before electing a president. Examples of

criteria might include the ability to act as a spokesperson for the board effectively, willingness to dedicate time to the demands of the office, ability to establish a strong working relationship with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator, ability to manage board discussions and ensure equity of participation, and skills to build teamwork among the governance team.

Role of the Superintendent/Chief Administrator

The superintendent or AEA chief administrator is the chief executive officer of the board. Although the superintendent/AEA chief administrator cannot vote on any issue, it is essential they, as chief executive officer of the school district or AEA, be present at all meetings, including closed sessions, as authorized by law.

In addition to the immediate members of the administrative staff, a board president or superintendent/AEA chief administrator may call on outside help to strengthen the operations of the board. IASB, the Iowa Department of Education, institutions of higher education and the AEA, as well as a wide number of professional and service organizations, may be asked for advice.

Role of the Board Secretary

The secretary of the board is appointed by the board. For local school boards, the secretary cannot be a teacher employed by the board but may be another employee or a citizen of the district (*Iowa Code 279.3*).

The duties of the secretary depend on the organization's job description of the position but are to include (*Iowa Code 291.6*):

- **Preservation of Records:** File and preserve copies of all reports made and all papers transmitted pertaining to the business of the corporation.
- **Minutes:** Keep a complete record of all proceedings of the meetings and of all regular or special elections in the corporation in separate books.
- **Accounting Records:** Keep an accurate accounting record of payments or electronic transfers from each fund and provide this record to the board on a monthly basis.
- **Claims:** Keep an accurate accounting of all expenses incurred by the corporation and present the same to the board for audit and payment.

“The secretary shall file monthly, with the board of directors, a complete statement of all receipts and disbursements from the various funds during the preceding month, and also the balance remaining on hand in the various funds at the close of the period covered by said statement, which monthly statements shall be open to public inspection” (*Iowa Code 291.7*).

Role of the Treasurer

The board appoints the board treasurer, whose duties depend on the organization's job description of the position.

“The treasurer shall receive all moneys belonging to the corporation, pay the same out only upon the order of the president countersigned by the secretary and shall keep an accurate accounting record of all receipts and expenditures. The treasurer shall register all payments and EFTs made and reported to the treasurer by the secretary, showing the number, date, to whom drawn, the fund from which each payment and transfer was made, the purpose and amount” (*Iowa Code 291.12*).

Role of the Attorney

Since federal and state law governs much of the action taken by boards, school and AEA boards often need legal advice. A school district or AEA may request legal interpretations and opinions from private legal counsel (*Iowa Code 279.37*). A school district or AEA may retain legal counsel whether or not a specific action is pending.

IASB encourages boards to establish a continuing relationship with legal counsel and recommends boards have a policy on access to legal counsel. Without prior board approval, this access may be granted to board presidents, superintendents/AEA chief administrators and board secretaries through delegation in board policy. When personnel issues arise, the board may need to select a different attorney from the attorney who has been advising the administration. In these situations, it is important to clarify which attorney represents the board’s interest.

It is beneficial to hire an attorney with experience in school law and with the operations of the organization. This may save hours of legal expenses spent on researching and gathering background information for a single case. The Iowa Council of School Board Attorneys (ICSBA), an affiliate of IASB, provides current developments in school law to Iowa school attorneys. ICSBA is also an affiliate of the National Council of School Attorneys.

Role of Committees

Many boards use committees to advise them on a specific task or issue. Committees develop a broad base of community involvement and use the talents of citizens with special interests and abilities. When a committee developed for a specific task or purpose submits its final report to the board, its function is complete, and the committee is dissolved. It is important to remember the board is the legal body governing an organization, and it cannot delegate its authority. No committee developed by the board can deprive the board of its legal authority.

An important note: Advisory committees and task forces established by law or created/ appointed by a board are generally subject to Iowa’s Open Meetings Laws (*Iowa Code 21.2*).

Participation in Meetings

Board members should try to attend and participate in every meeting of the board. A majority of the board must be present to constitute a quorum for the meeting (*Iowa Code 279.4*). Effective board members participate actively in the meeting by coming prepared to the meeting, listening, sharing opinions, asking questions and voting. It is every board member’s responsibility to participate by voting fairly and responsibly in all decisions.

When the Board Team is Divided

As a board team, your goal in decision making should be a compromise that is reasonably satisfactory to the entire board. Teamwork does not necessarily mean unanimous votes. There may be times when board members have strong minority opinions concerning the board's position on an important issue. Having differing views and votes is healthy and essential for good decisions. However, if opposing views keep your board from functioning as a team and supporting decisions once they have been made, they can be damaging to your effectiveness.

A divided board occurs when votes almost always split along factional lines, regardless of the issue. Here are some tips for rebuilding a divided board:

- Define your mission and vision as a board through planning, retreats or other processes. Help members see their part in reaching the vision.
- Select a president who can lead the group toward unity and cohesion.
- Ask board members from neighboring districts to sit in on your meetings and later relate their perceptions of your board's stumbling blocks.
- In difficult cases, consider getting an impartial third party (such as a mediator) to help your board work out conflicts or differences.

Few situations are more damaging to the board or to the organization than to have individual board members publicly working against an action of the board. Once a vote has been taken, dissenting board members should support the democratic process by supporting the majority decision.



CHAPTER 3: Exercising Board Leadership

Vision: More than a buzzword and a status symbol of business savvy. It's the heart of board leadership.

A first impression is often that the board has a shared vision, but ask yourself this: if someone recorded each board member separately talking about your district's or AEA's vision, how similar would your team members' descriptions be? A well-defined vision provides an opportunity to inspire and engage others to help the organization achieve its preferred future. It answers the questions: Given no limits, what would we want this district or AEA to be like five-to-10 years from now? What must we be able to provide for students in the future?

Sharing a vision goes beyond repeating buzzwords such as 'Every student learns citizenship skills,' or 'Our schools are the best in the state.' It means having clear answers to deeper questions that evolve from those broad statements. What are citizenship skills? How will you, as a board, know whether students are learning citizenship skills? What does 'best in the state' mean? Does it mean best test scores, best buildings, best extracurricular program? What will you do as a board to ensure the organization is moving toward the vision? This depth of shared understanding comes only from talking about the ideas, discussing, deliberating, listening and building consensus.

An important test for any vision is its focus on excellence and equity. Does your vision include each student learning at high levels? If it doesn't address the needs of all students, you limit the organization's potential.

There isn't a strict formula for writing a vision. Some examples are several pages long; others are a few short paragraphs or sentences. The important thing is that the vision works for your board and community.

Sound vision statements share some common ingredients:

- **The vision is clear and compelling.** The language is specific and descriptive enough to evoke a clear image of the best the organization can become.
- **The vision inspires.** A vision statement is no time to be 'practical.' Dare to dream! Your vision should come from the heart and express with great optimism your ideals, values and

aspirations for the organization. Assume that anything is possible. The time to be practical comes later as the district formulates plans and strategies to lead toward the vision.

- **The vision is worth taking risks.** As a sense of destination shared by people who care, a vision should be something for which the board will take a stand and a risk. A good vision challenges and stretches everyone in the organization.
- **Ideally, the vision is shared,** developed with widespread input so that it belongs not only to the board, but to the community as well.
- **The vision evolves.** The best vision is one that isn't carved in stone.

Your vision of the best possible future should change as your team learns and times change.

Establishing a Vision

There is no one-size-fits-all vision for school districts or AEAs. Your vision should be as unique as the people, community and resources you have. The reason visions have meaning and impact in a community is because of the ownership that emerges as people develop it. Because they own the vision, the community and staff are willing to take actions and support changes to ensure the vision becomes a reality. These steps can help increase widespread input and ownership in the district's vision.

- Consider using a facilitator from outside your community to ensure objectivity in the process. IASB and other organizations can facilitate vision planning processes. Contact IASB for details.
- Involve the community and staff. Let them know their voices will make a difference.
- Consider using face-to-face meetings, forums, and/or surveys to gather community and staff input. Typically, a small work group or committee can then use the input to develop a draft vision statement to share and review.
- Approve the final vision at the board table.
- Follow up and share the vision with participants and others in your community so they see the results of the process.

How Will Vision Make a Difference?

Your efforts to develop a vision will begin to pay off when the vision is central to the board's decision making at every meeting. According to Larry Lashway of the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Educational Management, "No matter how inspiring it sounds on paper, the dream will wither unless it takes concrete form in policies, programs and procedures. At some point, curriculum, staffing, evaluation and the budget must feel the imprint of the vision, or it will gradually lose credibility."

- With every board decision, ask: How does this get us closer to our vision?
- Ask and answer that question out loud during your meetings so the community sees that the board's decisions focus on the vision.

- Build planning processes, goals and objectives around the vision.
- Ensure that your organization identifies measures of success—how will you know when you are successful in reaching the vision?
- Improve accountability by regularly sharing progress with staff and the community.
- Establish a process to review and revise your vision statement so it remains relevant and vital.

Beyond Vision: Benefits of Planning

As the tips above suggest, the best vision is only a dream unless action occurs to support it. Districts and AEAs often use written plans to coordinate efforts to achieve the vision. Planning efforts include several facets.

The mission statement identifies the ongoing purposes of the organization. It answers the questions: Why do we need this organization? What distinguishes this organization from others like it?

Your district's philosophy is a basic set of beliefs about education. It answers questions such as: What do we know is true about education? How will this education be best accomplished? What is the worth of this education? What values are core to our educational process?

Goals are general statements that, if accomplished, will help you reach your vision.

Goals answer the questions: What opportunities will the organization offer to students? What will graduates be like? What will they be able to do? What will the organization do differently?

Strategies and objectives are specific steps to accomplish your goals. Developed and recommended by the superintendent/AEA chief administrator and staff leadership, they answer the questions: What will be done? Who will do it? When? How much will it cost?

Techniques will vary, although most planning efforts involve a basic cycle:

- **Assess:** Determine needs, review research on best practice strategies and reflect on where you are today and what needs to change.
- **Planning:** Set goals, strategies, objectives and indicators of progress.
- **Implementation:** Put your plan into action.
- **Evaluation:** Assess how well the goals have been accomplished, which leads back to more reflection.

While many written plans may cover multiple years, they should be updated annually to reflect progress and evolving needs. Continued involvement by community groups and new members of the board helps to ensure continuity.

Planning Resources

IASB offers customized planning workshops to assist boards in articulating the vision they wish for the future of their organization and in determining what central beliefs influence the decision-making process. This program can be extended to include the creation of a mission statement and goals for the organization. In addition, many AEAs work with school districts in this important process, as do private consultants. Contact IASB or your AEA for assistance or a referral, or visit www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/board-development.

Bringing a Vision to Life

The benefits of a written plan:

- **Guides** decisions and allows board members to ask about any topic: “Will this action bring us closer to our vision?”
- **Builds** understanding and support by clearly stating for stakeholders where the organization is headed.
- **Clarifies** the board’s expectations for the superintendent/AEA chief administrator and staff.
- **Helps** ensure continuity during changes in the board or personnel.
- **Assists** in meeting requirements of Iowa laws for boards to determine educational needs, develop long-range goals and plans to meet the needs, and evaluate and report progress.

Making Decisions that Make a Difference

When your organization’s superintendent/AEA chief administrator or staff leadership proposes a significant change or a new activity to improve student learning, you want to make an informed decision. By asking good questions about the proposed activity or initiative, you can get information to help inform your decision and ensure that the change takes the organization where the board has agreed to go. For best results, it helps to have a standard set of questions your board uses when considering significant instructional or programmatic changes.

For example, your board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator might consider using a few of the following questions as a framework for staff presentations and discussions with the board regarding proposed initiatives or professional development activities. Your board team can ask the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to share the questions your team has identified with staff well in advance so they can ensure their presentation addresses the key questions and information needs identified by your board team.



Questions for Your Board

1. How does it help fulfill our mission?

2. What kind of professional development is needed for staff to implement the change?

3. How much funding is needed to support this action or initiative in the first year? What are the long-term budget implications?

4. What policies will be affected?

5. What does educational research show us about the success of this type of change?

6. When and how often will progress reports be shared and discussed with the board?

Discussing the answers to these questions at board meetings can help clarify to both the board and the public the change, the rationale, and the anticipated benefits. Your board has a great opportunity through these discussions to ensure the changes align with the vision and student learning goals, are adequately supported, include accountability steps and serve as a communication pathway with the public about student learning needs and changes intended to address them.



CHAPTER 4: Keeping Students First

School districts and AEAs have the primary responsibility of ensuring high and equitable student learning for all students.

Until the 21st century, the prevailing thought was that school boards are too distant from classrooms and schools to influence instruction and student learning. After all, school board members don't interact with students and teachers on a daily basis, so how can school boards make a difference? Over the last two decades, research on the role of school boards has led to increased clarity on the opportunity and responsibility boards have to make decisions that directly correlate to improved outcomes in student learning. As they operate independently in the course of a school day, boards have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to affect the conditions within their school district and empower staff to improve instruction and outcomes for students.

Most board members say they ran for the school board to have a positive impact on student achievement. A key challenge for board members and superintendents is learning the attributes of an effective school board and how those attributes can build a unified commitment to achieve the highest possible outcomes for the children entrusted to your care.

Based on key research, you will find throughout this chapter an emphasis on the attributes of leadership from the board-superintendent governance team. The board's decision-making authority is only exercised as a collective at the board table and directly impacts student learning. These leadership attributes will deepen your board's collective knowledge and challenge your board to identify and take the required steps to strengthen leadership at the governance level.

Roles & Attributes of Effective School Boards

The following 12 attributes have emerged across multiple bodies of research over the past two decades in regard to the board's role as it relates to student learning. The first five attributes below, known as the *Key Roles of the Board*, are from *The Lighthouse Study*, IASB's groundbreaking research study on student learning.

1. Sets clear high expectations and goals.

Studies have shown that boards with high expectations regarding their commitment to improved student learning have seen significant gains. These boards have made a firm commitment to overcome the status quo, seek equity and excellence, and work actively to build commitment to their vision, even in the face of adversity. It is powerful for board-superintendent teams to set the standard of high expectations for all students and communicates those expectations to the district and community. The board puts its commitment into action by:

- **Consistently communicates high expectations.** The board ensures that high expectations for student learning are explicit in district statements of vision, mission, beliefs, standards, benchmarks and a challenging curriculum, and that these expectations are evident in the words and actions of board members, administrators, staff and teachers.
- **Establishes or approves goals and indicators of progress.** The board sets the expectation for priority goals to be based on:
 - » Engaging administrators and staff in the goal-setting process.
 - » Using data and information to identify the greatest student learning need(s).
 - » Focusing on improving instruction and student learning in the areas of greatest need.
 - » Identifying a narrow number of specific, measurable student learning goals and indicators of progress.
 - » Establishing a plan for staff evaluation as an indicator of progress toward student learning goals and making any necessary adjustments.
 - » Reporting progress to the staff and community on a regular basis.
- **Focus on improving instruction.** The school board ensures that the key strategy for focusing on improvement in student learning is improvement in classroom instruction, as research is clear that quality instruction has the greatest impact on student achievement.

2. Supports conditions for successful teaching and learning.

The board has a duty to match expectations for improvement with the supports needed to produce results. The board creates the conditions for success by:

- Showing commitment in board actions and decisions to allocate resources, ensuring that all parts of the system are aligned around the learning needs of students.
- Providing support for quality, research-based professional development for teachers to collaborate with each other to improve instructional skills.
- Supporting and connecting with districtwide leaders at the board table to build broad-based commitment and focus throughout the system.
- Staying the course by allowing time for improvement efforts to succeed and addressing roadblocks along the way.

3. Holds the system accountable for student learning goals.

The board monitors progress to achieving the goals by:

- Using quality data extensively for decision-making and planning, both at the board table and throughout the system.
- Understanding and agreeing to clear indicators as evidence of progress and success.
- Monitoring progress through regular, solution-oriented, supportive conversations at the board table with staff leaders on both successes and areas in need of improvement.

4. Builds collective commitment to achieve goals.

The board plays an essential role in creating a commitment and the collective will to achieve improved results throughout the staff and community. The board fulfills that role by:

- Creating widespread awareness and urgency of the moral purpose for improvement that meets the needs of students and society.
- Instilling hope that change is possible, using research-based practices that produce improved results for students.
- Connecting with families, businesses, civic and social organizations, churches and government agencies to engage in frank discussions, share challenges and successes, and provide information and data in an ongoing effort to encourage each sector of the community to fulfill its responsibility.

5. Learns together as a board-superintendent team.

In its goal to achieve long-term improvement, the board-superintendent team must have deep discussions about the implications of learning your governance role in the context of school improvement, gaining big picture understanding and background, and networking with other boards to learn from their successes and obstacles. To fulfill this important role, effective school boards:

- Establish board learning time, commit agenda time around school improvement efforts, and learn together in the context of the district's goals and improvement initiatives.
- Engage in deep conversations about the implications of their learning to build a shared focus through information and discussion.
- Build a trusting and supportive relationship with the superintendent, in which both the board and the superintendent develop a willingness to lead and nurture the leadership roles of each other.
- Lead through policy development, based on shared learning, to build momentum for change and to embed expectations for improvement in the culture of the system.

These seven additional attributes have developed from multiple studies on board leadership, providing further insights into effective board leadership for student learning:

1. Agrees on board and superintendent roles and responsibilities.
2. Conducts board and district business in a fair, respectful and responsible manner.
3. Models effective governance as a collaborative team.
4. Maintains a focus on districtwide improvement efforts and goals.
5. Commits to continuous improvement.
6. Conducts board self-assessments.
7. Demonstrates strong relationships, using positive interpersonal skills to conduct productive meetings.*

*The last attribute emerged from a 2014 study led by Lee and Eadens. Researchers observed 115 school board meetings of districts with high and low student achievement. They found significant differences between behaviors of boards in high-performing districts and low-performing districts across these elements of board meetings:

- Orderly meetings.
- Student learning as a priority.
- Respectful and attentive engagement with speakers (staff, community and guests).
- Priority given to district issues rather than individual board member agendas.
- Effective relationships between the board-superintendent team.
- More frequent requests for input from the superintendent.
- Individual board members minimizing the use of board meetings as a personal podium.

Putting it All Together: Setting Robust Student Learning Goals

Sample Board Discussion Questions

IASB strongly encourages board-superintendent teams to discuss thoughtful questions that are an integral element of an effective board-superintendent leadership team striving to enhance district efforts to aim for and achieve ambitious student learning goals. Consider how these questions might help reinforce your board team’s understanding of how to establish, monitor and discuss progress reports, and how to share that information with the public.

1. What major learning needs and goals have been identified for our students? What evidence do we have that these are the major student needs?
2. What are the essential elements of our district’s improvement plan to address the major student needs or goals?

3. How has or how will our district build the collective understanding of the community about major student needs and community involvement in the decision-making process as appropriate?
4. Do we have a board policy on developing and implementing curriculum (including rigorous student learning standards), improving instruction or professional development intended to improve instruction? What key guidance do our policies provide and how well are we following our policies?
5. How rigorous and challenging are our district's student learning standards? How do we know?
6. What data and information do we have, or will we be watching, to know the impact of these learning standards and classroom instruction on student achievement?
7. What is our plan to report progress to the board and community?

Setting Ambitious Student Learning Goals & Complying with State Requirements

Most board-superintendent teams want to set and pursue robust goals that make a difference for all students. A district can become energized by ambitious student learning goals that inspire staff, students and the community to sit up and take notice!

It is critical that the board-superintendent team meet state expectations while working toward these goals. A board-superintendent team that embeds the roles and attributes of effective boards together with a strong knowledge of state requirements should have a workable plan to set robust goals to improve outcomes for students.

Although state requirements may sometimes have the unintentional consequence of focusing your team's attention on meeting the minimum expectations, boards can rise above this by using the information from this chapter to engage the board in setting robust district goals that are achieved through effective, governance-level leadership.

Successful board-superintendent teams look for ways to weave in these state elements of goal setting:

- Determine major student needs.
- Establish short- and long-term student learning goals.
- Involve the community as appropriate.
- Determine and implement an improvement plan and regularly report progress to the community along the way. This should become an asset to the process instead of being perceived as steps to navigate through or around.

IASB believes that the most appropriate way to address state compliance is for the board-superintendent team to determine ways to ensure the district fulfills state requirements of the Department of Education.

District Administrative and Staff Leadership—Determining Operational Direction

Another critical element of achieving ambitious, robust district improvement goals is to implement a coherent, strategic action plan. Although IASB believes it is primarily the work of administrators and staff leadership to determine action steps to achieve student learning goals, the board should understand the major elements of the staff’s plan to achieve its goals and engage with administrators at the board table for regular progress reports.

IASB encourages boards to learn about the big picture elements of the staff’s work and not all the details. If the board goes too deeply into staff action plans, it can be distracted from the intended governance-level leadership and invite micromanaging of the action plan. The staff’s role in determining action steps to achieve student learning goals is an important nuance and is affirmed by research over the past three decades regarding effective school boards.

The information below is included to enhance board awareness and to stimulate whole-board learning and discussion at the board table.

The Work of Administrators & Staff Leadership—District Goals & How to Achieve Them

- Determine actions the district shall take to accomplish long-range and short-term goals.
- Consolidate state and federal resources to implement improvement plans and actions.
- Develop strategies to collect data and information to determine progress.
- Establish a districtwide assessment plan.
- Assess progress of student learning on the state indicators and use three performance levels.
- Provide evidence that the board has approved and supports the five-year comprehensive school improvement plan.
- Submit the comprehensive improvement plan to the state Department of Education.
- At a minimum, provide an annual progress report on student learning to the community.

We hope you’ve noticed throughout this chapter the intentional emphasis on the actions of the board as a whole. While the actions and behavior of individual board members can influence happenings in school districts, much of the key research regarding successful school boards and student learning centers on the leadership of the whole board and superintendent team.

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CHAPTER 5: Developing Sound Board Policy

Board policy is part of the planning, policy and management structure that will move you toward your vision.

Written board policy demonstrates that the organization is managed in a businesslike manner. It informs everyone of the board's intent, goals and objectives. It fosters stability and continuity when board members and personnel change, and it informs your community by providing clear-cut, thoroughly researched and planned solutions.

Iowa Code 274.7; 279.8 places the authority to develop and adopt policy for a school district in the hands of the school board. The state educational standards, which set the requirements for an accredited education program, require the board to adopt and maintain a board policy manual. They also require a school board to review its policies every five years.

Policy

A well-constructed written board policy translates an action idea into a written statement. The policy states what your board wants to achieve or have happen and why. A guideline to follow in making policy is, "If the issue or area of concern is one only the board can change and determine, it is policy. If the issue or area of concern is one the administration can change, it is administrative regulations." One example of board policy is determining the level of public participation in board meetings. They are the board's meetings and, therefore, the administration should not determine how the board conducts its meetings.

Administrative Regulations

Well-written administrative regulations set forth the mechanics and the step-by-step procedures for implementing the board's written policy statements. All administrative regulations must be written pursuant to an established board policy. Administrative regulations prescribe how, when and by whom the action the board desires will be carried out. Generally, the board delegates to the administration the responsibility for developing rules, regulations, procedures and standards

for operating within the written board policy framework. While board approval is not required, the board should regularly review administrative regulations to determine if they meet the spirit and intent of the board policies. One example of administrative regulations is the student handbook, which sets out detailed procedures for student conduct, attendance and other issues.

Another example of the relationship between written board policy and administrative regulations is shown below. A policy may state as follows:

School district facilities will be made available for a fee to local nonprofit entities. Use of the school district facilities will be permitted only when it does not interfere with or disrupt the education program or school-related activities.

This board policy is clear. The board wants to make the school district facilities available to the local community as long as the main purpose of the facilities—to deliver the education program—is not obstructed. While the action the board wants to occur is clear, how the action will occur must be defined in administrative regulations.

Administrative regulations would properly address the following questions:

- Who should the public contact?
- When should the request be made?
- Who is responsible for the care of the building?
- Should school personnel be available during use?
- What is the amount of the fee?
- When is the fee to be paid?
- What type of insurance proof should be required?

These illustrate the role of board policy in setting the action to occur and the role of administrative regulations in making the action happen. The administrative regulations supporting this policy might state:

- Requests to use a school facility should be made to the central administrative office at least one week in advance of the desired date.
- The central administrative office shall check with the building principal of the attendance center involved to determine if there is conflict with school activities.
- If there are no school activities in conflict, the central administration may reserve the room for the requesting organization subject to school district rules on facilities use.
- A member of the custodial staff shall be present during the use of the facilities.
- The school custodial staff shall be responsible for the setting up and taking down of any necessary chairs, tables, or other necessary equipment.

- A fee of \$60 will be charged for use of the building, payable at the time of use.
- Proof of insurance must be on file with the central administrative office prior to the use of the facilities.

In summary, written board policies are action statements clear enough to show your board's intent and broad enough to allow flexibility in their implementation. In the example above, the board policy would remain in place and require no change if the administration raised the fee to cover increasing costs. Administrative regulations may be changed by the administration and achieve the result intended in board policy without requiring a corresponding change in the board policy.

Policy Development

Just by looking at your board's policies, you'll begin to understand that policymaking is tough work. It requires careful study and deep thought. But through policy, especially once a sound and current policy is in place, the board creates an efficient and effective education program and school district operation.

Generally, the idea that a policy statement is necessary comes about because of a problem, issue, need or change in the law. The policy idea can be brought to the board's attention by a board member, an employee, a student, a parent or a citizen.

Once the problem, issue or need is recognized by the board as requiring written direction from the board, timelines are set, and the board takes steps to adopt the policy. Several options are available to the board to draft policy. The board may:

- Draft the policy itself.
- Use a board committee to develop a recommended policy for the board to consider.
- Use a board ad hoc advisory committee composed of persons with knowledge of the specific policy area or persons who may be affected by the policy. The committee may include board members, administration, certified and noncertified personnel, students, parents, and community members. It is important to include diverse views at the table.

Generally, boards choose one of the options below for the policy development process to keep the manual current. For a fee, IASB provides a policy subscription service and conducts side-by-side policy manual reviews for member districts. Regardless of the method chosen, the board will require information about the need for policy development.

The following list indicates sources for obtaining information when analyzing current policy:

- Review board minutes and administrative actions relating to the proposed policy.
- Obtain copies of other organizations' policies and, if possible, their administrative regulations.
- Consult IASB Policy Services. For more information, visit **www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/policy-legal-corner**.

- Consult the *Iowa Code* and Department of Education regulations for mandatory, permissive and prohibitive directives.
- Consult with the organization's attorney.

As part of the information gathering phase, organizations, personnel and other groups affected by the policy are contacted for their views, which helps in preventing problems and criticism later. The key is making the group understand the board is gathering information and the group is not dictating the board's action.

The board, after reviewing the information, must agree to the basic elements and direction the new policy will take to meet the needs of the school district. The administration then drafts a policy statement reflecting these key factors.

Policies developed by the administration are returned to the board for discussion, additions or changes. Depending on the nature of the policy, the board may ask an attorney to review the recommended policy. Once the board feels comfortable the policy accomplishes what it intended, the policy is adopted. Most board policies require at least two readings at board meetings before adoption, providing two opportunities for community input. Some comments may require changing the policy. At the second reading the board adopts the policy, which is entered into the policy manual.

Updating Policy

Educational standards require boards to review their policies at least every five years (*Iowa Administrative Code* 281–12.3(2)). Laws change, needs change and communities change. When policies are updated, the same format is used to ensure consistency in the location of the title, the adoption and revision dates, the code number, legal references and policy cross-references. Policy cross-references enable the user to obtain a full picture of the board's position on an issue. Legal references assist board members in finding legal support for the board's action. Whether hard copy or online, it is important that the manual is easily accessible.

Deviation from Policy

Well-written policy will stand the test of different demands and variables, yet it is almost impossible to foresee every situation for which policies are needed. Sometimes it is difficult to apply a well-written policy evenly under extreme situations. For instance, transportation policies may deviate due to weather, fuel shortages or equipment breakdowns. New policies become necessary due to changing times or changing community attitudes. If your board finds it is deviating from policy, it is time to study the old policy, determine why the deviation is occurring and either modify the policy or the pattern of deviation.

The hard work and effort required to develop and maintain a well-written policy manual pays off because it can head off a crisis and minimize legal risk.



CHAPTER 6: Board Meetings

*It is through board meetings
that your board fulfills its function
and responsibility for public education.*

Your board meetings are a way to conduct the board’s business, to show your community you are accountable and to communicate the successes and needs of the district or AEA. The public interest can be served best when all or, at the very least, a majority (quorum) of the board members gather to decide the course of action for the organization.

Working in the Open

Iowa law requires all governmental bodies, including school or AEA boards, to perform their official functions in the open. That law, Chapter 21 of the *Iowa Code*, is part of Iowa’s “sunshine laws,” intended by the legislature to ensure that the public has open access to government decisions and information. Some board members who have felt the heat of tackling tough decisions in front of a crowd know that conducting business in an open, public meeting can be awkward. However, open meetings serve both the board and the public. They allow the public to know what decisions are being made about students’ education and how public funds are spent. Open meetings can also improve public relations because they offer an opportunity for public input. Advisory committees created by statute are also subject to the law.

To make the most of open meetings, know and follow the law. Then, go the extra mile to ensure that your public knows you want openness. IASB offers many materials to help you grow in your understanding of the Iowa Open Meetings Law, including documents available online at www.ia-sb.org/openmeetings, and breakout sessions at the IASB Annual Convention. The law is complex, but ignorance of the law is not an excuse if the law is broken.

Iowa's Open Meetings Law At-a-Glance

Which education boards are subject to the Open Meetings Law?

- School boards.
- Area education agency boards.
- Community college boards of trustees.
- State board of education.

Which board advisory committees must comply?

- Advisory committees created by statute.
- Advisory committees created or appointed by a board to develop and make recommendations on public policy issues.

What is a meeting?

- A gathering;
- Of a majority of the board; and
- With deliberation or action upon any matter within the scope of the board's policymaking duties taking place.

Can meetings ever be closed to the public view?

- Only under certain, very specific criteria under the law.
- Only when very specific procedural requirements are followed.

Knowing the Law

Your superintendent/AEA chief administrator, board secretary and attorney should be well-versed about the Open Meetings Law and its requirements for your board. However, don't just rely on them. As a board member, you need to understand this law, too. Highlights of the law are printed in this chapter. For a more in-depth explanation, see Appendix C, p. 94.

Knowing your board's own policies is also imperative, such as those on public participation in board meetings and public hearings, setting meeting agendas and going into closed session. These policies must comply with the Open Meetings Law.

Going the Extra Mile for Openness

Although you may sometimes be uncomfortable making tough decisions in front of a crowd, remember that your goal is to build public understanding and support for your schools. You'll find it even more uncomfortable if, after a decision is made, citizens complain they weren't

involved or were unaware. Going beyond the letter of the law to build an open, trusting relationship with your community can have big community relations benefits.

Consider the following tips:

- It is a legal requirement that people know when and where you hold your meetings, and that the facility is accessible. Adhere to a regular meeting date and time as much as possible. Send agendas to schools, parent organization leaders and the media. Have them posted in local libraries, community centers or other places people gather. Make sure the agenda is clearly written so people can understand the topics being discussed. The agenda must be clear and posted under Iowa's Open Meetings Law.
- Be alert for agenda items that interest associates and friends and invite them to attend so they can hear the discussion.
- Get to your meetings early and mingle with people in the audience. Introduce yourself to people you don't know. Ask them if they have any questions about the agenda or meeting procedures.
- Have a 'welcome to our board meeting' brochure available for the public. The brochure should include procedures for addressing the board.
- Encourage community organizations to send representatives to your meetings so they can report back to their membership.
- If you have appointed a committee to make recommendations on a topic, ask the committee chair to formally present the findings at a board meeting. You'll get better media coverage and have a chance to publicly recognize the committee's work.
- Widely disseminate information about items under discussion and about your discussions. Let your staff and the public know you want the community to be informed and consider reporting on key actions at local service club meetings. Use staff and district newsletters, local media, your district website, social media channels and other methods to inform people of your actions.
- Welcome media interest in board activities. Have a table at the meeting set aside for the media to use. Include a copy of the agenda and all materials before the board. If a reporter can't attend a meeting, have the superintendent/AEA chief administrator, board president or board secretary follow up to highlight board decisions or answer questions.

Better Board Meetings

Board meetings can be interesting, productive, stimulating events. Better board meetings will result from careful planning. Some guidelines for effective meetings include:

- Plan every meeting thoroughly; the board president and superintendent/AEA chief administrator should ensure that the agenda is carefully constructed.
- Insist that all reports to the board are clear, concise, complete and relevant to the agenda.

- Reserve as much board meeting time as possible for serious discussion of issues, as opposed to time-consuming consideration of items that could be best left to management, or reports that can be briefly summarized.
- Permit as much informality as possible.
- Keep meetings to a minimum in both time and number.
- Request that all items appearing on the agenda requiring board action be accompanied by an administrative recommendation with appropriate supporting materials.

Meeting Procedure

Iowa law allows the board to make rules for its own government (*Iowa Code 279.8*). Board meetings should allow business to be transacted efficiently, protect individual rights and maintain the working relationships among the members. Your board has the authority to determine its own operating procedures. The most widely used procedures are based on common sense and courtesy. The relatively small size of a school or AEA board has led many to modify formal procedures designed for large assemblies. Robert's Rules of Order encourages streamlined meeting procedures for boards of fewer than 12 members.

The board should specify, in written policies, all rules governing board meetings. The policy should be adopted at the organizational meeting.

Agenda—Your Plan for Action

Your board meeting agenda gives the order of business, listing specific items for consideration. The open meetings law requires that a tentative agenda be included with the notice given at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. The items listed on the agenda must be specific enough to satisfy the legal requirement that the notice be “reasonably calculated to apprise the public of that information” (*Iowa Code 21.4(1)*). In a 1979 opinion, the Iowa Attorney General said that an agenda “which merely states: (1) Approval of minutes, (2) Old Business and (3) New Business would not be reasonable” (1980 O.A.G. 269).

The format for an agenda might be similar to the following:

1. Call to Order—Roll Call
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Consent Agenda
 - a. Minutes of Past Meeting(s)
 - b. Financial Report
 - c. Summary List of Bills
 - d. Personnel Resignations
 - e. Open Enrollment Requests

4. Communications (List specific topics)
 - a. Citizens, Organization(s) in Attendance
 - b. Correspondence
 - c. Board Member Reports (Items for discussion)
5. Reports (Specific topics and action if required)
 - a. Committee
 - b. Special
 - c. Superintendent/AEA Chief Administrator
 - d. Legislative Update
 - e. Student Achievement
 - f. Other
6. Old Business (List specific topics)
7. New Business (List specific topics)
8. Announcements
9. Adjourn

According to the Iowa Attorney General, the agenda can be amended within 24 hours of the meeting to include additional items only if good cause exists requiring action on such matters. The definition for good cause is flexible, determined on a case-by-case basis. The attorney general said the mere desire of members to take up a matter at the last minute will not be sufficient. There must be genuine circumstances making it necessary to meet to discuss a matter with less than 24 hours' notice to constitute good cause. If action can wait 24 hours, the board should wait. If a matter not part of the tentative agenda requires immediate action, a statement to that effect should be entered in the minutes. As much advance notice as possible should be given to the public and media.

If oral or written communications received during the meeting require deliberation or action, the board president should refer them to the administration or legal counsel, or both, for recommendation and ask that the item be placed on a future meeting agenda.

Usually the superintendent/AEA chief administrator, in cooperation with the board president, is responsible for developing the agenda. Board members and citizens may request that items be placed on the agenda. Good policy would require that requests for items to be placed on the agenda be received by the superintendent/AEA chief administrator up to a week before the meeting. This enables the administration to determine if the item is appropriate for board discussion and, if so, to prepare data and relevant material to help your board come to a decision. The agenda and supporting materials should be sent to board members several days before the meeting to read and study in advance of the meeting. With an agenda and

documentation in hand, the members have the responsibility to come to a board meeting informed and ready to discuss business.

Quality Counts

Assessing Your Meeting

It is important for boards to take time from busy agendas to step back and objectively evaluate the quality of their meetings. Doing so can shorten meetings and ensure that sound decisions are made. A meeting assessment answers questions such as:

- Has the board developed adequate procedures for getting meeting materials and notices in the hands of board members, the media and public leaders before the meeting?
- Do the board president and superintendent/AEA chief administrator plan the agenda together?
- Do board members prepare ahead of time—review materials, read reports—to participate in substantive discussions during the meeting?
- Do meetings begin on time? Are agendas constructed so that adequate time can be provided for important matters?
- Does the board president keep discussions to the subject at hand and ensure that all board members get a chance to participate?
- Does the board have a good method whereby the public may be heard at board meetings? Do visitors feel welcome?
- Are meetings composed primarily of policy decisions and discussing items that are truly the board's responsibility? Are agenda items tied to district goals?
- Does the board encourage the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to invite staff specialists to board meetings to supply back-up advice and knowledge on recommended proposals?

A consent agenda allows boards to lump items into one action item so separate discussions and motions aren't necessary. Items may be removed from the consent agenda for individual action at the request of a board member.

The Importance of Minutes

The minutes are the official record of all board actions. The legal implication is that the board speaks through its minutes. The court will not admit evidence that adds to or detracts from the official minutes of board actions. The minutes become the official record when the board formally approves them, and when the board secretary and president sign them.

The minutes should provide a clear picture of the issues and a record of the vote, including how each member voted on all issues. Too often, minutes lose the substance of the discussion when an item only appears, and the vote is recorded. Documentation presented with the minutes should be kept as an exhibit after the board meeting. It is good practice to keep everyone

informed about the official board actions, which can be done by distributing the minutes to board members and staff and placing them in an accessible place in your community or on your organization's website. In accordance with law, the minutes must be provided to the newspaper of record within two weeks of a board meeting.

Refer to the sample minutes in Appendix D, p. 97.

Public Participation

Members of your community should be welcome to observe your board meetings. Their presence signals their interest in school issues and their desire to ensure that quality decisions are made. It's important to be clear that community members are observers, not participants, at a board meeting. A board meeting is a meeting in the public view; it is not a public meeting in the sense that the public can participate whenever and however they choose. The board has established procedures for public participation and these procedures should be followed at all times. One form of participation available to the public is the petition process; the public can submit a petition and place a topic on the board agenda. Specific rules apply to how this process works. A more commonly used form of public participation is through open forum or public comment. Most boards offer an open forum or public comment time at each meeting to listen to the comments or concerns of community members.

Adopting and following a board policy on public participation will allow you to treat community members consistently. Such policies normally limit each person's comments to three-to-five minutes. Check your board policy or call IASB for a sample policy.

During public comment sessions, the board should listen carefully and take notes, if necessary. The board does not normally respond to concerns or questions raised during open forum if the issue discussed was not on the agenda. Instead, issues may be referred to the superintendent/AEA chief administrator for research or placed on a future board agenda, if needed.



CHAPTER 7: Area Education Agencies

AEAs provide services to districts, schools and families in an effective, efficient and economical manner.

Iowa area education agencies (AEAs) are each governed by a board of directors. The AEA board is elected by school board members of the school districts located in each AEA. (*Iowa Code 273.8(2)*).

The Iowa Legislature established Iowa's area education agencies in 1974 to be an effective, efficient and economical means of identifying and serving children from birth to age 21 who require special education services. This decision was a result of the federal law mandating a free, appropriate, public education for children with disabilities. The Iowa legislature was also plagued with complaints about inequitable services from district-to-district across Iowa.

At that time, only 25% of students in need of special education were receiving the needed services, and segregated schools for children with behavior disorders had been closed. AEAs remain responsible for ensuring that all children with disabilities receive the assistance they need to be successful.

The original 15 AEAs followed the boundaries of the community college system. In 2000, the AEAs asked for legislation allowing for voluntary mergers of AEAs. Since that time, several AEA mergers have taken place, and there are now nine AEAs across the state.

Iowa's area education agencies continue to work as partners with children, families and educators to ensure equitable, efficient, and economical educational services that prepare all Iowa children for a well-lived life.

The Role of the AEA Board of Directors

The primary functions of the board are:

- Approval of the AEA mission and goals.
- Selection of the chief administrator.

- Delegation of authority to the chief administrator for carrying out board policies and implementation of AEA programs and services.
- Fiduciary management of the AEA.
- Annual evaluation of the chief administrator’s performance. The administrator may conduct an annual board evaluation, as well.
- Policy review; and
- Accountability.

Board members are policymakers—making policy and having oversight of fiscal matters of an agency. The board approves an annual budget, and it has the responsibility for approving and auditing the expenditures against that budget. Their responsibility is not to oversee the day-to-day running of the agency. AEA board members bring to the table a multitude of talents and experiences that enrich the discussions and decisions made by the board and agency.

Like school boards, AEA board business is conducted under open meetings procedures. This promotes communication with the public and through the chief administrator, who shares information with AEA personnel. The powers and duties of the board are exercised during open meetings at which a quorum attends, using Robert’s Rules of Order. Individual board members only have the powers and duties as delegated by the board. Responsibilities are exercised through deliberations and voting at board meetings.

Standards for Services

In addition to providing special education services, an AEA must provide these services to all accredited private schools and public school districts within its service region:

- **School/Community Planning:** The AEA assists schools and school districts in assessing needs of all students, developing collaborative relationships among community agencies, establishing shared direction, implementing actions to meet goals, and reporting progress toward those goals.
- **Professional Development:** The AEA anticipates and responds to schools’ and school districts’ needs; supports proven and emerging educational best practices; aligns with school and school district comprehensive long-range and annual improvement goals; uses adult learning theory; supports improved teaching; uses theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching and; addresses professional development activities as required by the *Iowa Code* or administrative rules. AEAs may also contract with a school district to provide additional services.
- **Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Services:** These services support the development, implementation and assessment of rigorous content standards in, but not limited to, reading, mathematics and science. The AEA assists schools and school districts to gather and analyze student achievement data, as well as data about the learning environment. They compare that data to the external knowledge base and use that information to guide school and school district goal setting and implementation of actions to improve student learning.

- **Diverse Learning Needs:** The AEA assists schools and school districts in meeting the needs of all students including, but not limited to, services which address gifted and talented students and which meet the unique needs of students with disabilities who require special education.
- **Multicultural, Gender-Fair Services:** These services assist schools and school districts to take actions that ensure all students are free from discriminatory acts and practices. They establish policies and take actions that ensure all students are free from harassment; incorporate into the educational program instructional strategies and student activities related to responsibilities, rights and the respect for diversity, which are necessary for successful citizenship in a diverse community and a global economy, and; incorporate ongoing activities within professional development that prepare and assist all employees to work effectively with diverse students.
- **Media Services:** The AEA offers these services to align with school and school district needs; support effective instruction and provide consultation, research and information services, instructional resources and materials preparation and dissemination to assist schools and school districts to meet the learning needs of all students and; support local district media services.
- **School Technology Services:** These services provide technology planning, technical assistance and professional development and support the incorporation of instructional technologies to improve student achievement.
- **Leadership Development Services:** These services assist with recruitment, induction, retention and professional development of educational leaders. AEAs develop and deliver leadership programs based on local and state educational needs and best practices.
- **Management Services:** If requested, the AEA will provide management services to school districts. This is a common role of the AEA when a school district suddenly loses a superintendent or another administrator. The AEA assists a district during the hiring process, as school districts cannot be without a person in certain key roles.

See *Iowa Administrative Code 281–72.4* for more information.

Accreditation & the Comprehensive Improvement Plan

Each AEA, on a cycle established by the Iowa Department of Education (DE), submits a comprehensive improvement plan. The plan is the basis for the improvement actions taken by the agency and shall also serve as a basis for the comprehensive site visit.

The comprehensive improvement plan for an AEA includes:

- Description of how the AEA conducts ongoing needs assessment.
- Summary of the findings from agency-wide needs assessment.
- Agency-wide goals based on the assessment.
- Services developed to meet agency-wide goals.

- Action plans to accomplish agency-wide goals. Action plans shall include evidence of meeting all standards for services. Action plans shall include provisions for equitable availability of services.
- Provisions for management services.
- Professional development plan.

The comprehensive improvement plan of an AEA is reviewed by the DE to determine if the plan meets the legal requirements.

The Comprehensive Site Visit

An accreditation team conducts one or more onsite reviews of the AEA's progress toward agency-wide goals and determines if services meet the legal standards. Prior to an onsite review of an AEA, the accreditation team must have access to the AEA's comprehensive improvement plan, annual progress report and annual budget, as well as any other information collected by the department relating to the AEA.

After an onsite review, the team determines whether the legal accreditation requirements have been met and creates a report identifying which standards and other accreditation requirements the AEA has or has not met. The report shows strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each standard or requirement and advises the AEA of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance these strengths and improve areas of weakness. An AEA may respond to the accreditation team's report by providing factual information to the State Board of Education concerning its services.

Accreditation of an AEA by the State Board is based on the recommendation of the director after study of the factual and evaluative evidence on record about the standards and other requirements as described in this chapter and based upon the timely submission of information required by the department.

If, at any time, the board determines that an AEA has not met all standards and other requirements, the board requires the AEA to address the deficiencies. After completion of the comprehensive site visit, the State Board of Education grants continuation of accreditation if all standards and other requirements are met.

Annual Budget & Progress Report

Each AEA must submit an annual budget and a progress report on the indicators of quality and the agency-wide goals. An annual budget must be submitted by February 10 to the Iowa Department of Education. The Department of Education reviews the budget and presents it to the State Board of Education for approval at the March board meeting. An unapproved budget must be resubmitted by May 15 to forward to the state board for final approval. An AEA must also submit a written progress report to its member schools and school districts and the DE. This report must also be made available to the public.

The report includes:

- Agency-wide goals and the progress toward reaching those goals.
- Indicators of quality with aggregated data from the state indicators, the statewide customer service survey, school and school district comprehensive school improvement plans, and school and school district annual progress reports.

AEA Funding

Each school district is a political subdivision of the state with the power to levy property tax. Each AEA is a political subdivision but does not have the power to levy a property tax. The AEAs are funded primarily by the state foundation formula through the school districts. Their funding is calculated as part of each school district's combined district cost.

AEA funding 'flows through' the school district budget. This is commonly referred to as the AEA flow through (*Iowa Code 273.9*). The amount of funding provided to the AEA serving a school district is determined by the formula. A school district cannot change the amount of, or withhold, the funds from the AEA serving it. The Department of Management pays the AEAs directly from the school district's state foundation aid (*Iowa Code 257.35*).

The AEA special education per-pupil cost to school districts varies across the state. This is due to the inclusion of services to private school students at the time the per-pupil costs were set. The rates were determined by dividing the total AEA special education expenses by the number of public students served by the AEA.

The special education support services provided by AEAs are funded with property tax and state foundation aid. The media and educational services are entirely funded by property taxes. State aid funding to AEAs has been reduced from the formula determined amount every year since FY 2002. There is a permanent reduction totaling \$7.5 million, and the General Assembly has made an additional reduction each year since FY 2004.

It is important to remember this distinction, as AEAs have no ability to levy cash reserve funds the way a school district can. So, when across-the-board cuts hit or when their state aid amount is not fully funded, AEAs are often hit harder than school districts because they don't have the ability to raise funds.



CHAPTER 8: The Superintendent/ AEA Chief Administrator

Your board must establish a management system enabling everyone to contribute to the vision.

The board is directly responsible for hiring, supporting and evaluating the superintendent or AEA chief administrator. The board encourages and empowers this person to lead the organization toward its vision and to involve stakeholders.

Legal Status

The role of superintendent of schools or chief administrator of an area education agency (AEA) is seldom mentioned in the *Iowa Code*. *Iowa Code 279.20*, however, states “The superintendent shall be the executive officer of the board and have such powers and duties as may be prescribed by the rules adopted by the board or by law.”

The board has the authority to employ the superintendent/AEA chief administrator for a contract of up to three years. In many ways, the leadership role of the superintendent and the leadership role of the AEA chief administrator are similar.

Chief Advisor

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator is your board’s main consultant and advisor on all matters concerning the organization. They keep board members well informed about the educational conditions, challenges ahead and alternative ways to deal with obstacles and roadblocks. That individual should contribute to the board’s deliberations and decision making by providing reports, information and recommendations.

The recommendation process is more than conveying individual preferences. When board action is needed, the superintendent/AEA chief administrator should clarify the issue and identify the contributing factors. Alternative solutions should be presented and include the educational and financial implications of each. Clear and specific recommendations should be made based on the superintendent/AEA chief administrator’s professional judgment.

The board deliberates on the subject and decides what action will be taken. The board may not always agree with the superintendent's or AEA chief administrator's recommendations; that's to be expected on any team. However, if a board regularly rejects the recommendations, it may indicate a lack of understanding between the two parties.

The board should be objective as it considers the recommendations of the superintendent/AEA chief administrator. Board members should thoroughly discuss and analyze each issue before acting. The final decision should represent the composite thinking of both the board and administration. When the board operates in this manner, it models robust decision making. It also minimizes giving the impression it rubber stamps recommendations of the superintendent/AEA chief administrator.

Although the superintendent/AEA chief administrator cannot vote on any issue, it is essential that they, as chief executive officer of the school district or AEA, be present at all meetings, including closed sessions authorized by law.

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator also helps onboard newly elected board members to their position. Onboarding activities should be ongoing and designed to provide new board members with essential background information needed to assist them in making sound decisions when dealing with the matters of the district or AEA.

The superintendent's or AEA chief administrator's key duties and functions as the board's main advisor are to:

- Develop and recommend policies focused on improving student achievement for all students.
- Provide data and information to the board on vital matters pertaining to implementing policies and governance leadership.
- Prepare and submit a preliminary budget to the board.
- Recommend candidates for employment in accordance with law and policy. (The board may reject specific candidates recommended, but all personnel should be employed based upon the superintendent's or AEA chief administrator's recommendation.) The law allows the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to sign individual contracts (except for administrators) if the board adopts a policy authorizing the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to perform such duties and specifies the positions they are authorized to fill.
- Submit an annual progress report (APR) on the district's achievements.

Executive Officer

Once the board establishes a policy decision, it becomes the responsibility of the superintendent/AEA chief administrator and the staff to execute those decisions. The board should be involved as little as possible in the daily operations of the organization. The administration should implement board policies via rules and regulations and handle individual concerns regarding operations in most cases.

If practices or policies appear unnecessary or unreasonable, it is appropriate for board members to ask questions and to seek clarification from the superintendent/AEA chief administrator or

board leadership. Before discussing these matters during a board meeting, it is preferable for board members to approach the superintendent/AEA chief administrator beforehand to provide time for them to gather and provide background information to the whole board before board discussion and decision making. Placing the superintendent/AEA chief administrator or fellow board members on the spot during board meetings hinders the development of mutual respect and confidence within your board team and between the board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator.

As chief executive officer of the organization, the superintendent/AEA chief administrator sets the tone for the entire system. Their job is to:

- Carry out policies, comprehensive improvement plans, and rules and regulations established by the board. (In matters not specifically covered by board policies, the superintendent/AEA chief administrator should take appropriate action and report to the board in a timely manner.)
- Empower and support employees to implement board policies effectively.
- Implement steps to enhance the leadership and supervision skills of staff.
- Execute a plan to maintain, improve, or expand facilities, sites and equipment. Direct all purchases and expenditures in accordance with board policies.

Educational Leadership & Learning

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator is in a unique position to model a commitment to lifelong learning through ongoing professional development and collaboration with others. Quality professional development is a powerful lever to help meet the instructional goals of the comprehensive school improvement plan. This leader works with other educators in the district or AEA, with regional, state and national educators, and with professionals in other organizations and agencies. This role places them in direct contact with other districts, area education agencies, the Department of Education, IASB, and the state legislature to formulate laws, policies and programs that will assist in improving the learning of all students.

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator should keep the public informed about student learning, annual progress reports and the needs and directions of the school system. A wide range of communication methods can be used to present messages including traditional and social media, small group discussions, speeches and personal appearances.

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator should exercise a key leadership role with the board by keeping the board informed of new trends in education and the implications of those trends. Board members should be kept informed about the organization's performance, including both strengths and weaknesses, in comparison to other school districts or AEAs.

Communication and collaboration with the organization's staff are essential for effective leadership of the organization. With a strong focus on the vision and mission of the district or AEA, and the support and understanding of the staff, goals and objectives can be achieved.

The Board–Superintendent/AEA Chief Administrator Relationship

Improving student learning is hard work. School boards and superintendents and AEA boards and chief administrators tackle complex challenges as they work toward continuous improvement of student learning. The board and the superintendent/AEA chief administrator need to develop a relationship built on open communication, trust and respect. Board members have an obligation to remain open-minded, to read, to study, and to take advantage of opportunities to learn background information about topics and issues before the board votes. Attending state and national meetings can be especially helpful sources of information.

A well-informed board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator are better prepared to address issues and lead the organization in ways that ensure the best education for every child. Consistent dialogue with community members and state-level policymakers is also essential to meeting your organization’s needs. Board members should work with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to define and advocate for key needs in your organization.

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator is the educational leader of the school district or AEA; yet, as chief executive officer of the board, they are duty-bound to execute the board’s policies and directives. This may create conflict. Administrative leadership of a school district or an AEA is not an exact science. Different viewpoints can be healthy and conducive for forming new ideas through free discussion of issues. However, when disagreements reach a personal level, the effectiveness of leadership is often significantly damaged.

The superintendent/AEA chief administrator and board should develop a governance leadership approach to leading the organization. In many school districts and AEAs, additional teams of administrators, along with committees comprised of staff, teachers and citizens, collaborate on issues ranging from individual student learning needs to improvement plans regarding curriculum and professional development. Through involvement, development of mutual respect, and working together, the various leadership groups all contribute to providing a quality educational experience for all students.

Decision Making & Diversity of Opinions

As mentioned in the previous section, differing opinions can be a challenge and serve as a strength of the board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator during the decision-making process. Differences can help leadership identify aspects of issues that may not have surfaced during prior information gathering and deliberations. During these times, additional board questions may also emerge that will require further exploration by administration and staff leadership. It’s essential for the board to allow adequate time for the superintendent/AEA chief administrator and their designees to seek information in response to questions and report findings back to the board team for subsequent deliberations and the vote.

As the board completes deliberations, prepares, and then votes, it is critical for the board to work toward consensus regarding the key factors that influenced the vote. Another important step that sometimes gets passed over is identifying common messages to share with the public about the decision and rationale. Think about the wisdom in this statement by a board member:

“Whether the vote is 7-0, 5-2, or 4-3, after the vote is taken the board has determined the direction for the district. For our administrative leader, this means the board has then

given them their marching orders. Thus, the sooner the whole board can rally around the decision that was made, and the more effectively the board can communicate through key, common messages about the reasons for it, the better we (the board) position our leader to successfully implement the decision of the board.”

Assessing & Evaluating Progress

The foundation of a positive board-superintendent/AEA chief administrator relationship depends on the board’s ability to set clear expectations to guide the work of the administrator.

An influential way for the board to foster a strong working relationship with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator is through an ongoing evaluation cycle. Establishing clear expectations and goals, monitoring progress, providing support and giving regular feedback throughout the year to the superintendent/AEA chief administrator on their performance in relation to the goals and expectations are key components of a robust, ongoing process.

Two key elements are required by law for the superintendent/AEA chief administrator’s annual evaluation. The first is the board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator should collaborate to set clear goals and indicators of progress for your educational leader.

The second element is to review the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) and use the standards as the yardstick to assess your superintendent’s or AEA chief administrator’s performance. The board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator will benefit from discussing the connection between the goals and leadership standards. Boards that meet with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator at least once or twice during the year to conduct informal performance reviews, along with an end of the year summary evaluation, maximize their opportunity to make a difference.

Contact IASB for support and assistance with building a strong board and superintendent/AEA chief administrator relationship.

Written board policy is also a method of setting clear expectations. Board policy provides clear direction when questions arise on a broad range of issues and allows the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to be confident that daily decisions they make have a basis of authority in board policy.

Selection Process

Selecting a superintendent/AEA chief administrator may be one of the most important actions a board takes. As the executive officer and general educational consultant for the board, they are key to improving student achievement and determining the effectiveness of the organization.

A key first step is to analyze the needs and goals of your organization. The selection process can be much more focused if the board is able to use existing district or AEA goals as it seeks the best candidate to provide leadership for the organization to achieve its goals.

The analysis should include carefully considering the mission, vision and district’s or AEA’s improvement plan, budget, organizational structure, educational programs, staff and unique

issues. This information will help focus your board's attention on alignment between the candidates' qualifications and your organization's needs.

The selection of the superintendent/AEA chief administrator is a critical board responsibility. No one else can make the decision. Hiring a new superintendent/AEA chief administrator is a time-consuming task that includes compliance with legal requirements; vacancy announcements; recruiting, screening, and interviewing candidates; community visits and contract negotiations. Many boards hire a consultant to assist in the process, while others conduct the search themselves. IASB can be a source of support to help your board make this decision.

Termination

The board should discuss the legal procedures and implications with their legal counsel and follow the contract termination procedures outlined in law when considering terminating the superintendent/AEA chief administrator's contract.

The board should give notice of its intention to terminate before the May 15 statutory deadline for the termination or any deadline specified in the individual's contract.

This will address two important factors:

1. Advance notice gives the superintendent/AEA chief administrator the opportunity to adjust and take actions to meet the board's expectations.
2. Although the administrator may be incompatible with the board and organization, they may still be successful in another district or organization. This will provide them with time to seek other employment. When the problem involves the working relationship between the board and administrator, efforts should be made to protect the individual's professional reputation.

For further information about contract termination, please reference Chapter 9, pp. 46–53.



CHAPTER 9: Employee Relations

Your board can promote positive relations with employees and a culture that supports innovation and improvement.

Employees are a school district or AEA's most important resource, as they interact with students daily. As an employer, the board can promote positive relations with employees to encourage an environment that supports innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

The board and administrative team should adopt policies, rules and regulations which clearly define the responsibility of all staff toward helping the organization* achieve its objectives. Your board's expectations should be clearly communicated to administrative personnel following established appropriate avenues for feedback. In this manner, the board can better understand the health of the district and make appropriate policy changes where needed.

The employment relationship between your board and staff members is governed by the law, which is often technical. This chapter provides an overview of some of the key concepts. Your attorney should be consulted on employee relations issues to ensure that your board follows the law.

**Under Iowa law, school districts and AEAs are legally referred to as "corporations."*

Setting Direction through Personnel Policies

By law, the board must adopt certain policies that touch on personnel matters. Each employee has the right to expect clearly stated personnel policies and procedures that express the organization's processes and expectations. Personnel policies set the tone and parameters for administrators to establish a management structure that includes clear procedures for personnel programs and processes, including:

- Guiding principles for employees.
- A hiring process with attention to affirmative action and equal employment.
- New staff orientation and assistance.
- Salary and benefits.

- Staff development and mentoring.
- Staff evaluation.
- Staff retention, promotion and termination.

In maintaining appropriate governance level relationships with employees, your board must establish itself as a firm, objective and fair entity: an employer that can be trusted by its employees. Toward this end, sound leadership principles support the practice that when policies are made which affect personnel, care should be taken to provide the employees with input in the policymaking process.

The process of developing and implementing policies that affect personnel does not occur in a vacuum. Federal and state laws specify employment rights and procedures that apply to employee groups and employment related circumstances.

With a foundation of parameters set through policymaking, boards then delegate authority to the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to address personnel issues. Many human resource processes require specialized training and experience, a function for which certain administrators are employed.

Ongoing communication between the board and the superintendent/AEA chief administrator gives the assurance that the leadership efforts are ongoing and functioning in alignment with board policy.

Recruiting, Retaining & Supporting a Quality Staff

Board members want their district or AEA to recruit, hire, retain and support the best staff available. How can the board fulfill this goal?

- Ensure employees are fairly compensated in salary and benefits. That means advocating with the legislature and other policy leaders the need to adequately fund teacher quality/student achievement, adequate growth in state aid and staff development resources.
- Actively recruit employees who reflect the demographic makeup of the student population and provide adequate mentoring and support to retain these employees.
- Build an environment where teachers feel appreciated and supported; work in partnership with teachers to identify areas of improvement and boost student achievement; place priority on instructional needs when making budget and other decisions; provide teachers with the time and resources needed for instruction and planning; include teachers in school improvement decision making; hear reports from staff at the board table on instructional initiatives and their results; and respond to teachers' suggestions for research-based school improvement strategies.
- Clarify priorities for improving student learning and ensure each organization's instructional initiatives are selected and implemented because of their potential and documented success for increasing student performance. Set the expectation for staff responsibility for student learning and regularly ask superintendents or AEA chief administrators if supports are needed in order to get results. Evaluate instructional initiatives regularly to determine whether they are making the desired improvements.

- Develop understanding within the community that improving teaching is the most powerful strategy for improving learning.
- Give teachers both the responsibility and the support needed to improve classroom instruction and student learning. Encourage teachers to implement innovative approaches and provide them with the time and resources needed for planning, data analysis, collaboration, professional development, instruction and research.
- Support a research-based professional development program around your district learning goals. Allocate time for all school staff members to meet periodically for sustained, in-depth, collective study of teaching and learning. The built-in time is used for the collective study of student learning, training and for peer coaching teams to meet. Evaluate the effectiveness of professional development efforts by changes in student learning.

Licensed Employee Contracts

The board is responsible for approving individual employment contracts for administrators and teachers. The law allows the board to delegate, through board policy, the authority to the superintendent/AEA chief administrator to offer a contract to teachers. Procedures for contract issuance, duration and termination are found in *Iowa Code* Chapter 279. Procedures codified in *Iowa Code* Chapter 279 apply to the AEA as cited in *Iowa Code* Chapter 273, as AEAs are also considered education corporations under Iowa law. It is important to understand these procedures since they play a critical role in employing school personnel. This chapter provides a brief overview. More detailed information is available from IASB.

Administrator Contracts: The employment relationship between administrators, including superintendents, and the school district is complex and relies on detailed statutory provisions. Individual employment contracts with administrators are continuing contracts, which means the contract is originally issued for an agreed-upon length of time (following term limitations outlined in Iowa law). Once the original terms have been met, the contract will automatically continue for one-year periods, unless the contract has been modified or terminated (*Iowa Code* 279.24).

Administrator and superintendent contracts must contain: the number of contract days per school year, the salary for the period, the term of the contract, that the contract is rendered invalid if the administrator is still employed at another district, and other matters mutually agreed upon (*Iowa Code* 279.23). The contract term for a superintendent can be for up to three years. However, a new superintendent's contract must be limited to an offering of one year, should the hiring board still be paying out a previous, unexpired superintendent contract (*Iowa Code* 279.20).

The contract term for other administrators may be for up to two years. A board may offer a temporary contract for up to nine months. In other words, an administrator's first employment contract must be a one-year contract, but after the administrator has served nine months of that contract, the board can issue a one-year or a two-year contract beginning the next school year.

Teacher Contracts: All teaching personnel are employed on a one-year continuing contract (*Iowa Code* 279.13). The contract will continue with the same terms and specified compensation, except as terminated or modified in accordance with Iowa law.

An employment contract issued to a teacher must be in writing and contain the number of contract days, the annual salary, and other matters mutually agreed upon (*Iowa Code 279.13*). The teacher's contract term cannot exceed one school year.

Teacher contracts may be offered on, or any time after, March 15 of each year. Teachers must have at least 21 days from the date the contract is offered to sign and return the contract. If the contract is not signed and returned to the board within the specified time, the previous contract terms continue to be in effect, except as modified by the collective bargaining agreement.

A new teacher's first three consecutive years of employment in a school district are a probationary period. A teacher who successfully completes the probationary period in an Iowa public school may be required to serve up to a two-year probationary period in a new district. A board of directors may waive the probationary period for any teacher who previously served a probationary period in another district and the board may extend the probationary period for an additional year with the consent of the teacher.

Coaching Contracts: All athletic coaches employed shall be issued a one-year contract for each of the sports that they coach. Coaching contracts must be in writing and contain the number of contract days for the sport, the annual salary and any matters mutually agreed upon (*Iowa Code 279.19A*). Unlike administrator and teacher contracts, coaching contracts do not automatically continue.

Classified Employees

Besides administrators and licensed teaching staff, a school district or AEA employs classified or support personnel to ensure effective and efficient operation. These include custodians, bus drivers, food service personnel, secretaries and clerks. Classified employees are certainly important because they work closely with and around students, assist other staff and have contact with community members on an informal basis.

In some school districts, the board delegates the authority to hire classified employees to the superintendent or superintendent designee. This delegation must be stated in board policy. To ensure clarity, board members should be aware of current hiring practices in the district or AEA.

Collective Bargaining

Under Iowa law, school employees have the right to negotiate the terms of their employment with the school board as collective groups through an organized labor union. *Iowa Code* Chapter 20, known as the Public Employment Relations Act, provides the parameters of collective bargaining rights for employees, clarifying the rights of employers and laying out the collective bargaining process.

Chapter 20 requires the employer to negotiate with the legally recognized employee organization as the exclusive bargaining agent for the employees in a certified bargaining unit. The law governs the conduct of both employers and employee organizations during the process. The law also prohibits the union from striking, protecting the continuity of education delivery for students. A full-time, three-person Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), appointed by the governor and approved by the senate, administers Chapter 20 provisions.

Topics of Bargaining: Chapter 20 sets parameters over the topics of bargaining, categorizing employment topics into three areas: mandatory, permissive and illegal.

Mandatory: Mandatory subjects are required to be negotiated. For education-based bargaining units, there is only one mandatory topic: base wages.

Permissive: Other matters mutually agreed upon by the parties may also be negotiated. These items are often referred to as permissive subjects of bargaining, since one party cannot unilaterally compel the other party to bargain on these subjects. Permissive subjects include topics such as hours, vacation, leaves of absence, shift differentials, overtime compensation, seniority, job classifications, health and safety matters, in-service training and grievance procedures.

Illegal: The third category of subjects is referred to as illegal. It is unlawful to bargain over those subjects. The illegal topics of bargaining are retirement systems, insurance, evaluation procedures, supplemental pay, transfer procedures, procedures for staff reduction, subcontracting public service, leaves of absences for political activities, payroll deductions for political activities and dues checkoffs. While these topics cannot be bargained, it may still be valuable to request feedback from employees to consider specific issues. For example, if significant insurance changes are being considered, input from employees can help the board and administration prioritize the benefits most important to employees.

Employer Rights: Chapter 20 also establishes the rights of school districts. *Iowa Code 20.7* specifies that a public employer, including a school district, has the right to:

- Direct the work of its public employees.
- Hire, evaluate, promote, demote, transfer, assign and retain public employees in positions within the public agency.
- Suspend or discharge public employees for proper cause.
- Maintain the efficiency of governmental operations.
- Relieve public employees from duties because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons.
- Determine how employees will operate the school district.
- Take such actions as may be necessary to carry out the mission of the public employer.
- Initiate, prepare, certify and administer its budget.
- Exercise all powers and duties granted to the public employer by law.

Since the board ultimately ratifies, rejects or implements a negotiated agreement, it is important that board members understand the collective bargaining rights of public employers and employees along with other provisions and procedures of Chapter 20.

The Bargaining Team: Your board will determine the members of the bargaining team that establishes guidelines and proposals for salary, fringe benefits and other negotiable subjects. In Iowa, the composition of those teams varies. Superintendents/AEA chief administrators, central office staff and board members serve on many district bargaining teams.

However, some boards hire an outside consultant or attorney to be the chief negotiator for the team. If your organization hires an outside negotiator, be thorough in identifying the educational

philosophy, give direction, and set parameters around the board's goals. The goals should include the expectation of reaching a mutual settlement.

Regardless of your bargaining team's composition, remember that a public employee or any employee organization should not negotiate or attempt to negotiate directly with a member of the board unless that individual is the designated bargaining representative. Other board members should refer the employee to their bargaining representative or to the organization's chief negotiator.

Bargaining Timelines: Unless there is a mutual agreement to waive the timelines, Chapter 20 requires collective bargaining agreements with teacher bargaining units to be reached by May 31. For bargaining units composed of support staff, the deadline is April 15.

Mediation and Arbitration: Throughout negotiations, if the parties are unable to produce a tentative agreement, Chapter 20 requires a conflict-resolution process involving third-party intervention. If there have been previously agreed upon impasse procedures, employers and employee groups should look to those procedures. Otherwise, Iowa law outlines impasse procedures that first require mediation, and the final resolution step is arbitration.

In the absence of agreed upon impasse procedures, the parties will enter into mediation. During mediation, a mediator is assigned at the request of either party to PERB to assist them in resolving an existing dispute. The parties can either accept or reject the mediator's advice or suggestions.

If mediation efforts are unsuccessful, the contract dispute is resolved through arbitration. Here, upon request of either party to PERB, the parties use an arbitrator to resolve the dispute. The arbitrator issues a final and binding award.

The award shall not exceed the lesser of:

- A 3% increase in base wages; or
- The percent increase in consumer price index (CPI) for the urban consumers for the Midwest region. This number is available on the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) website.

Although there are statutory procedures such as mediation and arbitration for resolving collective bargaining conflicts, the best agreements are generally reached voluntarily by the parties directly involved in the process. For that reason, IASB supports the concept that collective bargaining should end in voluntary settlement.

Your Agreement—The Master Contract: The result of the negotiation process is a written agreement or "master contract." Negotiation is the key word. The board and the employees have agreed in a written contract to the terms of employment negotiated under the law. Master contracts cannot be changed unless both the board and the employees agree to the change.

Master Contract Application and Interpretation: Occasionally, employees will have employment-related problems or disagreements with administrators and other management representatives. Disagreements over the application of collective bargaining agreements are generally challenged through formal channels in the contract. Some collective bargaining agreements include procedures for written complaints, or grievances. These procedures allow

employees to file a grievance, which describes the alleged violation of a collective bargaining agreement and the remedy that the employee seeks.

Grievance procedures typically detail a three- or four-step process of resolution. Under many procedures, the employee and their direct supervisor will attempt to resolve the problem informally with the superintendent/AEA chief administrator. The board may become involved if efforts to resolve the alleged violation fail. Contractual grievance procedures may end in arbitration if the parties cannot agree that an alleged violation of the contract occurred or on the remedy that the employee is requesting. Board members should bear in mind the provisions of collective bargaining agreements take precedence over conflicting provisions contained in individual employee contracts.

Handling Concerns or Complaints About School Employees

Positive relationships are also reinforced when board members refer employee or public complaints to the appropriate internal resource. It is important for board members to remember to remain at the governance level and that they are board members regardless of whether the board is in session or not. When confronted with a personal complaint from an individual, a board member's job is to listen to an appropriate extent to maintain their unbiased, governance role and politely refer the individual to the appropriate staff member for resolving the problem or concern at the lowest level possible. This applies whether the concern is about a teacher, principal, counselor or superintendent/AEA chief administrator. This practice of referring concerns through 'the chain of command' is the most effective, and fairest, way of getting the concern resolved effectively. If a citizen concern cannot be resolved at the first level, it will be escalated through the chain of command. While some issues may result in the need for board review if not resolved at lower levels, those will be very limited because the process helps them be resolved effectively.

Boards should also exercise caution when handling public comment during open meetings. Board meetings often provide a means for both written and oral communication between the board and the public. However, personnel situations should be confidential and handled carefully through the correct forums. Generally, boards should refrain from discussing individual personnel issues at open board meetings.

Personnel Evaluation

Your board should work with the administrator to establish evaluation systems for all personnel in the district/AEA. Chapter 279 of the *Iowa Code* includes provisions relevant to staff evaluations. For teachers, *Iowa Code 279.14* directs that, "the board [of directors] shall establish evaluation criteria and evaluation procedures."

Evaluation is one of the most important tools your board and administration have with which to direct the work of the employees, align staff expectations with student achievement goals, maintain efficiency and develop a better school operation.

Evaluation is also an active process. An evaluation seeks to measure performance. An evaluation plan must be developed for performance and must be aligned with state standards. Once that is developed, the process of evaluating can be completed.

The board has a role in communicating to the administration their expectations for performance. Your board may then appropriately delegate to the administration the development of an objective and meaningful evaluation process that relates to the vision and goals of the organization. The carrying out of the employee evaluations should be left to the designated administrators.

Licensed Employee Contract Termination

The decision to terminate an educator's employment contract is a difficult one, even when it seems necessary. These decisions are complicated in school districts and AEAs because licensed employees—teachers, principals and superintendents—often hold highly visible positions in the community. Regardless of which licensed employee is being considered for termination or the reasons for the decision, the employee's rights must be respected.

The termination proceedings required by law must be followed to terminate individual contracts with licensed employees. The termination proceedings were adopted to provide teachers, administrators and superintendents with sufficient procedural protections that satisfy the due process requirement of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution. School districts and AEAs cannot terminate the employee's contract without providing prior notice. The courts require strict adherence to the termination proceedings for the protection of the employee.

Iowa Code 279 contains different termination proceedings for teachers, administrators and superintendents. It is important for board members to know the requirements for terminating teacher continuing contracts and administrator and superintendent contracts. More detailed information regarding the statutory requirements is available on IASB's website at www.ia-sb.org/hrresources.

The laws related to dismissal put boards in a position to be the arbiter of a fair and unbiased decision. Thus, it is in the board's best interest to have minimal involvement in the personnel process leading up to a hearing. The board should only become involved when their role as the unbiased arbiter arises. The termination proceedings are complex, and the facts and circumstances of each case differ. The superintendent or board, in the case of an administrator or a superintendent, should confer with an attorney before taking any action, no matter how preliminary, regarding the potential termination or discharge of a licensed employee.

Classified Employees: Unlike educators, classified employees are considered at-will employees and do not typically hold contracts. They may, however, have specific termination procedures detailed in board policy or in a master contract. Please refer to these documents when considering the termination of employment for classified employees.

Employee Relations: The Bottom Line

It is the board's responsibility to maintain and strengthen employee relations by setting clear personnel policies, expressing the value of school employees, and handling personnel situations as detailed in policy.

Students are successful in part due to strong and positive employee relations. Boards that put an emphasis on employee relations are able to set a district culture that puts a focus on quality instruction and high, equitable student learning.



CHAPTER 10: School Finance

By monitoring the budget and ensuring funds are spent to accomplish district goals, effective school boards sustain and enhance district resources through planning and fiduciary oversight.

The funding of Iowa public schools is one of the most important issues for school board members. It can also be one of the most challenging for new members because the state foundation formula (also known as the school finance formula), which generates a significant amount of money for a school district, often changes and is considered complicated and confusing. Part of the school board's role in applying the vision set for the school district is to ensure funds are available to accomplish the vision. A well-thought-out and prepared budget is the first step in providing sufficient funding.

School board members must make their budget and funding decisions within the timelines required by law. School districts operate on a fiscal year beginning each July 1 and ending each June 30. Starting with the FY 2025 budget, the school board must adopt its annual certified budget, using the state foundation formula, by April 30, just prior to the start of the budgeted year.

Iowa school districts are created by law and, up until July 1, 2017, had only those powers specifically granted by statute (Dillon's Rule). The legislature approved a bill that now provides school districts limited Home Rule. Since school finance laws are drafted based on Dillon's Rule, *Iowa Code* currently dictates how school funds are generated and how they are to be spent, while Home Rule allows districts to approve actions that are within the spirit of the law. Transitioning between Dillon's Rule and Home Rule will likely take some time and may take further legislative adjustments and code changes.

Iowa law and the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) create several funds for school districts. These funds are categorized into different types as follows:

- General Fund.
- Special revenue funds, including District Management Levy Fund, Public Education and Recreation Levy (PERL) Fund, Library Levy Fund and the Student Activity Fund.
- Capital projects funds including the Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL) and Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE) funds.

- Debt Service Fund.
- Enterprise Funds, including School Nutrition, Child Daycare, and Community Education funds.
- Internal Service Funds.
- Trust and Custodial funds.

Funding Silos: Money received by school districts must be deposited in the appropriate fund and may only be spent for the purposes authorized in *Iowa Code*. All money received by a school district from property taxes, state aid and other sources must be accounted for in the General Fund, except money required to be accounted for in another fund. For example, school nutrition funds can only be used for school nutrition programs and cannot be used for renovation, construction or to hire more teachers.

Generally, funds cannot be transferred from one fund to another fund. However, with enactment of House File 564 during the 2017 legislative session, funds for the purchase of safety and protective equipment for students can be transferred from the General Fund to the Student Activity Fund.

Excess funds also may be transferred from the Childcare Enterprise Fund to the General Fund if the program exceeds the amount necessary to operate the program. The State Foundation Aid Formula applies only to the General Fund and determines how much state aid, in addition to property taxes, the district will receive as part of the formula.

Enrollment & the Formula

Funding is enrollment-based and follows the student: The State Foundation Formula is pupil-driven; the number of pupils in a school district determines the amount of the school district's budget each year. Actual enrollment is determined by counting the number of students enrolled and residing, or defined by law as residing, in the school district, including open enrolled-out and tuitioned-out students. While a district counts students that reside in their district but attend school outside the district, when the funding for those students is received by the district, that funding will need to be sent to the districts where the students are attending school. Enrollment counts must be done by October 1, or on the Monday following October 1, if that date is on a weekend.

Weighted Enrollment

Weighting allows a school district to count certain pupils as more than one student and generate additional funding for the budget. Supplemental weighting is designed to encourage a school district to offer certain programs or to structure itself in a certain way. Supplemental weighting is available to school districts for special education, programs for sharing students and teachers, including community college courses; sharing specific operational functions; at-risk students; non-English speaking students and reorganization incentives. A student participating in those programs or structure generates additional weighting. The sum of actual enrollment, special education and supplemental weighting equals weighted enrollment. Generally, funding generated in this manner must be used as specified.

District & State Cost Per Pupil

Under the School Finance Formula, a dollar value is assigned to a pupil. This is commonly called the Cost Per Pupil. There are two levels of cost per pupil, the district level and the state level. The state cost per pupil serves as a floor, defining the minimum district cost per pupil. When the School Finance Formula was created, certain districts which had a higher cost per pupil were allowed to maintain a higher cost per pupil than the minimum, and have been allowed to continue that practice, but fund the difference with property taxes. A major portion of the school district's budget is determined by the number of pupils multiplied by the Cost Per Pupil (referred to as the Regular Program Cost).

The Iowa Legislature provided funds for five years (FY 2019–2023) to raise the state cost per pupil, which reduced the gap between the state cost per pupil and the highest cost per pupil. However, no action was taken for FY 2024, so the future to reduce this inequity is unknown.

State Percent of Growth/Supplemental State Aid (SSA)

State Percent of Growth: The State Percent of Growth is a percentage that determines the dollar growth amount to each school district cost per pupil. This increase in the cost per pupil is referred to as **Supplemental State Aid (SSA)** and helps determine the district's budget. The governor will recommend the State Percent of Growth to the legislature. The Iowa Legislature is required by law to set the State Percent of Growth within 30 days of receiving the governor's budget recommendation, and that is generally two months prior to the date (April 30) the board must certify the school district budget for the next fiscal year.

Supplemental State Aid (SSA): The SSA replaced the term "allowable growth" beginning in FY 2015. The change in terminology is to emphasize that the authorized increases in the district cost per pupil will be entirely paid for with state aid, with no portion of the increase in the district cost per pupil paid for from property taxes, as had been done in the past. The portion of SSA that provides property tax relief is referred to as the Property Tax Replacement Payment. Legislative action is required to continue this property tax relief into the future.

State Categorical Supplemental State Aid

The 2008 legislature transitioned several state categorical appropriations into the School Finance Formula as per-pupil supplements effective for the budget year beginning July 1, 2009 (FY 2010). These categorical program requirements remain as originally intended, are paid entirely with state funds and include no property tax component.

- A **Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS)** cost per pupil combined the Phase II funds from the Educational Excellence Program and Basic Teacher Salary allocations from the Teacher Quality and Student Achievement Act into one Teacher Salary Supplement.
- A **Professional Development (PD)** supplement cost per pupil included Professional Development allocations from the Teacher Quality and Student Achievement Act and additional Professional Development dollars dedicated to implementing the Iowa Core Curriculum from the 2009 legislative session. PD is approved through the district's Teacher Quality Committee and must follow the Iowa Professional Development Model.

Unexpended and unobligated Professional Development dollars that remain at the end of a fiscal year, upon board approval, may be transferred into the flexibility account (established with enactment of House File 565 during the 2017 legislative session). Unexpended and unobligated PD dollars that remain at the end of a fiscal year in addition to ongoing revenues may also be transferred to TSS (established with enactment of House File 68 during the 2023 legislative session).

- An **Early Intervention Supplement (EIS)** cost per pupil was formerly funded as the class size/reading intervention or early intervention categorical fund. In the past, these funds could only be used to lower class size or develop early intervention reading programs, but now can be used for any general fund purpose.
- The **Teacher Leadership Supplement (TLS)** was created during the 2013 legislative session and included a phase-in period over three years beginning in FY 2015. After receiving approval to participate in the program, districts received funding through a grant in the initial year, with future funding provided on a per pupil basis through the School Aid Formula in the second and subsequent years. All school districts participate in this program. Unexpended and unobligated TLS dollars that remain at the end of a fiscal year, upon board approval, may be transferred into the flexibility account (established with enactment of House File 565 during the 2017 legislative session). Unexpended and unobligated TLS dollars that remain at the end of a fiscal year in addition to ongoing revenues may be transferred to TSS (established with enactment of House File 68 during the 2023 legislative session).

Flexibility Resources—Transfers

Recent legislative changes have made the following transfers allowable:

- Funds for the purchase of safety and protective equipment for students can be transferred from the General Fund to the Student Activity Fund. Board resolution is the only requirement.
- Excess funds also may be transferred from the Childcare Enterprise Fund to the General Fund if the program exceeds the amount necessary to operate the program. Board resolution and public hearing are required.

Additionally, starting with FY 2024, unexpended and unobligated dollars that remain at the end of a fiscal year in addition to ongoing revenues may be transferred to the Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS) program from the following categorical funds:

- Professional Development Supplement (PDS)
- Talented and Gifted (TAG)
- Teacher Leadership Supplement (TLS)

No board action is required.

Flexibility Resources—Flexibility Accounts

Legislative changes increased district flexibility in how unexpended, unobligated amounts from certain categorical funds can be used by creating and using a Flexibility Account within the General Fund. A school district may transfer all or any portion of unexpended and unobligated amounts remaining at the end of the fiscal year from the following categorical funds to the Flexibility Account for the following:

- Preschool Foundation Aid
- Professional Development Supplement
- Home School Assistance Program
- Teacher Leadership Compensation

Board resolution and public hearing are required for Flexibility Accounts.

Combined District Cost

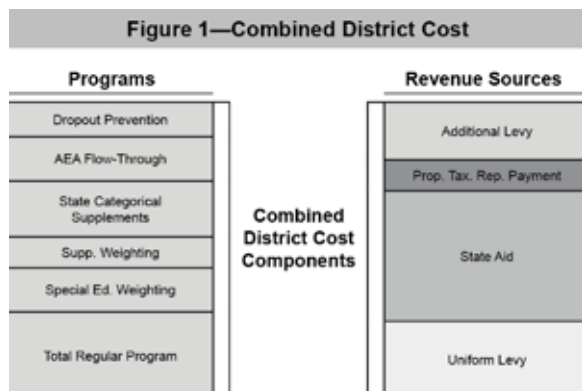


Figure 1 (Left)

Programs that are funded through the Combined District Cost (CDC) include the Regular Program, Budget Guarantee, Special Education Weightings, Supplementary Weighting Provisions, Programs for Dropout Prevention and Returning Dropouts, AEA program funding (funding that flows through the district), and each of the State Categorical Supplements (see Figure 1).

The CDC is funded by the Uniform Levy, State Foundation Aid (which includes property tax replacement dollars) and the Additional Levy.

Uniform Levy: A Property Tax Levy of \$5.40 per \$1,000 taxable valuation for each school district.

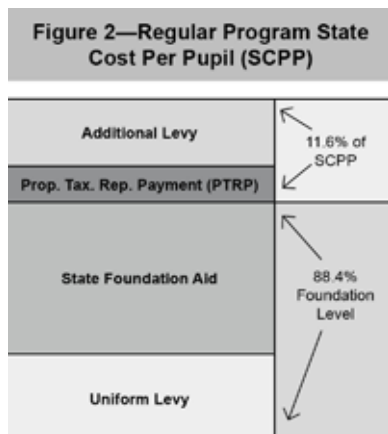


Figure 2 (Left)

State Foundation Aid: Three purposes of State Foundation Aid are to make educational programs more comparable, to equalize funding on a per pupil basis and to equalize property taxes. State Foundation Aid equalizes funding based on the state cost per pupil. The percentage level of equalization is called the foundation percentage and is set by law at 88.4%. That is, the Uniform Levy and the State Foundation Aid are combined to provide funding equal to 88.4% of the state cost per pupil (see Figure 2). Note: Prior to FY 2023, the foundation level was 87.5%. In addition, State Foundation Aid includes funding for state categorical supplements and AEA special education support.

Additional Levy: School districts levy the ‘Additional Levy’ to fund its district cost per pupil to the 100% level. While the amount of funding generated on a ‘per pupil’ basis for the Additional Levy is similar, each district uses a different tax rate because of the different amount of taxable property value backing each child in each district. The Additional Levy also includes funding for a budget guarantee, AEA programs, any district per pupil amount that is in excess of the state per pupil amount, and programs for returning dropouts and dropout prevention.

Property Tax Replacement Payment (PTRP): A portion of the Additional Levy is currently frozen at the FY 2013 statewide levels due to the Property Tax Replacement Payment (PTRP) provisions. The increase in the per pupil amount (Supplemental State Aid) each year is currently funded solely with state aid. The PTRP replaces the portion of increase that would have fallen on the Additional Levy (see **Figure 2**). Continuation of PTRP requires legislative action.

Additional Levy Buy-Down

Since FY 2006, a Property Tax Equity and Relief (PTER) fund to buy down the highest districts’ additional property tax levies in the state to the average has been in place. Over the long term, the intent of the act is to eventually dedicate growth in the fund to raise the foundation level from the current 88.4% to the level the available remaining revenues to the fund can support. The funding for property tax equity was phased in over several years, starting as a state appropriation that currently stands at \$24.0 million. In addition to the state General Fund appropriation of \$24.0 million, additional funding is deposited in the PTER fund from the state sales/use tax for school infrastructure after the school infrastructure allocations. Statute requires that a portion of the total state sales/use tax for school infrastructure be deposited in the PTER fund.

Legislation passed in 2019 that extended the Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE) sales tax for school infrastructure from 2029 to 2051. As part of that extension, an ‘Equity Transfer Amount’ is created at 3.1% which started in FY 2021 (up from 2.1%) and requires that amount to increase 1% each year if total SAVE revenues grow at least 2% for that year. The Equity Transfer Amount is capped at 30%. For more information, see p. 66.

Budget Guarantee/Budget Adjustment

School districts that have enrollment decreases that are greater than the impact of the state percentage of growth are likely to be eligible for a Budget Guarantee (also referred to as Budget Adjustment). The provision allows districts to maintain a Total Regular Program District Cost that is 101% of the previous year’s regular program cost (not including any previous year’s Budget Guarantee). This provision guarantees that the district will have at least a 1% increase in its regular program district cost. The use of this provision requires board approval (when certifying the budget to the Department of Management) and is funded entirely through local property taxes. Although this provision helps buffer enrollment decreases, districts on the Budget Guarantee for consecutive years are likely to see their overall budget decrease.

New Money—Change in the Total Regular Program District Cost Amount

The change in a district's Total Regular Program District Cost from one year to the next is referred to as New Money. The Regular Program is calculated by multiplying the District Cost Per Pupil by the Budget Enrollment. Enrollment changes and the State Percent of Growth are major factors in determining the Regular Program amount. Additionally, the Total Regular Program amount includes the budget guarantee if the district is eligible and approves that provision. New money generally reflects the additional funding available to help pay for increased general fund costs resulting from compensation contract negotiations, utilities, curriculum and other expenditures, from one year to the next.

Maximum Authorized Budget (Also Referred to as Spending Authority)

The Maximum Authorized Budget, also known as Spending Authority, represents the upper dollar limit a school district can use when setting its General Fund Budget. This limit is intended to ensure that all students, no matter their geographic location, are provided with equitable resources toward their education. The Maximum Authorized Budget is the summation of the district's Combined District Cost (see section on Combined District Cost, p. 58), Miscellaneous Income and Unspent Balance.

Miscellaneous Income

The Combined District Cost is one element of a school district's Maximum Budget. The other two elements are Miscellaneous Income and Unspent Balance. Miscellaneous Income is defined as any General Fund revenues that are not Uniform Levy, State Foundation Aid, Additional Levy or Supplemental State Aid, but does not include the Cash Reserve Levy. Miscellaneous Income provides a school district with revenue opportunities. Most local, some state categorical appropriations and most federal fund allocations, as well as any grants and donations, are considered Miscellaneous Income to the General Fund.

Unspent Balance

The last element of a school district's maximum budget is its Unspent Balance. Unspent balance (also referred to as Unspent Authorized Budget) is the amount of the Authorized Budget or Total Spending Authority not spent during the budget year and includes previous years' accumulations of Unexpended Total Spending Authority. Unspent Balance is often referred to as 'Carry-over Balance' because it is the Cumulative Unused Total Spending authority, which is carried forward to the next year. However, it does not reflect the school district's cash position.

Unspent Balance is a one-time spending opportunity for a school district. If a school district chooses to use Unspent Balance to fund salaries in one year, it will not be available to fund those salaries in the next year. If the Unspent Balance is not backed by money in the bank, the district

can raise the money through levying a cash-reserve property tax up to the statutory limit. An Unspent Authorized Budget Report is available on the Iowa Department of Management website.

It is an important distinction to note that, while Unspent Balance represents a district's "credit card" limit, it is not necessarily backed by cash. A district's cash and investment balance represents the district's cash position at any given time, and a district's fund balance represents its financial position after all reported obligations are met.

Unspent Authorized Budget (UAB) Ratio is an important measure of Unspent Balance and is calculated by dividing the Unspent Balance by the Maximum Authorized Budget. Districts that have a negative ratio will be required to complete workout plans for the School Budget Review Committee (SBRC). If a district has two consecutive years with negative ratios, the SBRC may recommend that the Department of Education implement a Phase II site visit to conduct a fiscal review of the school district. The amount of Unspent Spending Authority reduced by the Restricted Fund Balances (Categorical Fund Balances) is also a key measure, as it reflects the Spending Authority available that can be used for any General Fund purpose. If the Unspent Spending Authority balance is positive but becomes negative after reducing the balance by the Restricted Fund Balances (Categorical Fund Balances), SBRC may request the district to appear for a discussion on how the district plans to correct the situation going forward. IASB recommends that the district have a UAB ratio in the range of 5–15%, not to exceed 25%. If not within that range, IASB recommends the district make appropriate budget adjustments to attain the 5–15% range.

Annual School District Budget Process

Each school district operates on a fiscal year (July 1–June 30) and must file a certified budget with the county auditor each year by April 30 for the subsequent year. Preparation of the budget generally takes place throughout the fiscal year.

The budget is a document that serves many purposes. It tells how much money the school district expects to generate and spend in the fiscal year and serves as a plan and guide for operations for the fiscal year. The budget can also serve as a tool for evaluating the financial performance of the school district.

Example Budget Process: The following steps represent just one example of how the budget process might work in a school district.

- The board develops budget parameters and budget priorities that align with district priorities.
- With these parameters and priorities in mind, the superintendent and/or business manager/board secretary develop budget forms and distribute them to principals, teachers and other employees in the school district. School employees use the forms to estimate expenditures for current programs during the coming school year and to request additional funds for new activities. Often, employees are asked to set priorities for proposed and estimated expenditures.
- Employees prepare and return their budget forms to the principal, who then reviews the budget requests and prepares a report for submission to the superintendent and/or business manager. The principal may make recommendations about the priority of the requests submitted by other staff members.

- The superintendent and/or business manager/board secretary prepare budget estimates for the entire school district based on the information provided by the school employees and submit a report to the school board.
- The school board reviews the proposed budget and directs the superintendent and/or business manager/board secretary to make appropriate changes.
- Changes are made to the proposed budget based on the decisions of the school board.
- The board instructs the superintendent and/or business manager/board secretary to publish the budget statement for review by the public within the timeframe required by law (HF 718, 2023 legislation).
- The board instructs the superintendent and/or business manager/ board secretary to publish the proposed budget for review by the public within the timeframe required by law.
- Send budget statement information to county auditor by March 15, as county auditors are required to send each property owner or taxpayer within the county by regular mail no later than March 20 an individual statement containing information compiled and calculated by the Department of Management (House File 718, 2023 legislative session).
- The school board holds a public hearing to discuss the budget statement and to receive public comments at a separate meeting from all other district meetings.
- The school board holds a public hearing to discuss the proposed budget and to receive public comments.
- The school board adopts the final budget.
- The budget must be annually certified to the county auditor on or before April 30.

Budget Protest: While it rarely happens, a formal, written protest of the proposed budget may be filed with the county auditor if signed by at least one-quarter of 1% of the number of voters in the previous district election (at least 10 citizens but not more than 100 citizens). The county auditor submits a copy of the protest to the State Appeal Board. The State Appeal Board, comprised of the director of the Department of Management, state auditor and state treasurer, holds a hearing to consider the protest. The State Appeal Board has the power to approve, disapprove or reduce appealed budgets.

Review of District Bills: During the school year, the secretary and president of the school board must sign all vouchers for money expended. Many school boards appoint one or more board members to review the bills before each meeting. This saves time at the board table yet provides the necessary oversight by the board. Approval of the bills must be done by the board but may be included in a consent agenda.

Monthly Financial Statements: Each month the school board, by law, must receive a summary statement of revenue and expenditures against all funds.

Annual Audit: The financial conditions and transitions of the school district must be audited each year. The school district hires an independent private auditor or the state auditor to prepare its audit.

Solvency Ratio: Following the audit each year, the board should take the time to review its financial health. Besides the Unspent Balance Ratio described earlier, another measure is the Financial Solvency Ratio, determined by dividing the district’s Unassigned and Assigned Fund Balance by the district’s actual revenues minus the AEA Flow-Through funds.

$$\text{Financial Solvency Ratio} = \frac{\text{Assigned \& Unassigned General Fund Balance}}{\text{(Actual General Fund Revenues—AEA Flow-Through)}}$$

The Assigned and Unassigned General Fund Balances represent financial resources available for spending after payment of all accrued liabilities and recognition of accrued assets. In short, the Solvency Ratio measures the ability of a school district to repay an obligation on June 30 and into mid-September when the first State Foundation Aid payment is received by the district. The amount of Assigned and Unassigned General Fund Balances may be found on the district balance sheet in the audit report. The total amount of actual General Fund revenue and AEA Flow-Through funding is found in the Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance in the audit.

IASB recommends that the district have a Solvency Ratio in the range of 7–17%, not to exceed 25%.

By charting the amount of the school district’s Unspent Balance Ratio as well as Financial Solvency Ratio over a period of years, the board will gain an understanding of the relative strength of the financial position of the school district.

Budget Amendment

As the school district monitors revenues and spending during the year, it may find that it needs to amend its budget after it has been certified. The school district cannot generate more revenue by simply amending its budget, but it can amend its budget to spend additional revenue that has been received during the year or to spend more than was certified, as long as the school district does not exceed its Total Spending Authority allowed by law. Board approval of all amendments to the budget must take place no later than May 31 to allow time for a protest hearing and resulting decision on the permissibility of the amendment that is under protest prior to the year end. Amending the budget requires the school district to publish notice and hold a public hearing as it did for the original budget.

Facilities Construction/Major Renovation

The school board is often faced with the task of deciding whether to build a new school building or to remodel an existing facility. Over the years, changing delivery models for educational programs, the potential for expanded or new programs, increasing or declining school population and aging facilities may have affected school districts’ use of available space. The decision whether to renovate and remodel old facilities or to build new facilities merits thoughtful attention. The following questions should be raised:

- What are the long-term and short-term facility needs for the district?
- Is the basic physical structure of the school building sound?

- Will the building meet educational specifications, or does the space restrict the offering of certain programs?
- Is the interior of the building designed so that it can be altered to accommodate a good educational program?
- Does the building meet health and safety standards?
- Does the building need new lighting, ventilation and heating systems? Would more efficient systems result in long-term energy savings?

Architects & Planners

Boards should seek the advice of architects and educational planners in developing a facilities program. Boards would also be well advised to consult with a fiscal consultant, their legal counsel and bond counsel to make certain that planning objectives fall within legal and fiscal constraints.

Resources are available to plan and match educational and facilities objectives, including state universities, the Department of Education and private organizations. Educational planners can help staff, administration and the board develop educational specifications and provide estimates on the capability of existing buildings to house specified educational programs and to develop specifications for new buildings.

Architects have the technical expertise to translate educational specifications to the space needed and to evaluate existing buildings. Early on, the board should talk to its school attorney about a contract for services and review the American Institute of Architects standard contract documents to ensure the school district's interests are fully represented in the final contract with the architect. The architect may be paid upon the basis of a percentage of the construction cost, or on a basis of professional fee plus expenses. The board should discuss with its attorney the pros and cons of the architect's fee arrangements before selecting an architect.

The board will probably want to discuss with its architect the different design stages or phases contemplated in the contract. Try to reach an understanding about the review and input by the board during and at the completion of the schematic design phase and the design development phase.

For general obligation bonds, the board should decide whether to hold the bond issue election before beginning any design work, or to proceed through the schematic design phase. In the schematic design phase, the architect prepares schematic design studies consisting of drawings and other documents illustrating the scale and relationship of the project components, and a cost estimate for the project. If an architect is retained to do design work before the bond issue, it is important to specify in the contract how the architect will be paid if the bond issue proposal fails and that the contract will be terminated if financing is not possible. The school attorney should review all documents prior to an architect's bids and contract letting.

Also, the board should obtain assurances in the contract with the architect that when the project gets to the bidding stage, all cost estimates will be current and within the financing capability

of the school district. It is frustrating to proceed to bid letting, only to find out that the design is based upon a scale which is too costly and not within the district's financial possibilities.

As part of the preliminary work in a building program, the board will want to consider the following:

- Involvement of the community in all steps of the process.
- Description of all educational facilities.
- A study of the student population in terms of educational need and enrollment projections.
- An examination of the existing educational facilities.
- A study of the financial situation of the district.
- Conclusions and recommendations about facilities, students, educational programs and recommended steps for a board to take.

It is helpful for a study to be conducted either by school staff or by using outside assistance when the district is developing a facilities/ building plan.

Fiscal Consultants

In addition to talking with the architects, educational consultants and school planners, the school district may wish to work with a fiscal consultant at the outset of the building program. A fiscal consultant can assist in determining the available resources for a building program, suggest alternative financing methods, assist in gathering financial information for use during a bond election campaign and, if the issuance of bonds is approved, assist with the development of maturity schedules, tax levies, retirement of principal and interest on bonds and assist with the marketing of the bonds. The fiscal consultant can assist with or prepare a bond prospectus, help secure favorable investment ratings on the bonds, recommend the proper timing of the bond sale for the most favorable rates and solicit bids for the purchase of bonds placed for sale.

The School Attorney & the Bond Attorney

The school attorney should be consulted at the outset of a building program so the attorney is aware that important contractual relationships are being considered. The school attorney should be consulted when a school district enters into a contract with the architect or a fiscal consultant. The school attorney should review the contract documents in cooperation with the bond attorney and may work with the architect in developing conditions of the contract to ensure the result that the school district desires from a contract.

The school district should also consult with a bond attorney, who will work as part of a team that includes the architect, fiscal consultant, school administration and school board. The bond attorney should prepare the petition for the calling of the election and assist in the determination of the amount of the bonds which may be issued, taking into consideration tax levy restrictions and the debt limitations of the school district. The bond attorney prepares the election proceedings, including the form of proposition to be submitted to voters. If the election is successful, the bond attorney prepares the bond documents necessary to evidence the indebtedness of the school district and assists with the sale of the bonds and review of financial information.

At the conclusion of the legal proceedings, the bond attorney will render an opinion that the proceedings are legal, which is important to bond purchasers who must know that the school district is entering into a legal obligation.

State Penny for School Infrastructure—Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE)

On July 1, 2008, all 99 county School Infrastructure Local Option (SILO) taxes were replaced with a State Penny for School Infrastructure.

The state penny revenues generated from sales tax are deposited into the **Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE) Fund** and distributed from there directly to school districts based on a per pupil formula. Since all grandfathered provisions have expired, all districts will now receive the same amount per pupil each year through 2051, with the passage of the SAVE extension. The annual amount per pupil may vary from year to year. The use of funding from SAVE is dictated by the district’s Revenue Purpose Statement (RPS).

Revenue Purpose Statement (RPS): The law defines the existing Revenue Purpose Statement as valid until it is amended, extended or would otherwise expire. In 2019, the legislature passed House File 576, requiring school districts to pass a new RPS by January 1, 2031, or the expiration date of the current RPS, whichever is sooner, with the intent of having the election of the RPS prior to obligating funds past 2031. A 50% simple majority vote approves a district’s RPS or approves changes to the use of an existing RPS. Votes on the RPS may be held at any special election or the annual school election held in odd-numbered years but limited by action approved during the 2019 legislature to two-to-three specific dates a year, beginning in March 2020. If at some future time a district has no RPS in effect and doesn’t receive voter approval for a new or extended RPS, the law requires that state penny revenues be used to buy down specific existing property taxes (debt levy, PPEL and PERL) prior to using the funds for any lawful infrastructure purpose. The law also requires that sales tax revenues dedicated to paying debt on bonds must be maintained for that purpose.

Revenue bonds: The school board can authorize the issuance of negotiable, interest-bearing school revenue bonds, without election, and use SAVE for principal and interest repayment.

However, beginning July 1, 2019, school districts must hold a public hearing prior to issuing revenue bonds and prior to expending any SAVE funds on athletic facilities. A vote on the proposed action is required if a petition is filed following the hearing.

If a district receives a petition requesting an election to be held on the issuance of Sales Tax Revenue bonds, the same timing applies as for general obligation bonds—the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November (HF 718, 2023 legislation).

Other key provisions: The law maintains the original use for infrastructure, Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL), Public Education and Recreation Levy (PERL), bonding, and property tax relief. The original SILO requirement for a Certificate of Need is maintained in the state penny law for very small districts. Prior to any new construction in districts with K–12 enrollment below 250 or fewer than 100 high school students, the district must receive approval from the Department of Education.

School General Obligation Bonds/Construction

School districts are authorized to contract indebtedness and issue general obligation bonds repaid with property taxes to provide funds for a building or renovation program. However, the school district may not issue bonds which, when combined with other district indebtedness, will exceed the statutory and constitutional debt limitations of the school district. The limit is 5% of the assessed value of the taxable property within the school district as ascertained by the last preceding state and county tax list.

In addition, the amount of general obligation bonds which a school district may issue may be limited by the amount that can be raised by taxation. The amount that may be levied for the debt service fund to pay the principal and interest upon lawful bonded indebtedness cannot exceed \$2.70 per \$1,000 of taxable valuation, unless the school district has held an election which increased that limitation, not to exceed \$4.05 per \$1,000 of taxable valuation.

Before general obligation bonds can be issued, an election must be held. The election process is initiated by a petition which must be signed by electors equal in number to more than 25% of those who voted at the last election of school officials. The bond attorney prepares the form of petition, which must include the amount of bonds proposed to be issued and the purpose for which they will be issued.

The petition must be properly drafted, since failure to do so can result in the invalidation of the entire election.

When the board receives the petition, the president must call a meeting of the board within 10 days and, at that meeting, the date of the election must be set. Bond counsel provides the necessary proceedings for use at the meeting, which include the forms of the proposition and the notice of the election. General obligation bond elections may be held only one time per year, on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November (HF 718 passed, 2023 legislation).

Notice of the election must be given by publication made by the commissioner of elections not fewer than four, nor more than 20, days prior to the date of the election. For the proposition to carry at the election, the affirmative vote must be equal to at least 60% (super majority) of the total votes cast for and against the proposition. If the issuance of general obligation bonds is approved, the school district then authorizes its architect to complete preparation of plans and specifications and, in conjunction with the school attorney, the contract documents.

When the cost of a building project exceeds \$196,000, the competitive bid process set out in the law must be followed. This requires a hearing be held upon the proposed plans, specifications, form of contract and cost of the project. The 2016 Legislature changed the Notice to Bidders process (*Iowa Code 26.3*) for informing potential bidders of a district's intent to solicit competitive bids for a public improvement project such as a new facility. Under the law, there is no longer a requirement to publish a Notice to Bidders in a local newspaper. Instead, the Notice to Bidders must be posted in three online sources which meet specific criteria.

IASB collaborated with Master Builders of Iowa to make this process easy—and free—for members. Read about this process at www.ia-sb.org/bids. The postings must occur not fewer than 13 days and not more than 45 days before the date for the bid letting. (Note that the timeline also changed from the previous law, which was not fewer than four days and not more

than 45 days.) At the time and place set for hearing and letting, opportunities should be given to people who wish to be heard on the proposed plans, specifications, form of contract and cost of the project. After that hearing, the bids are opened and the low bids determined. The school district is obligated to let the work go to the lowest responsible bidder. Out-of-state bidders may be affected by the bid-preference laws.

Maintenance of Facilities

It is important for school districts to have a policy regarding the maintenance of school facilities. They should be kept clean, safe, healthy and attractive. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) includes definite requirements that must be met. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) includes stringent regulations regarding asbestos fibers. Iowa law regulates asbestos control.

A calendar for painting and repairing buildings should be established to keep all buildings in good condition. This includes the annual inspection of the interior of all buildings, playgrounds, sports complexes, and periodic inspection of underground storage tanks.

School facilities affect the environment in which student achievement takes place.

For more information, visit www.ia-sb.org/affiliatedprograms and visit the Iowa Construction Advocate Team (ICAT) & Integrated Project Delivery webpage.



CHAPTER 11: Legislative Advocacy

Communicating your challenges and successes to policymakers is a key role and responsibility during your time on the board.

As a board member, you have tremendous credibility with legislators. You speak as another elected public official charged with doing what is right for your constituents. Legislators often mention how important it is for them to hear from school board members on education issues.

Board members play a critical role in connecting legislators with their schools by inviting them on building tours and to board meetings, celebrating the successes of Iowa public education and understanding the needs of Iowa schools and students. Close connections must be established before the legislative session so lawmakers can trust board members during the legislative session.

Keys to Effective Lobbying

Key 1: Know your legislators.

- Knowing your legislators is the first step to making an impact for your district.
- Know each legislator's party, committee assignments, priorities and history.
- Find out if your legislators have been teachers, board members or have family members in education.
- Ask whether they prefer to be contacted by phone or email.
- Improve your advocacy efforts by learning what guides their decision making: facts, figures, or personal stories.
- Discuss their goals and vision for Iowa public education.
- Visit IASB's Advocacy Center at www.ia-sb.org/advocacy to find your legislators and information on critical education issues.

Key 2: Be a source of reliable and credible information.

- Give legislators your contact information so they can contact you. You want legislators to consider your input before a vote.
- Be willing to share your insight and experience as a board member on issues legislators will vote on.
- Be ready to provide accurate, persuasive information on how pending or desired legislation will affect your district or AEA. Use data and personalized examples of those effects. Work with your superintendent/AEA chief administrator to collect the information you need.
- Visit the School Finance Toolkit at www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/financial-tools or the Advocacy Center at www.ia-sb.org/advocacy on the IASB website to find district-specific information.
- Build coalitions locally and meet your legislators together—there is strength in numbers.

Key 3: Help your legislators become experts on your district.

- Provide information on your district or AEA at every opportunity.
- Send legislators your newsletter.
- Always leave information in writing, even if a legislator prefers receiving emails. Legislators and legislative staff like to have a hard copy of the information you provide to use when reviewing legislation for impacts on local districts.
- Ask legislators how they will vote. Let them know you need their support on education issues.
- If a legislator was supportive, send a handwritten thank you.
- Share good news and accomplishments, especially if they were made possible by past legislation. Legislators like to know that their vote made a difference.
- Send local news clippings or links from your local newspaper or other publications frequently, and particularly when the legislature is in session.
- Invite legislators to your schools. Show them new programs or buildings and how they impact student learning.
- Tag legislators in your social media posts if they visit your district or if legislation helped your district establish a new program, build a new school, or anything that gives both your district and the legislator an opportunity to showcase the positive impact of public schools.

Key 4: Timing is everything.

- Attend meetings and forums that your legislators hold in their district.
- Pick a good time to meet with your legislators (weekends, interim, or a reminder call right before a vote).

- Contact legislators and thank them for their vote. If you don't agree with how they voted, still thank them for listening and continue to offer your help on education issues. They may be supportive on the next issue.

Key 5: Don't forget Iowa's governor.

- Send letters, emails, and make phone calls to the governor's office.
- Invite the governor to your district or AEA if something special will showcase student learning in a unique way.
- Become familiar with the governor's background and priorities to ensure your message resonates.

Key 6: All politics are local.

- Recruit local advocates who care about public education to help explain your students' needs to legislators. Talk to chamber of commerce members, service organization partners, church friends, farmers, retired board members, school staff and parents—anyone who needs your organization to provide the best possible education to students.
- Encourage citizens to advocate on behalf of your district or AEA. Share IASB e-newsletters, podcasts and email alerts on advocacy topics.
- Meet with local government officials to discuss common concerns and legislative issues. Talk about ways you can partner to improve the education you provide to your students.

For helpful hints, tips and more resources on all the keys to effective lobbying, visit our Advocacy 101 toolkit at www.ia-sb.org/advocacy-center/advocacy-101.

Your IASB Grassroots Legislative Process

IASB members determine the legislative platform and policies. Understanding your association's grassroots process is an important step in legislative advocacy. This process has led to an extension of SAVE, additional funding and flexibility, and expanded access to mental health services. When board members speak together, collective goals have a better chance of success.

Legislative Resolutions Committee (LRC)

The LRC is a group of well-informed and committed members who help decide and advocate for the interests of boards statewide and facilitate grassroots activism. The IASB Board of Directors appoints LRC members to three-year terms and holds annual meetings in June and August. The LRC consists of 17 PK–12 school board members, one AEA board member, and one community college board member.

The IASB Call for Legislative Priorities

IASB sends out the Call for Legislative Priorities survey to every board in May. Each summer, IASB posts this survey in the Advocacy Center on the IASB website. The survey gives each board the opportunity for input on priority issues for the next legislative session. IASB asks all boards to review and submit the survey together at the board table, so the submission reflects your board's voice. When more districts submit priorities and are united behind an initiative, IASB can be more persuasive with legislators. Boards may submit their priorities, propose and edit amendments, and propose and edit resolutions. IASB compiles the submissions, prepares research and data, and then distributes the information to the Legislative Resolutions Committee (LRC).

During its August meeting, the LRC reviews all the proposals and recommends legislative beliefs, resolutions and priorities for the upcoming legislative session. The committee makes recommendations to present to the IASB Board at its September meeting. The board reviews the recommendations and any changes needed. Once the board approves the platform, it goes before IASB's Delegate Assembly in November for debate, discussion and final approval. During a gubernatorial election year, the LRC hopes to question the candidates for governor and publish their answers concerning education and policy issues.

The School Year Begins

The beginning of the school year is a great time to invite legislators to a board meeting or to visit a school. Establishing a connection with your legislator early is a primary step in the process of providing information and getting to know each other before the legislative session begins. A solid relationship with your legislator before the legislative session leads to more effective advocacy during the session—they trust you and respect your opinion on the issues.

The IASB Delegate Assembly

The annual IASB Delegate Assembly meets in November on the Wednesday before the IASB's Annual Convention to establish the legislative platform, made up of the resolutions and beliefs of the association. Additionally, the Delegate Assembly votes on IASB's Public Policy Agenda, which outlines the legislative priorities of the association. IASB bylaws give each member board a delegate to cast the board's vote, weighted based on enrollment. By participating in this debate process, school, AEA and community college boards contribute to IASB's legislative platform and, ultimately, the unified legislative interests of all Iowa school boards. Members of the LRC are present to answer questions from delegates about the committee's recommendations and to offer insight into a particular issue.

Legislative Session Begins

The legislative session begins on the second Monday in January. PK-12 and AEA board members and IASB staff lobby legislators based on positions taken by the IASB Delegate Assembly. IASB keeps board members informed of legislative activity through its legislative publications, emails, podcasts, and information posted on the IASB website and social media accounts.

IASB Legislative Summary

IASB produces an annual Legislative Summary in June, available on the IASB website at www.ia-sb.org/advocacy. It provides information on legislative changes that affect schools, wins for public education, and bill summaries for everything that passed the legislature and was signed by the governor.

Legislative Action

Legislative action at the board table is critical to every Iowa school district and AEA, and boards must work to coordinate local legislative activity. During the legislative session, January through May, board agendas should include legislative updates at board meetings. Board members are also encouraged to attend the IASB Day on the Hill and to talk to their legislators on key issues. IASB e-newsletters, email alerts, and podcasts provide up-to-the-minute legislative updates and focus on specific topics to maximize the collective voice of Iowa school board members.

How Do I Get Information?

IASB provides information and training to help you advocate for your students and your district or AEA and can connect you to many informational resources that can help you get a handle on legislative issues and processes.

Advocacy Center

The Advocacy Center section of the IASB website, www.ia-sb.org/advocacy, provides access to the IASB legislative platform (including the beliefs, resolutions, and Public Policy Agenda for the current year), information on key issues, tools to improve your advocacy skills, the Legislator Look-Up tool to find information about elected officials, and legislative advocacy guides. These resources help members stay informed on issues and understand which legislative committees to engage.

IASB Meetings & Conferences

IASB's Day on the Hill is held every year in late January or early February. It brings board members, administrators, legislative and executive branch leaders together for a discussion of key issues relating to education. Members can ask questions, share with elected officials the beliefs and resolutions set forth at November's Delegate Assembly and discuss the potential impact of pending legislation. In addition, IASB's government relations staff will support your board on an individual hill visit. Contact the IASB government relations team for more information.

The IASB Annual Convention in November includes several education sessions that can help you find out more about legislative issues, the IASB platform and priorities, and how to improve your advocacy skills.



CHAPTER 12: Community Relations

Effective community relationships are essential in order for board members to champion the needs and successes of students.

Boards have both internal and external stakeholders. The internal stakeholders are those who are taught in or employed by the school district or AEA. The external stakeholders are those who are outside the organization, such as parents and community members. The stakeholders of any school district or AEA include students, parents, business leaders, retirees, members of service clubs and organizations, and staff. Each group of stakeholders has different avenues of communication open to the board.

Effective communication planning has become increasingly important as the proportion of community residents with children has decreased over the past decade. Today, nearly 75% of most districts' populations do not have students in school. While reaching parents is important, reaching the entire community population is crucial to the effectiveness of the school district in meeting community needs. Attention to systematic, continuous, two-way communication with the community will ensure your district is meeting parent and community needs, as well as gaining public support for the school district.

We live in an information age. Now, more than ever, boards recognize the need for quality relationships with parents, community, and the news media. Some school districts and AEAs are hiring professional communications personnel to perform the task. Boards and administrators are taking an increased interest in communications skills.

Written board policy can provide guidance to the administration for quality communication. Effective written communications policies outline the action the board wants taken in providing its public with information. It also reinforces the intent of the board to establish an open flow of information between the organization and the community.

Communication Guidelines

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) suggests the following guidelines for boards in developing communication plans:

- Board members should recognize that citizens have a right to know what is happening in their school district; that board members and central office staff have an obligation to see that the system will benefit from seeing that citizens get all information, good and bad, directly from the system itself.
- The board should appoint a committee that includes board members, staff members and community experts in the field of communication. The group should be large enough to brainstorm ideas, but not so large as to be hampered by the number of members.
- This committee must develop a proposed policy statement for the board that will commit the system to the development of a program for open communications with its various stakeholders. The statement serves as the goal of the community relations program.
- Once the policy statement has been adopted and publicized, the committee should develop guidelines for work that will include what their final report to the board will cover and a timeline for activities.
- A person with strong professional skills should be placed in charge of the main research and development procedures as directed by the committee.
- The committee should secure workable background information on what is being done in the area of school/community relations around the country and then assess what is being done in their own system. This analysis should include an evaluation of all communication presently being used.
- Using the policy statement adopted by the board, the committee should develop goals for open communications between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders. These goal statements will form the basis of the public relations program and will be used in the selection of the activities to be initiated in the first year.
- An initial list of many different techniques for communicating with both the internal and external stakeholders should be developed to ensure a systematic way of meeting the system-wide goals. These publics will include the external stakeholders— parents, taxpayers, community business leaders, ministers, nonparents, alumni and teachers, as well as the internal stakeholders— secretaries, bus drivers, lunchroom workers, custodians and maintenance workers.
- The committee's report to the board should contain the proposed goal statements of the community relations program and the activities that will help meet those goals. It should be organized in such a way that there is little doubt how communication can be initiated. Provisions must be made for both adequate staff and adequate funding to ensure the success of the program. Accountability procedures should be included so that the results of the program can be carefully analyzed.
- The basic staff should include an efficient, reliable secretary and a communications specialist.

Benefits

There are many benefits of a good community relations program.

The organization's activities will be viewed positively and result in community pride in the schools. Respect, cooperation with and assistance from the business community allow misunderstandings to be clarified quickly or completely avoided. Cooperation with and the support of the community enable the organization to provide a quality education to the students. The school district or AEA attracts quality staff, which assists in attracting business, individuals and industry to the community. A good communications policy and program develops a positive relationship with the media.

Communications must be tailored to reach many individual audiences. Using only the newspaper to get the message out may not reach the people the organization needs to reach. An effective communications plan identifies different segments of the public, then designs the most effective means to reach those individuals, be it special events, business partnerships, school newsletters, radio or television announcements, or social media.

An effective school district/community relations program is an ongoing commitment by the board. Community relations covers a whole gamut of communication issues, from how the board receives community comment at board meetings to how the board engages the community in identifying school improvement goals and a vision for the school district.

Consider these facets of a sound community relations program:

- **Interpreting the needs and values of your community:** Tools such as public forums, surveys, town meetings, focus groups, needs assessments, advisory committees and others can help the board interpret public attitudes and desires for the school district.
- **Communicating district goals, progress and news:** Tools such as newsletters, a website, social media, newspaper articles, videos, speaking engagements, open houses, brochures, annual reports and others can be used to share information, explain policies or initiatives, and build understanding within your community.
- **Supporting community involvement:** Volunteer programs, mentoring programs, adult and community education, public use of school facilities and school/business partnerships are just a few of the tools school districts can use to involve the community in education.

Community relations is the vehicle by which the board carries out its responsibilities to the citizens. The quality education of students and meeting the needs of the local community deserves no less than open, honest, effective, two-way communication by the board of education and the organization.

Handling Comment or Criticism from the Community

In your role as a board member, you will be subject to contacts from constituents—at times from close friends. This contact may range from subtle to considerable pressure. It may come through your spouse, family or, in some instances, from some influential citizen of the

community. The best approach is to listen, to be informed, and to direct the contacts to the proper channels in the system. After weighing all factors in a decision carefully, your job is to vote your conscience based on what is best for all children.

School Boards & Social Media

Social media can be an effective tool to communicate with stakeholders. School board members may choose to communicate with constituents through social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram and blogs. There are many benefits to using social media for communication—it's an informal platform that provides useful, informative and consistent interactive communication to stakeholders, and the cost is minimal.

Reaping Social Media Benefits While Minimizing Pitfalls

- **Be courteous, honest and respectful:** Social media is a forum where your constituents will share their opinions, whether negative or positive. Think twice before responding and pay attention to the tone of your words.
- **When it gets negative, take it offline:** When handling social media complaints or criticism, respond publicly once to show you are responding, but do not address the substance of the complaint. Instead, ask for contact information to continue the conversation offline. If the complaint is against the board/superintendent/school employee, direct them to your board secretary for policy handling citizen concerns.
- **Think before you tweet/post:** Don't blog, tweet or post anything you don't want to go viral on social media, splashed across the front page of a news website, leading the evening news, or printed in the newspaper.
- **Understand legal and ethical aspects:** Board ethics and conflict of interest policies apply to social media outlets. Don't use social media to leak closed session materials and/or information that is protected by law. Understand what constitutes a public record and how that information should be managed.
- **Less is more:** Social media is a time commitment, so don't overdo it. Pick one or two social media channels you want to focus on, rather than juggling too many and wasting energy.
- **Focus on shared values and unity:** Don't criticize other board members, school employees or students. Remember, you are part of a team with a shared vision and goals.
- **Be careful what you share online:** Don't retweet or like posts that could be ostracizing, seem like conspiracy theories, or can't be proven as factual. Your constituents are across the political and social spectrum.
- **Clarify your individual viewpoint:** It is important to share upfront that you are not representing the viewpoint of the whole board.

Media Relations

The news media plays an important role in efforts to communicate with the public at large. The relationship the board and school district or AEA maintains with the media can be active or passive, one of positive responses or negative reactions. The board has the opportunity to choose either of these roads.

Basic to any relationship is getting acquainted, and it is no different in media relationships. Introduce yourself to the reporters who cover your board meetings and talk with them one-on-one.

Understand that, especially for newspapers, education reporters are often the newest staff. The complexities of education policy and issues may be new to them. Provide complete information for reporters to help them do their job. Boards of education have the chance to help the reporter do a good job. Don't make them copy down a page of budget figures when you could simply provide them with a budget sheet and help ensure they'll be able to accurately report it.

In getting to know media representatives, ask them questions about their needs, as well. What kinds of deadlines do their organizations carry? Daily newspapers differ from weeklies. Radio stations usually need information at least half an hour before broadcast. Television news carries deadlines about an hour prior to broadcast. And remember that the different media do different things well. Newspapers are best suited for explaining complex issues. Radio broadcasts are brief but widely distributed. Television is first and foremost a visual medium—television news must have visual appeal.

Your board's goals and the media's goals will sometimes seem divergent. Understand that the media have jobs to do—they tell the public about news that is: (1) of interest and (2) sells newspapers (or, in the case of broadcast media, gets listeners or viewers). The school district or AEA is responsible for communicating with the public; the media is not responsible for being the public relations agent. When it comes to media coverage, be willing to take the good with the bad. If you want to have the media's cooperation when test scores go up or students win honors, you must be willing to cooperate when a bond issue fails or staff must be reduced.

Here are some checkpoints that might be of help as your district or AEA assesses its relationship with the media:

- **Have a written policy:** Good written communications policies outline the action the board wants taken in providing the public with information about the school district. They also reinforce the intent of their board to establish an open flow of information between the school district and the community. For sample policies, contact IASB.
- **Be aware of upcoming issues:** Every issue begins as a 'local' issue. Be aware of events and trends both statewide and nationally. Be prepared to respond to what is happening in your district. Media often need to localize stories; how is the issue or trend being dealt with in your district?
- **Decide who will speak for your district:** Decide ahead of time who speaks for your district. For some types of news, you'll want building principals or instructors able to speak to the media. For district philosophy and policy, decide whether you want the superintendent, board president or some other spokesperson to be available.

- **Be accessible:** A good, trusting relationship with the media will mean a commitment on your part to be open, honest and accessible to reporters. Respect the media deadlines by returning phone calls promptly.
- **Be accurate:** There are going to be times when you are unable to respond to a question because of legal consideration. Never use the phrase “No comment.” Tell the media you’re unable to respond to that question because of litigation in progress. If you don’t know the answer to a question, say so, and let the reporter know you can get them the correct information, or direct them to the source that can answer the question.
- **Know what ‘news’ is:** Understand the media’s definition of ‘news.’ News is the remarkable, the timely, the controversial, the outstanding. Know how to design a news ‘peg’ — the hook that will interest media in your district’s news. Statistics may sometimes be interesting hooks; often human interest will be a more compelling hook—an individual success story, a compelling personality, faces and names.
- **Don’t argue with the media:** An anonymous philosopher said, “Don’t argue with someone who buys ink by the barrel and paper by the ton.” Publishers and television and radio stations control the news—your job is to give them the news you want reported. But they have the final say. Choose your battles wisely. Evaluate whether an inaccuracy is worth rehashing. If there is a major error, be rational in asking for a correction.
- **There’s no such thing as ‘off the record’:** Woodward and Bernstein made this phrase famous. But in day-to-day media relations, there really is no such thing as ‘off the record.’ Expect anything you say to show up in print or on the air. If you don’t want to see it in the media, don’t say it.
- **Talk in ‘real English’:** Avoid education jargon in talking with reporters. Explain your district’s issues in terms that mean something to the average citizen. Communication begins with clear language.
- **Be fair:** Don’t play favorites with the media—you’ll pay for it if you do. Likewise, if a reporter has unearthed a “scoop” through their own initiative, respect their efforts and don’t interfere with the release of their story.
- **Learn how to be interviewed:** There are materials available to learn how to convey your message effectively in an interview. You may want to take advantage of books and workshops available on this skill. Don’t fill pauses; speak when you’re ready. Ask for clarification when you don’t understand a question. Be prepared.
- **Remember to say thanks for a job well done:** The plight of reporters is much like that of the school board member or administrator—they often only hear about things that have gone wrong. Reporters appreciate an occasional ‘thank you’ for the work they put forth in covering education news. They value their objectivity; a job well done might not always be the story you would have written, but one that accurately conveyed important facts to the community.

There is no ‘working around’ the news media. A direct and honest approach is the best way to ensure building media relationships that will communicate important education news to your community.

Evaluating Community Relations

A checklist for the school board:

- Does the board have a policy specifying community relations goals and objectives, and is there a plan for implementing this policy, including who will be responsible for that aspect?
- Do you have a plan for dealing effectively with the news media?
- If you have delegated community relations responsibilities to staff members, have you made adequate budgetary provisions to support the program?
- If a crisis or emergency arises, what is the district's plan to alert the public and assure safety?
- Has the board stressed the importance of good communication throughout the school community?
- Is community relations training included in the in-service programs for district employees?
- Does the district have a publication directed to its employees?
- What is the district plan when communicating with parents and non-parents?
- Does the board have a plan or use its meetings as a vehicle for communication and feedback from staff members and the public?
- Does the district use citizen advisory committees?
- Do board members participate in school and community events and stay in touch with other public service and government agencies?
- Does the board observe an appropriate chain of command for resolving complaints or grievances raised by school staff or patrons?
- Does the board have a designated spokesperson?
- Does the public have easy access to board agendas, meeting minutes, policy documents, financial data, student achievement data and other information?
- Does the board use public surveys, community conversations or other tools before they take action on major policy issues and on items such as the budget, changes in attendance boundaries or school closings?
- Do you use your board meetings to showcase district programs and emphasize student achievement?

After determining the needs for the communications program, the board policy should provide for an evaluation process to ensure those needs are being met. This regular assessment allows for incorporating new ideas and techniques or discontinuing unsuccessful techniques.



CHAPTER 13: Your School Boards Association

Vision & Voice for Public Schools

Since 1946, the Iowa Association of School Boards has been committed to serving Iowa school boards and public schools. As a 501c4 nonprofit organization, the association advances the goals of its members through advocacy and service. With a membership that includes nearly every school board in Iowa, IASB is one of the strongest and most influential educational organizations in the state. IASB offers members a strong voice through advocacy and representation, a full array of membership services and benefits, access to Affiliated Programs and extended benefits provided by national organizations.

IASB members include boards of education for Iowa's public school districts, area education agencies and community colleges. In addition to board members themselves, IASB provides important support services for roles that work closely with boards: superintendents/AEA chief administrators, business officials, board secretaries and school attorneys.

IASB's Mission

To educate, support and inspire public school boards in their pursuit of world-class education for all students in Iowa.

IASB's Vision

All Iowa school boards demonstrate effective governance practices to foster commitment to a vision of success for all students, bring voice to the needs of the community and ensure that Iowa public schools lead the nation.

Board of Directors

IASB is governed by a 17-member Board of Directors elected from among active Iowa school board members. The IASB Board includes officers, as well as regional directors from nine Director

Districts and representatives from Iowa area education agencies and community colleges. Directors serve three-year terms. The IASB president-elect is elected by the Delegate Assembly for a two-year term. The executive director and the treasurer are appointed by the board.

IASB Office & Staff Team

The IASB office is located in Des Moines and is open to the public on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays of each week. Staff telework on Mondays and Fridays and are accessible by phone and email.

Call: (515) 288-1991

Email: IASB@ia-sb.org

Facebook: facebook.com/IowaSchoolBoards

Twitter/X: @IASB_Iowa

IASB staff include experts in board development, policy, legal, school finance, government relations, community relations and employment issues. Need consulting help or advice on school governance and management? IASB is here for boards. Staff field hundreds of member calls each month and are ready to support members in any way they can.

For a complete staff list and individual contact information, visit www.ia-sb.org/team.

Advocacy & Representation

IASB advocates on behalf of its member boards at the Iowa State Legislature and at all levels of government, including the Governor's Office, the State Board of Education, administrative rules hearings and state commissions, as well as in our state and federal courts.

In addition, IASB collaborates with education organizations and strives to increase citizen support of public education and school boards through several communication campaigns.

IASB also provides resources, education and opportunities to members interested in engaging in advocacy on behalf of their districts and Iowa PK-12 education at the local, state and national level.

Advocacy is every school board member's job. IASB's advocacy structures ensure that school board members, superintendents and AEA chief administrators have the information, training and support needed to be a strong voice for Iowa public schools and the needs of students.

Communications

IASB provides a wealth of information to school boards and superintendents. Weekly newsletters, social media channels and emails about advocacy alerts, data, policy/legal changes and events keep members up-to-speed on education in Iowa and across the nation. Many resources are available digitally on the website, including special reports on issues, procedural manuals and handbooks, data, sample forms and contracts, salary comparison reports, research, tools, tip sheets, videos and more at www.ia-sb.org.

The Learning Hub

IASB board development programming provides your governance team with the skills to be effective.

Designed around the Standards for Effective School Boards, IASB offers a diverse curriculum that includes conferences, regional workshops, custom board workshops, webinars, podcasts and self-study tools. These learning resources help new and experienced board members expand their knowledge, sharpen their governance and leadership skills and hone their decision-making skills. Events are designed for individuals, as well as board-superintendent/AEA chief administrator teams.

Visit www.ia-sb.org/learninghub for a current calendar of offerings, details on locations and registration, as well as information on the Annual Board Awards program. The IASB Annual Board Awards Program acknowledges the extensive time and effort required of school board members who continually strive to expand their knowledge and skills for better board governance. Individual board members, board teams and superintendents/AEA chief administrators/community college presidents can earn hours for participation in education activities and events that have taken place between November 1–October 31 of each year.

Annual Convention: Iowa school boards and education leaders gather annually in November for the IASB Annual Convention & Trade Show. Nationally renowned experts discuss timely subjects dealing with student learning and public education. Prominent Iowans lend their talents to the program on school administration and educational initiatives. More than 160 vendors display school supplies, equipment and services at a trade show held in conjunction with the convention. Convention activities are held in Des Moines each year on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the week immediately preceding Thanksgiving Day.

Policy & Legal Services

IASB supports school boards in policy development—one of the board’s most important roles. In addition to policy consulting, resources and workshops, IASB offers subscription-based services to help boards, including policy updates, a comprehensive reference manual of sample policies, regulations and forms and custom policy development consulting.

Legal Service Fund: The IASB Legal Service Fund (LSF) assists school districts, area education agencies and community colleges in legal cases that have statewide significance. The IASB Legal Service Fund Committee is made up of nine board members representing the nine IASB director districts. The committee is responsible for determining when IASB will either get involved in cases of statewide significance or assist LSF members in cases of statewide significance. If the committee approves assistance, the assistance can be in the form of research, working as a special counsel with the local attorney, support through an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief, becoming directly involved as an intervening party or financial assistance to help defray legal costs.

Iowa Council of School Board Attorneys (ICSBA): The Iowa Council of School Board Attorneys is designed to improve communications among attorneys representing school districts across the state. IASB works with the council to sponsor workshops and seminars dealing with legal developments in Iowa and across the nation.

Human Resource (HR) Services

IASB supports school boards and administrators on employment issues, including collective bargaining, teacher settlements and negotiations, employee benefits, hiring and termination, as well as employee evaluation. Services include background information, consulting, comparative data, and a variety of forms and resources used in personnel processes.

School Finance Services

IASB helps school boards and administrators understand Iowa school finance laws and processes, obtain and review accurate data on school budgets and projections. These services are designed to ensure districts have the capacity for sound financial planning, oversight and risk management. IASB offers members in-depth and comparative data for your district, budget calendars and oversight processes, and more.

Affiliated Programs

IASB selects affiliates to extend our services to members in critical areas of support to the governance/management team. By collaborating with these affiliates in the business community, we are able to offer a broader array of services to advance IASB’s mission. IASB works actively with each program to ensure the affiliates are providing features that bring added value to our members. IASB contributes to these programs in various ways, including oversight, governance and support.

Current (at the time of publication) Affiliated Programs are listed here. More details on each program are available at: www.ia-sb.org/affiliatedprograms.

Governance & Leadership	Simbli by eBOARDsolutions
Risk Management	Safety Group Insurance Program Iowa Medicaid Education Disbursement (IMED)
Financial Management	Iowa Schools Joint Investment Trust (ISJIT) Frontline Analytics OPEB Valuation Compliance Service (GASB 74, 75)
Human Resources	Iowa Schools Employee Benefits Association (ISEBA) Iowa Drug & Alcohol Testing Program (IDATP) Employee Background Screening Service
Facilities	Iowa Construction Advocate Team (ICAT) & Integrated Project Delivery

APPENDIX A

Sample Code of Ethics for Board Members: Option I

The public school system is accepted as the foundational agency for building and sustaining a principled democracy. The Iowa Association of School Boards recommends every board discuss, adopt and follow a code of ethics, using it to guide their decision making. The following is a sample code of ethics.

Board Members:

- Will listen and respect the opinions of others.
- Will be motivated only by an earnest desire to serve the school district as a whole and our community's students in the best possible way.
- Will recognize that authority rests with the board in legal session and not with individual members of the board, except where authorized by law.
- Will abide by majority decisions of the board.
- Will expect, in board meetings, to focus time on providing the best possible learning for district students.
- Will remain open minded and objectively listen to facts presented at the board table prior to voting.
- Will recognize our responsibility is governance and not management.
- Will abide by all policies adopted by the board, including the chain of command and meeting procedures.
- Will recognize the superintendent as executive officer of the board and empower them to administer the educational program and student learning.
- Will provide oversight for the financial stability of the district balanced with the need for an effective educational program.
- Will respect confidentiality when required by law.
- Will be trustees of public education and do our best to protect it, conserve it and advance it.
- Will abide by the oath of office, federal law and state law.

Sample Code of Ethics for Board Members: Option II

Board members' actions, verbal and nonverbal, reflect the attitude and the beliefs of the school district. Therefore, board members must conduct themselves professionally and in a manner fitting to their position. Each board member shall follow the code of ethics stated in this policy.

As a School Board Member:

- I will listen.
- I will respect the opinion of others.
- I will recognize the integrity of my predecessors and associates and the merit of their work.
- I will be motivated only by an earnest desire to serve my school district and the students of my school district community in the best possible way.
- I will not use the school district or any part of the school district program for my own personal advantage or for the advantage of my friends or supporters.
- I will vote for a closed session of the board if the situation requires it, but I will consider “star chamber” or “secret” sessions of board members unethical.
- I will recognize that to promise in advance of a meeting how I will vote on any proposition which is to be considered is to close my mind and agree not to think through other facts and points of view which may be presented in the meeting.
- I will expect, in board meetings, to spend more time on education programs and procedures than on business details.
- I will recognize that authority rests with the board in legal session and not with individual members of the board, except as authorized by law.
- I will make no disparaging remarks, in or out of the board meeting, about other members of the board or their opinions.
- I will express my honest and most thoughtful opinions frankly in board meetings in an effort to have decisions made for the best interests of the students and the education program.
- I will insist that the members of the board participate fully in board action and recommend that when special committees are appointed, they serve only in an investigative and advisory capacity.
- I will abide by majority decisions of the board.
- I will carefully consider petitions, resolutions and complaints and will act in the best interests of the school district.
- I will not discuss the confidential business of the board in my home, on the street or in my office; the place for such discussion is the board meeting.
- I will endeavor to keep informed on local, state and national educational developments of significance so I may become a better board member.

In Meeting My Responsibility to My School District Community:

- I will consider myself a trustee of public education and will do my best to protect it, conserve it, and advance it, giving to the students of my school district community the educational facilities that are as complete and adequate as it is possible to provide.
- I will consider it an important responsibility of the board to interpret the aims, methods and attitudes of the school district to the community.
- I will earnestly try to interpret the needs and attitudes of the school district community and do my best to translate them into the education program of the school district.
- I will attempt to procure adequate financial support for the school district.
- I will represent the entire school district rather than individual electors, patrons or groups.
- I will not regard the school district facilities as my own private property but as the property of the people.

In My Relationship with Superintendent & Employees:

- I will function, in meeting the legal responsibility that is mine, as a part of a legislative, evaluative, policy-forming body, not as an administrative officer.
- I will recognize that it is my responsibility, together with that of my fellow board members, to see the school district is properly run and not to run it myself.
- I will expect the school district to be administered by the best-trained technical and professional people it is possible to procure within the financial resources of the school district.
- I will recognize the superintendent as the executive officer of the board.
- I will work through the administrative employees of the board, not over or around them.
- I will expect the superintendent to keep the board adequately informed through oral and written reports.
- I will vote to employ employees only after the recommendation of the superintendent has been received.
- I will insist that contracts be equally binding on teachers and the board.
- I will give the superintendent power commensurate with the superintendent's responsibility and will not in any way interfere with, or seek to undermine, the superintendent's authority.
- I will give the superintendent friendly counsel and advice.
- I will present any personal criticism of employees to the superintendent.
- I will refer complaints to the proper administrative officer.

To Cooperate with Other School Boards:

- I will not employ a superintendent, principal or teacher who is already under contract with another school district without first securing assurance from the proper authority that the person can be released from their contract.
- I will consider it unethical to pursue any procedure calculated to embarrass a neighboring board or its representatives.
- I will associate myself with board members of other school districts for the purpose of discussing school district issues and cooperating in the improvement of the education program.

APPENDIX B

School Boards & the Law

School Board Elections

School board members are elected by their local communities in an election held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in odd numbered years. They serve four-year terms and may be elected at-large, from director districts, or in several combinations of at-large and director districts, depending on the system locally adopted. The school board secretary will have materials to help you get started, including the auditor's school election calendar, nomination petition and general information about school boards.

Any person who is a United States citizen, 18 years of age or older, a resident of the school district (and director district, if applicable) and is eligible to be registered to vote may become a candidate for the school board.

Nomination petitions for the office of school board member must be filed with the school board secretary not more than 71 nor fewer than 47 days prior to the regular election. The process for filing nomination petitions is as follows:

- Request the original nomination petition from the school board secretary or community college secretary.
- **K-12 School Board Signature Requirements:** Ask your school board secretary for the minimum number of signatures. Obtain the nomination signatures from eligible electors of the school district equal to at least 1% of the registered voters of the district or 50 eligible electors of the district, whichever is less, but at least 10 signatures.
- **At-Large Districts:** If board members are elected at-large, the number of signatures needed is calculated from the number of registered voters in the entire school district, and petition signers may live anywhere in the school district.
- **Director Districts:** If board members are elected by director district, rather than at-large, and are voted upon by the entire school district, the number of signatures needed is calculated from the number of registered voters in the school district, and petition signers may live anywhere in the school district. In school districts where directors are only voted on by the residents of the director district, the number of signatures is calculated from the number of registered voters in the director district, and petition signers must live in the director district.
- A person may sign nomination petitions for more than one candidate for the same office.
- Attach a notarized affidavit acknowledging the candidate's eligibility.
- File the petition with the school board secretary or community college secretary not more than 71 days and not less than 47 days prior to the election. Petitions must be filed with the board secretary by 5 p.m. on the 47th day preceding the election.

Each candidate is assured a place on the ballot by successfully filing the completed nomination petition. A candidate's name may be withdrawn from the ballot after the completed petition is filed by submitting a written statement to that effect with the school board secretary or community college secretary more than 35 days before the election.

An individual may be elected as a write-in candidate. Space must be provided on the ballot for write-in candidates. The write-in candidate is not required to file a nomination petition.

Campaign Finance Disclosure Law

School board candidates must comply with the Iowa Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws (*Iowa Code Chapters 68A and 68B*). Candidates should be aware that failure to comply with these laws can result in fines and other penalties. The laws also apply to write-in candidates.

Important provisions of which school board candidates should be aware include:

- Candidates who receive contributions, make expenditures or incur debts in excess of \$1,000 (including personal funds) must form a committee and file reports. This holds true for such actions done by a committee on behalf of a candidate. The committee must file its statement of organization within 10 days of the \$1,000 threshold being crossed. Reports disclosing campaign transactions are due by 4:30 p.m. five days before the election (if minimum threshold is crossed), and on the 19th day of January. For committees that do not dissolve, they must also file reports on the 19th day of January of each year in which the candidate's name does not appear on the ballot. Contributions from relatives within the third degree of consanguinity and affinity must include a description of the relationship to the candidate.
- Every candidate who crosses the \$1,000 threshold is mandated by law to file their statement of organization and campaign disclosure reports electronically using the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board's web reporting system.
- Candidates are required to deposit all contributions within seven days of receipt in an account maintained by the candidate's committee in a financial institution. (Exception: a separate account need not be established if the candidate receives no funds from others and finances the campaign out of their own pocket; in this instance reports must still be filed to show expenditures from personal funds as in-kind contributions from the candidate to the committee.)
- Candidates may spend campaign funds only for campaign purposes, educational or other expenses associated with the duties of the office or constituency services and may transfer funds only as provided in *Iowa Code* sections 68A.302 and 68A.303.
- Candidate committees that hire a consultant for services such as public relations, advertising, fundraising or polling must provide information that identifies the consultant and the consultant's activities.
- Any printed political material must include the words 'paid for by' and identification of the individuals, committee or organization which paid for the ad (includes newspapers, brochures, videos, posters, billboards, mailings and websites, but not items too small to include such credit, such as buttons or pens). Candidates who have not registered a

committee must include their full names and addresses as part of the identification, or file form DR-SFA to use the shorter ‘paid for by’ statement.

- School resources cannot be used to promote either candidates or ballot issues, including the use of school mailboxes for distribution of campaign advocacy materials or school email for promotional or solicitation messages.

Candidates may obtain more information about Iowa’s campaign finance laws and access the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board’s web reporting system at **ethics.iowa.gov**.

Oath of Office

After election or appointment to the board of directors, a board member is administered an oath (*Iowa Code 277.28*), a positive response to which qualifies each board member to serve.

“I, (name), do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of Iowa and that I will faithfully and impartially to the best of my ability discharge the duties of the office of (director) in (district) as now or hereafter required by law.”

Sources of Laws

There are three primary legal sources governing school districts:

1. Federal law, including the U.S. Constitution and federal statutes;
2. State law, including the Iowa Constitution and state statutes; and
3. Federal and state rules and regulations.

There are also three sources of interpretation of school law:

1. State and federal court decisions;
2. Opinions of the Iowa attorney general; and
3. Federal and state agency administrative decisions, which are based on the statutes, rules, case precedents and opinions as they may relate to a specific administrative appeal. Examples of administrative decisions could include decisions made by the state Department of Education, the Public Employment Relations Board, and others.

Powers & Duties

After the board has been legally constituted and organized, actions of the board must be consistent with existing constitutional and statutory authority.

Three basic types of state statutes provide the legal framework within which the local school district is operated. Mandatory statutes specify actions that “shall” be taken by the board.

Permissive or discretionary statutes specify actions that “may” be taken by the board. Prohibitive statutes specify actions that “shall not” be taken by the board. Below are examples of each type:

- **Mandatory:** The board of directors of each school corporation shall meet and organize at the first regular meeting, or at a special meeting called by the secretary of the board, to organize the board in advance of the first regular meeting after the canvass for the regular school election at some suitable place to be designated by the secretary (*Iowa Code 279.1*).
- **Permissive:** Special meetings may be held as may be determined by the board (*Iowa Code 279.2*).
- **Prohibitive:** A member of the board of directors of a school district shall not be an agent for a textbook or school supply company (*Iowa Code 301.28*).

Conflict of Interest & Gifts

As elected public officials, board members are duty-bound to serve the public interest. Yet, as private citizens, they may also participate in outside employment and activities. The most critical conflict of public-versus-private interest in decision making arises in financial transactions—the spending of public funds. School board members must comply with the conflict-of-interest laws in the *Iowa Code*.

Statutes remove certain potential conflicts of interest by excluding a board member from:

- Receiving compensation from the school district for one or more contracts for the purchase of goods or services which benefit a board member unless the benefit to the board member does not exceed \$20,000 in a fiscal year or the contract is publicly bid.
- Appointing a relative within the third degree to a paying position unless it is first approved by the board.
- Being an agent for a textbook or school supply company involved in a transaction with a staff or board member of your own school district.
- Being a statewide elected official or a state legislator.

The law does not prohibit a spouse or other family member of a school district employee from running for the board. There may be other instances of board member conflict of interest not listed here. For more information, discuss this topic with your board president.

Generally, Iowa law prohibits school board members and candidates from accepting gifts and honoraria from people who may be financially affected by actions of the school board. Candidates are advised to inquire about the current status of restrictions or reporting requirements at the time of the election by contacting the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board (*Iowa Code 68B.22*).

Board Member Liability

Iowa law imposes a duty on the school district to defend board members and, if found liable, indemnify board members from compensatory damages, which include damages such as

medical bills, repairing damaged property or measurable losses incurred by the injured party (*Iowa Code 670*). The law limits instances when school districts or board members can be liable. Board members are not immune from lawsuits when their actions violate constitutional rights or other laws.

Removal from Office

There is no provision in Iowa law for removing a school board member by recall petition or election. However, like other appointed or elected Iowa officials, school board members may be removed (*Iowa Code 66.1A*) by the district court for:

- Willful or habitual neglect or refusal to perform duties of office.
- Willful misconduct or maladministration in office.
- Conviction of a felony.
- Intoxication, or conviction of being intoxicated.
- Conviction of violating the Campaign Finance Disclosure laws (*Iowa Code 68A*).
- Corruption; and
- Extortion.

APPENDIX C

Open Meetings

Chapter 21 of the *Iowa Code* is titled “Official Meetings Open to Public,” but it is more often called the “open meetings law.” The open meetings law, along with *Iowa Code*, Chapter 22, “Examination of Public Records,” comprise Iowa’s ‘government in the sunshine’ laws. These acts establish the state requirements with which governmental bodies, including school boards, area education agency (AEA) boards and community college trustees must comply in their meetings and records.

Open meetings serve both the board and the public. Open meetings allow the public to know what decisions are being made about the education of students and the expenditure of public funds.

By seeing the board in action, the public may acquire a deeper appreciation for the amount of work a board handles, the difficult decisions it faces, and the knowledge needed to become a board member. Open meetings can also improve community relations because they allow opportunities for input and access to meetings. There are certain instances when it is lawful for a board to meet in private, and these exceptions to the open meetings law are called ‘closed sessions.’ There are also exemptions from the open meetings law which are called ‘exempt meetings.’

The following information provides an overview of the sunshine laws, but by no means provides the detail necessary to fully understand these laws. For additional information, please visit www.ia-sb.org/openmeetings.

Understanding a ‘Meeting’

Since school boards must meet and conduct their business in the open, it is important to understand how the law defines a ‘meeting.’ *Iowa Code* 21.2 defines a meeting as “a gathering in person or by electronic means, formal or informal, of a majority of the members of a governmental body where there is deliberation or action upon any matter within the scope of the governmental body’s policymaking duties.” Generally speaking, the definition of a meeting has three parts, which include the following:

1. A gathering;
2. Of a majority of the board; and
3. With deliberation or action upon any matter within the scope of the board’s policymaking duties taking place.

A meeting exists when a majority of the board deliberates or takes action on an issue within the board’s policymaking duties. However, when board members meet for purely social purposes or ministerial duties, those meetings are exempt from the open meetings law. What is a ministerial duty? These are duties of the board such as attending a graduation ceremony, a school open house, convention or signing an official document after the decision has already been made.

Types of Meetings

- **Regular Meetings:** Regular meetings include those meetings of the board generally held at the same time, in the same place and on the same day(s) every month. Some school districts have two regular meeting times, one for use during the school months and another during the summer months. Boards should set their regular meeting time for the year at the organizational meeting in odd-numbered years or at the annual meeting in even-numbered years.
- **Work Sessions:** Work sessions are open meetings generally held when the board wants to engage in board development, planning or goal setting. At work sessions, while the board may be discussing policy issues, it is not acting upon any of the issues. Even though the board is not acting on policy issues, the board is deliberating policy issues, so a work session is considered a meeting, and all the provisions of the open meetings law apply, including the provision that meetings be accessible to the public and minutes be kept and published.
- **Special Meetings:** Special meetings are held in addition to regular meetings to consider lengthy issues or those issues needing attention prior to the next regular meeting of the board.
- **Emergency Meetings:** Emergency meetings are held only when the board must act immediately and cannot wait the required 24-hour notice period for a special meeting. For example, an emergency meeting is appropriate if a board has bid on a piece of property, the bid is accepted, and the board must act that same day in order to finalize the bid. Boards may occasionally need to hold an emergency meeting, as most items can wait the required 24 hours for a special meeting or until the next regular meeting. The minutes of the emergency meeting must state why the meeting was held without the required 24-hours' notice.
- **Closed Sessions:** A closed session is one portion of an open meeting. A governmental body may hold a closed session only by affirmative public vote of either two-thirds of the members of the body, or all the members present at the meeting. A closed session may be held "only to the extent a closed session is necessary" and only for the reasons listed in the *Iowa Code* 21.5.

Preparation for a Meeting

- **Public Notice:** A governmental body must give notice of the time, date and place of each meeting, and its tentative agenda, in a "manner reasonably calculated to apprise the public of that information." Reasonable notice includes advising news media that have filed a request for notice, as well as posting the notice on a prominent exterior main entrance that is easily accessible to the public. Usually, such notice shall be at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. Holding meetings on shorter notice is not allowed unless it is an emergency. If a meeting is held on shorter notice, as much notice "as is reasonably possible" must be given, and the "nature of the good cause justifying departure from normal requirements" must be stated in the minutes (*Iowa Code* 21.4). Notice must be given of meetings being held by electronic means such as telephone conference calls, and a physical location accessible for the public to listen to the meeting must be made available (*Iowa Code* 21.8).
- **Meeting Agenda:** See a sample meeting agenda in Chapter 6 of this book, pp. 31–32.

- **Meeting Time and Place:** Each meeting shall be held at a place reasonably accessible to the public and at a time reasonably convenient to the public, unless for good cause such a place or time is impossible or impractical (*Iowa Code 21.4*). The time of day and location of the regular meetings should be consistent from month to month. The meeting area should provide comfortable seating, ample workspace, and ease of access to needed data for the board members, board secretary and superintendent/AEA chief administrator. It should also provide seating to accommodate the media and public, as well as ease of access to the meeting site.

Happenings During & After a Board Meeting

- **Minutes Required:** Each governmental body must keep minutes of all its meetings, showing the date, time and place, the members present and the action taken at each meeting. The minutes must show the results of each vote taken and how each member voted. The minutes are a public record open to public inspection (*Iowa Code 21.3*).
- **Public Comment:** The board decides the level of participation by the public, if any, in board meetings. Some boards set aside a specific time during the meeting for public comment. Other boards allow public participation during discussion of specific agenda items, and others offer a combination. The level of public participation the board chooses should be clearly addressed in board policy, and the policy should be made available upon request. This does not address the legal requirement that boards place an item on the board agenda upon filing of a qualifying petition pursuant to *Iowa Code 279.8B*.
- **Publication Required:** *Iowa Code 279.35* requires publication of the proceedings of each regular, adjourned or special meeting of the board. The secretary must furnish a copy of the proceedings within two weeks of adjournment of the meeting to the school district's official newspaper for publication. There seems to be no distinction between 'minutes' and 'proceedings.' If the proceedings to be published contain the elements contemplated by the open meetings law, Chapter 21, they should be sufficient.
- **Enforcement:** The Iowa Public Information Board (IPIB) is the organization charged with enforcing Chapters 21 and 22 of the *Iowa Code*. If an individual feels there has been a violation of either of these chapters, they may file a complaint with IPIB. Ignorance of the law is not a defense; boards are authorized by the open meetings law to seek legal or court opinions as necessary.

APPENDIX D

Sample Official Minutes

Minutes of a Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board of Directors
of the _____ Community School District

October 14, 20xx

1. **Call to Order**

Meeting was called to order by President Olmos at 8 p.m.

2. **Roll Call**

Present: C. Anderson, F. Nguyen, R. Olmos, B. Stoner, P. Kaiser, M. Spence

Absent: T. Havson

3. **Consent Agenda**

a. Agenda

b. Minutes of September 15 meeting

c. Secretary's Monthly Financial Report

4. **Bills**

Motion by Nguyen and second by Stoner to approve items on the consent agenda.

Carried unanimously.

5. **Communications**

Latonya Marks, President of the P.T.A., was recognized by the board. She wished to thank the board members and Superintendent Towne for their assistance in making the annual P.T.A. membership the highest ever recorded with a total of 673 members.

6. **Recognition**

Sally Peterson, High School Art Teacher, was recognized as a runner-up for the Art Teacher of the Year Award.

7. **Reports**

Summer School Policy Report—The nine-member study committee named by the board in August has held two conferences as reported by Steve Oaks, Junior High Principal. The committee, comprised of representatives from the board, P.T.A., teachers, administrators and students, has not completed its study, but initial findings indicate: (1) present arrangement is adequate; (2) classes should be large enough to justify teaching expense and; (3) driver education should be offered on tuition-free basis.

8. **Reading Data Review**

The Reading Team and principal reported on the progress of the Action Research Project.

9. Enrollment

Superintendent Towne made a report on present student enrollment of 867—down 13 from a year ago.

10. Franklin Property Purchase

The offer to sell the district the tract of land immediately south of Franklin by R. Bailin during the last board meeting was discussed.

R. Anderson moved and B. Stoner seconded the proposal to purchase the property for \$30,000.

Yeas: Anderson, Nguyen, Stoner

Nays: Olmos, Kaiser, Spence

Motion failed to receive a majority; Pres. Olmos declared the motion failed.

11. Resignation

Superintendent submitted for the board's consideration and recommended the acceptance of the resignation of Marjorie Olson. Motion by Kaiser, second by Nguyen, that the resignation be accepted and the teacher be released from her contract for the remainder of the 20xx school year. The motion carried 6-0.

12. Appointment of New Teacher

Superintendent recommended that Harvey Phipps be appointed to the Junior High staff to replace Marjorie Olson. Motion by Kaiser, second by Nguyen to employ Harvey Phipps beginning on _____, 20xx, at a salary of \$_____. Carried 6-0.

13. Adjournment

There was no further business to come before the board for consideration at this time. Motion by Nguyen, second by Spence to adjourn. Carried 6-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Reports and documents and the full text of motions, resolutions or policies considered by the Board at this meeting are on file in the Board Secretary's office, 555-3720, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

R. Olmos, President

B. Baker, Secretary

APPENDIX E

Legal Structure of Iowa Schools

Educational Subdivisions of Iowa

Although education is a state function, in no instance does the State Board of Education, director of the Department of Education, or state legislature attempt to directly operate the schools. The legislature has, however, established three public educational systems which have varying responsibilities for the education of public school students. The three systems are community colleges, area education agencies and local school districts. Each system is governed by a board of directors. The State Board of Education has some jurisdiction over all these school systems.

State Board of Education

The policymaking board of the Department of Education is established under Chapter 256 of the *Iowa Code*. The state board consists of 10 members: nine voting members and one nonvoting student member. The voting members are appointed by the governor subject to senate confirmation. The nonvoting student member shall be appointed as provided in *Iowa Code* 256.5A. The voting members shall be registered voters of the state and hold no other elective or appointive state office. Not more than five voting members shall be of the same political party. The powers and duties of the State Board are to:

- Adopt and establish policy for the programs and services of the department pursuant to law (*Iowa Code* 256.7(1)).
- Adopt, and update annually, a five-year plan for the achievement of educational goals in Iowa (*Iowa Code* 256.7(4)).
- Hear appeals of persons aggrieved by decisions of boards of directors of school corporations under Chapter 290 and other appeals prescribed by law (*Iowa Code* 256.7(6)).
- Adopt rules establishing standards and a procedure for accrediting all public and private schools in Iowa (*Iowa Code* 256.11).

Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE)

The Board of Educational Examiners is responsible for establishing requirements for the licensing of teachers and administrators and professional development programs required for the renewal or upgrading of a practitioner's license. The board also establishes licensing fees, enforces licensure requirements and may suspend or revoke a teaching license or take other disciplinary action against a practitioner.

Membership of the board includes 13 members. Four must be members of the general public who have demonstrated an interest in education but have never held a practitioner's license.

These four members may not hold elective office or be employed or contracted by a school district, accredited nonpublic or charter school. Two of the members must be the parent or guardian of a student currently enrolled in a school district, accredited nonpublic or charter school. One member must currently be or previously have been a member of a board of directors of a school district. Eight members will be licensed practitioners, three of whom must be administrators, and one of whom must be an employee of an accredited nonpublic school. The remaining four licensed practitioners must be selected as designated by law. One member will be the director of the Department of Education or their designee. Members shall elect a chairperson of the board. Members, except for the director of the Department of Education or their designee, shall be appointed by the governor subject to confirmation by the senate.

Department of Education (DE)

The state Department of Education is an administrative, supervisory and consultative agency designed to improve the state system of public education. The subdivisions of the DE cover elementary and secondary education, community colleges, educational support for students and families, financial and information services, public broadcasting, state and regional libraries and vocational rehabilitation.

Director of the Department of Education

The director is appointed by the governor subject to senate confirmation. The director must possess a background in education and administration and serves at the pleasure of the governor. Some of the duties of director are to (*Iowa Code 256.9*):

- Carry out programs and policies as determined by the State Board.
- Employ personnel and assign duties and responsibilities of the department.
- Submit recommendations to the General Assembly relating to revisions or amendments to the school laws.
- Determine the condition, needs and progress of the schools under supervision of the department.
- Act as executive officer of the State Board.
- Recommend to the State Board rules necessary to implement the programs and services of the department.
- Develop criteria and procedures to assist in the identification of at-risk students and their developmental needs.

Local School District

The primary responsibility for providing educational opportunities to students is placed upon the shoulders of school board members in local school districts.

The school board “shall have exclusive jurisdiction in all school matters...” unless provided by law (*Iowa Code 274.1*).

The [local] board shall make rules for its own government and that of the directors, officers, teachers and pupils, and for the care of the schoolhouse grounds, and property of the school corporation, and aid in the enforcement of the same, and require the performance of duties by said persons imposed by law and the rules (Iowa Code 279.8).

All school districts must maintain at least the educational approval standards specified by law for both elementary and secondary students.

Area Education Agency (AEA)

Iowa Code 273 sets forth the services and requirements for area education agencies (AEAs), which began operation in 1975. AEAs are required to provide special education services and media services for the local school districts within the area (*Iowa Code 273*). Other educational programs and services may be provided by the AEA within the limit of available funds. Each of the nine AEAs is governed by a board of directors, the members of which are elected from AEA director districts. Each AEA director is elected to a four-year term by members of local school boards at an AEA director district convention. An AEA director may serve more than one term, may be a member of a local school board and must be a resident and elector of the AEA director district.

Community Colleges

Iowa Code 260C sets forth the services and educational opportunities community colleges may offer. Their primary focus is to provide vocational schools and area colleges on a regional basis.

The state is divided into 15 geographic areas for this purpose. Each community college has its own governing board of five to nine members, each elected to a four-year term from area director districts. Board members must be residents of the director districts from which they are elected. Members of school district boards or members of area education agency boards may not serve as members of the community college board of directors.

Although the major portion of a community college’s program is designed for students past high school age, high school students may enroll in courses. The community colleges also provide programs for students of high school age who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school. In addition, high school completion programs may be offered for students past high school age who have not graduated from high school.

The State Board of Education’s authority over the community colleges is similar to its power over local school districts: to administer, allocate and disburse federal and state funds, to adopt administrative rules and regulations and approve standards.



IASB

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