



Roles of a School Board

A GUIDE CREATED BY THE IDAHO SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

1 What is a school board?

A school board is an elected body that governs and oversees public schools and is elected by district residents or charter staff and families. In essence, the school board is a direct connection from the community in the communities hopes and vision for their schools. While the ultimate role of a school board is to focus on improving student outcomes, school boards also have other responsibilities. For example, they create and adopt policies, hire and evaluate the district superintendent or charter administrator, set the budget, set the school calendar, and are the ultimate decision-maker on school issues. School boards are responsible for setting the goals of the district/charter and accountable for how schools – and their students – perform.

2 What decision making factors does a school board have?

When making decisions, a school board considers a variety of factors such as the needs of the students, the available budget, the interests of the community, and the qualifications of potential staff members. The board must ensure that decisions align with the district's/charter's mission and goals and comply with state and federal laws. Ultimately, the board's priority is to provide the best possible education for students while being fiscally responsible and transparent in their decision-making.

3 How are decisions made on a school board?

All decisions of a school board are voted on in an open meeting. These items are called action items on an agenda. Most often school boards vote on action items in an open meeting unless it directly relates to personnel or student expulsions. Each member brings their unique perspective and experiences to the table, which allows for a comprehensive decision-making process. Ultimately, the goal is to make decisions that benefit all students, the district/charter, and the community and families impacted. Good decisions require collaboration, open communication, and a willingness to listen to all voices affected by their decisions.

4 What are the rules for a school board?

School boards need clear operating protocols and typically use parliamentary procedure, but each school board meeting may look a little different. School boards must comply with Idaho's Open Meeting Law. You can learn more about Idaho's Open Meeting Law by visiting the Idaho Attorney General's website. Information regarding a school district's powers can be found in Idaho Code §33-512.

5 When does my school board meet and how often?

School boards are required to meet at least once a month according to Idaho Code, and typically determine their regular meeting date and time at their Annual Meeting in January. However, a special meeting of the board may be called by the board chair or any two members of the board, and that meeting may be held at any time with at least 24 hours notice. Your school board should have their annual and monthly meeting calendar posted on their website or placed prominently at the district office. Agendas for a regularly scheduled meeting must be posted no later than 48 hours before the scheduled meeting. Agendas for a special meetings or executive session must be posted no later than 24 hours before the scheduled meeting.

6 What is an executive session and when can a school board host one?

A school board can only lawfully be in executive session to discuss confidential or sensitive information. This includes personnel matters, legal issues, negotiations, and other sensitive topics that require privacy and discretion. It is important for school boards to follow proper procedures when entering executive session, including notifying the public of the reason for the closed meeting and limiting the discussion to only the authorized agenda items.

7 What is ISBA and what is its role with school boards?

The Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA) is a membership organization that provides quality, educational, and cost-effective services to its members – such as board and leadership development, policy services, monthly education opportunities, annual convention, and advocacy. Our vision is to Empower Local Boards for Student Success. Any public school board (charter schools & public schools) in Idaho is invited and welcome to be an ISBA member.

8 How Do I Make a Complaint or Raise a Concern with a School Board?

An individual board member who receives a complaint or inquiry from a parent or interested citizen concerning a school district or charter school matter will typically refer the patron to the appropriate person using the board's process for "chain of command" and may, when appropriate, advise the patron to the grievance or complaint procedure process established by the board. The board member may also refer the patron complaint to the superintendent or chief administrator, who will determine an appropriate means of responding to the complaint.

While initially, patrons might feel upset with how this works, there is good reason for it. Board members must refer patron complaints to the appropriate person instead of handling them directly in order to maintain their impartiality in the event that the complaint makes its way up to the board level for final action. If they learn too much outside of a formal hearing, they may have to recuse themselves from participating in future deliberation or action on that issue because they may be biased. Board members must also honor the due process rights guaranteed to their staff members and public school students, so it's important they remain impartial in the event they must take future disciplinary action. This is also why individual board members will refrain from taking individual action with regard to such complaints other than referring them to the proper administrative employee.

Get to know your school district or charter schools' policy manual, especially how to handle complaints or issues you might have!

Roles of a School Board Member

1 What is the role of a school board member?

A school board member, commonly known in Idaho as a trustee, is responsible for representing a specific zone within a school district. A school board member – together, with the board, oversee school system by adopting policies, creating the goals within the continuous improvement plan, adopting a budget and approving school finances, and evaluating superintendent/charter administrator performance. Individual board members have no authority. The board as a whole has authority, which it exercises during a duly called and posted meeting.

2 What is a Code of Ethics and are my School Board Members required to sign it?

A Code of Ethics helps your board members understand the responsibilities and standards that come with serving as a board member. Your school's board members are not required to sign a code of ethics, however ISBA highly encourages them to do so. It is important for a high-functioning board to hold themselves accountable to ethical practices.

3 What is the role of the Board Chair, and how is it different from other members of the board?

The board chair plays a crucial role in oversight of a school system. This chair is responsible for leading the board in their governance duties. The board chair works closely with other board members, school administrators, and community members to ensure that the needs of students, teachers, and staff are being met. The chair also serves as a liaison between the board and the public, ensuring that information is communicated effectively and transparently.

4 What is the best way to contact your board members?

To communicate with your school board, you can find their email addresses on your district or charter website. Keep in mind that due to open meeting laws, board members are not able to conduct official school board business outside of scheduled meetings. If you email a board member, they may respond vaguely and may address your concerns during the next meeting. The same rule applies if you approach a board member in public. You are welcome to attend your school board meeting and may be invited to voice your comments or concerns during a public comment period.

MISSION:

The Idaho School Boards Association advocates for Idaho students and public education with leadership and service for local school boards.

VISION:

Empower Local Boards for Student Success.



Terms and FAQs

School Board or Trustee	A local board or authority responsible for the governance of schools.
School/Trustee Zones	School district are divided into zones, and board members are elected based living in a zone. There can be no more than one member of the board per zone. According to Idaho Code 33-313, elementary school districts should have no fewer than three school zones and three trustees and all other school districts/charters should have no fewer than five board members/zones.
Quorum	A quorum means a majority (50% +1) of the board members are present at a meeting. A board must have a quorum present to conduct business and make decisions.
Charter School	A charter school is a type of school that is publicly funded but operates independently of the traditional public school system. They are often created by parents, educators, or other community members who are looking for an alternative to traditional public schools.
Traditional School District	A traditional school district is a system of public schools that are funded and overseen by the local government. These schools operate under a set of standardized policies and procedures, including curriculum, staffing, and budget, that are determined by the district.