

### **When are school board members elected?**

School board elections must be held only on the second Saturday in May or first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Special elections to fill vacancies that may occur between elections also may be held as appropriate.

### **How are school board members elected?**

School district trustees are elected by popular vote. Whether an election is by majority or plurality vote is a matter of local policy. Terms of office vary depending on the legal characteristics of the district. Generally, trustees serve staggered terms so that the entire board is not up for election at the same time.

### **Can citizens attend school board meetings?**

Yes. School boards must meet in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act and make public records available pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act. Citizens are welcome at all school board meetings, except in a few legally specified circumstances permitting closed meetings.

Most school boards allow citizen participation and have policies communicating how and when citizens can contribute their input. Generally, boards set aside a portion of the regular meeting for public comment and limit each speaker to five minutes. This is a chance for citizens to give input while allowing adequate time for other important board business.

*Texas Association of School Boards*  
P.O. Box 400 • Austin, Texas 78767-0400  
800.580.8272 • 512.467.0222  
[tasb.org](http://tasb.org)



# Understanding Your School Board

## Who is responsible for public education in Texas?

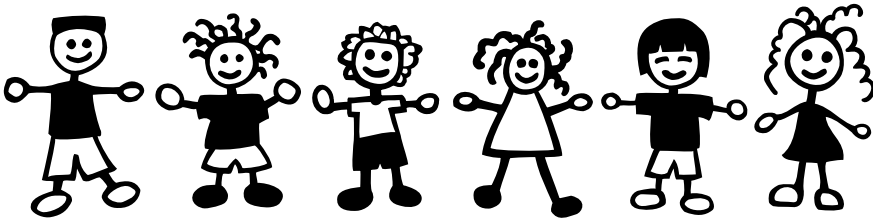
The commissioner of education, State Board of Education (SBOE), and Texas Education Agency (TEA) guide and monitor public education in Texas. SBOE provides leadership and state-level administration as prescribed by law, and the commissioner and TEA staff implement state education policy. Texas has delegated much of the responsibility for education to the local school board. Locally elected school boards are political subdivisions carrying out a state function. Despite increasingly prescriptive state and federal laws and SBOE and commissioner's rules, local school districts have significant latitude in governing the schools.

## Why are local school boards needed?

The U.S. Supreme Court has said education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Our system of local school districts and boards of education epitomizes representative and participatory government—citizens elected from their community making decisions about educational programs based on community needs, values, and expectations. School boards are entrusted by the public to translate the needs of students into policies, plans, and goals that will be supported by the community.

## What is the primary function of the board and its members?

Governing the school district is the primary role of a school board. School board members are guardians of the public trust and, through the policies they make, are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of local public education. These policies dictate the standards and philosophy by which schools are run and the criteria used to judge whether they are being run well. The board serves as the advocate for educational excellence for the community's youth and puts those interests first.



This responsibility often entails difficult choices, self-sacrifice, and exposure to public criticism. However, it also brings a great deal of personal satisfaction in sharing with parents, staff, and students their academic successes. This crucial responsibility and the closeness of trustees to the voters make the local school board the purest example of democracy our society presents.

## What are some of the key roles and responsibilities of a school board?

- ★ Ensure creation of a vision and goals for the district and evaluate district success.
- ★ Adopt policies that inform district actions.
- ★ Hire a superintendent to serve as the chief executive officer of the district and evaluate the superintendent's success.
- ★ Approve an annual budget consistent with the district vision.
- ★ Communicate the district's vision and success to the community.

## How do school boards make decisions?

A school board is a local governmental body that can take action only by a majority vote at a legally called public meeting. The individual board member's major responsibility is to study issues facing the district, evaluate needs and resources, and, after due consideration, vote in the best interest of all students at such a meeting. A trustee who attempts—without board authorization—to speak for the whole board, direct school staff members, or make other individual decisions is exceeding his or her authority.

## Who is eligible to serve as a school board member?

There are a number of requirements to be eligible for election. Among them, a local school board candidate must be (1) a qualified/registered voter, (2) a resident of the district he or she desires to represent for six months before the filing deadline, and (3) a resident of the state for 12 months before the deadline.

## Is there special training involved in being a school trustee?

Trustees are required by Texas law and commissioner of education rules to participate in three types of continuing education: (1) an orientation to local district policy and to the laws affecting public education in Texas; (2) an annual team-building activity, taken in conjunction with the rest of the board and the superintendent; and (3) a specified number of hours each year in areas of special need.

Board members determine needs with their board annually by reviewing the Framework for School Board Development, a document that outlines the tasks an effective board performs in its governing capacity. Continuing education courses that address these needs are available through a variety of sources. Board members also receive training on the Texas Open Meetings Act and Texas Public Information Act.