



The Roles of School Districts and School Boards

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Overview of School Districts

- Pennsylvania's 500 school districts are the heart of public education in the commonwealth
- Funded through local, state, and federal dollars
- Serve over 1.75 million students



Overview of School Districts

- Governance
 - School directors and school boards
 - Running for the office of school director
 - How school boards are organized
 - Board roles and responsibilities
 - Board meetings
- PSBA's role
- Discussion



Governance

What is a school director?

- Volunteer elected official who is part of a school board which governs the school district
- Serves a four-year term of office
- Designated by school law to govern the school district



Governance

What is a school board?

- A legislative body elected locally by their fellow citizens to serve as agents of the state legislature
- Each board consists of nine members
- Tasked with providing public education to the children who reside within its geographic boundaries



History of School Boards

- Free School Act of 1834 & Thaddeus Stevens

Pennsylvania Constitutional Mandate:

“The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth...”

~Pa Constitution III § 14



Legislative Authority

School directors are both local and state officials. Although locally elected, school boards are agents of the state charged with the responsibility of fulfilling the constitutional mandate of a “...thorough and efficient system of education.” (24 P.S. § 3-301)



Who can run for school board?



Board Eligibility Requirements

A candidate for school director must be:

- A citizen of Pennsylvania
- Of good moral character
- At least 18 years old
- A resident of the school district for at least one year prior to election or appointment (must also be a resident of region if elected regionally)



How to Become a Candidate

- Circulate a petition & obtain signatures
- File a petition
- File a statement of financial interest for preceding calendar year with local SD
- School board elections occur in November of odd-numbered years



How is the school board organized?



Board Reorganization

Elected school boards meet to organize during the first week of December.

(24 P.S. § 4-401(b), 4-404)



Legislative Authority

- Every school board is charged with the responsibility of establishing, equipping and maintaining elementary schools and such other schools it deems proper to establish. (24 P.S. § 5-501- 503)
- Public School Code delineates many, but not all, of the powers that school boards may exercise to fulfill their responsibility of operating a public school system. (24 P.S. § 5-508)



What does a school board do?



Board Director vs. School Board

- The nine member board operates within the framework of federal, state, local laws and regulations
- The authority of the board is explicitly defined by law and regulation
- No individual board member has legal authority outside of public “sunshine” meetings, unless authorized by a vote or resolution of a majority of the board



What do boards do?

- Make policy
- Hire/fire superintendent
- Focus on students
- Plan and set goals
- Adopt a budget
- Hire staff
- Adopt instructional programs



What do boards do?

- Determine school facility needs
- Engage the community in its schools
- Advocacy
- Adjudication
- Establish board operating guidelines
- Participate in board professional development



School Board Meetings

Required by law!

- Boards must meet once every two months, at minimum (PA Public School Code of 1949)
- It is the only venue in which the board can exercise its authority to act (Sunshine Act)
- Each board's own policies and procedures define board operations that are not outlined in law.



The Sunshine Act

“The General Assembly finds that the right of the public to be present at all meetings of agencies and to *witness* the deliberation, policy formulation and decision making of agencies is vital to the enhancement and proper functioning of the democratic process and that secrecy in public affairs undermines the faith of the public in government and the public’s effectiveness in fulfilling its roles in a democratic society.”

Preamble – Act 93 of 1998



The Sunshine Act

Any prearranged gathering which is attended or participated in by a quorum of members (in this case school directors) held for the purpose of deliberating or taking official action must be open to the public.



At a board meeting...

- School board fulfill its responsibilities
 - Listens to comments from residents and taxpayers
 - Public can witness board deliberations and decision-making
 - Directors discuss and review confidential issues in executive sessions



Private Meetings of the Board

There are two types of meetings where the board is permitted to meet in private:

1. **Conference:** a training program or seminar organized for the sole purpose of providing information to agency members on matters directly related to their official responsibilities
2. **Executive Session:** a meeting held for special purposes from which the public may be excluded, such as:
 - Personnel
 - Labor relations
 - Real estate
 - Litigation
 - Confidential information



To whom is the board
responsible?



Public School Governance

As stewards of public tax dollars and directors of public schools, school directors are accountable to:

- Students
- Parents
- Each other
- Superintendent and school district staff
- Taxpayers
- The “common wealth” of the community
- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- The Pennsylvania General Assembly
- Our future as a nation



School Board Balancing Act

Public Opinion

- Back to basics
- Keep taxes low
- Reduce spending

Public Interest

- Good stewardship
- Invest in student achievement
- Good schools have a positive community impact



Standards for Effective School Governance

Each effective school director:

- Advocates for a thorough and efficient system of public education
- Models responsible governance and leadership
- Governs through policy
- Ensures that effective planning occurs
- Monitors results
- Communicates with and engages the community



PSBA's Role

A nonprofit statewide association of public school boards, pledged to the highest ideals of local lay leadership for the public schools of the commonwealth

- founded in 1895 as the first school boards association established in the United States
- Pennsylvania's 4,500 school directors become members by virtue of election to their local board — the board joins as a whole
- 100% membership among 500 school districts



PSBA's Role

Mission

We empower elected school board members to succeed by providing vital tools, superior training and powerful advocacy. We promote high quality, locally driven public education for all Pennsylvania students.

Vision

We stand for strong school boards, strong public schools and a strong Pennsylvania.

PSBA's Role



Policy Services



LEARN



Publications



Legislative
Advocacy



Legal
Assistance



Insurance



Employee
Relations



Recruitment
Services



Administrative
Resources



Questions & Discussion

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