

The Duties of a School Board

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Have you ever wondered what a school board really does? We know they are made up of publicly elected individuals and meet at least once a month to take care of school business. But really, what are the duties of a school board?

Before addressing this topic, here is a short pop quiz - True or False:

1. School board members have individual duties and powers as described in the Texas Education Code.
2. Approved by legislation, school board members are paid a small annual stipend based on the district's total enrollment.
3. A school board president is issued a master key to all school buildings as instructed by the Texas Education Agency.
4. School boards are responsible for evaluating the performance of the superintendent and all campus principals.
5. After a superintendent approves the district's financial budget, school boards are responsible for sharing the budget with the community.

Now, let's see how we did. The correct answer to all the questions above is false.

On the question of individual board members having certain duties and powers, the truth may surprise you. Unless specifically authorized, individual board members do not have governing power. Therefore, individually, they cannot publicly act on behalf of the school board.

The Texas Education Code is very clear in this area. As an entity, a school board is described as a "body corporate." Managing a school district can only be accomplished by majority vote from a board of trustees. In other words, the authority to manage a school district is found when board members come together as one – body corporate. Additionally, conducting school business by a board can only take place during legally called public meetings.

On the question of being paid for service, contrary to what some may think, board members are not compensated. However, board members can be reimbursed for expenses such as travel, lodging, and registration to education related conferences.

Regarding the master key question, board members are not issued keys of any kind. This includes the president of the board. As a matter of fact, many districts have board policy or procedure extending protocol for board members to call in advance before visiting any school campus.

On the question of evaluating the superintendent and all campus principals, as a body corporate, a board evaluates only one employee; the superintendent. The Texas Education Code shares in detail the expected collaboration between the board and superintendent. Within the language found, the words “shall work together” says it all.

One of the greatest duties a school board has involves the district’s financial health. A school board works with the superintendent to develop and manage the district’s budget. Annual budgets and amendments are approved only by the school board. However, the responsibility to share with the community belongs to all involved.

Chapter 11 of the Texas Education Code provides information concerning other duties and powers school boards hold. The most important includes the creation of the district’s vision and the goals needed to succeed. In concert with the superintendent, school boards are constantly evaluating the district for success. Reviewing school policy and fostering community relationships are additional cornerstones needed for a successful educational institution.

Everything needed to properly oversee the management of a school district is provided in the Texas Education Code - everything but one; community ownership.

Without local communities taking active ownership, educational successes will be jeopardized. A respectful partnership must exist between the community, elected trustees, and the school district. Accountability is a shared responsibility that must be recognized on all sides. Together, we can raise the value of education. Let’s Make Education a Priority.

Chapter 11 of the Texas Education Code

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3038&menu_id=741



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