

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES: SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE GUIDE (2023)**

[Good Governance for School Boards: Trustee Professional Development Program  
\(ontarioschooltrustees.org\)](https://www.ontarioschooltrustees.org)

### **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Every school board in Ontario is governed by a board of trustees that is accountable to the public who elected them and/or to the communities they represent as appointed trustees.

There are five types of trustees:

- Publicly elected trustees comprise the vast majority of trustees of Ontario's district school boards and isolate boards.
- First Nation trustees represent First Nations communities who entered into an agreement with a publicly funded Ontario school board to provide education services to Indigenous students.
- Student trustees are secondary students elected by their peers to represent the voice of students at the board table.
- Hospital board trustees are appointed by the Minister of Education for a term of four years, on the same term cycle as publicly elected trustees. Hospital boards provide education programs for students in children's treatment centres.
- Centre Jules-Léger Consortium is a newly established group composed of six trustees (3 public and 3 Catholic) appointed by the two French-language trustee associations (ACÉPO and AFOCSC) from among their members.

### **Effective Boards of Trustees**

Trustees play a key leadership role in ensuring that schools operate in compliance with the law, and consistent with other standards established by the province, and that programs and services remain responsive to the diverse communities they serve.

Effective boards are both smart and healthy. Smart boards recognize the strengths and weaknesses that their individual members bring to the table. More importantly, these boards can identify when and how to leverage the knowledge, skills and experiences of their members to best serve the interests of students and the community. Healthy boards have a high level of trust and honesty, are clear on each player's role, and have the courage to recognize negative or unproductive behaviour and come up with a plan for addressing it.

### **AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD:**

- Understands why it exists, what difference it aims to make in the community and develops a plan for this purpose
- Maintains a focus on student achievement and well-being
- Works together as a team
- Serves as a role model for the education system and the community
- Makes informed decisions

- Strives for excellent communications with its partners and constituents
- Has a clear sense of the difference between its role and that of senior management
- Understands the distinction between policy development and implementation
- Is accountable for its performance
- Holds the director of education accountable for effectively implementing the policies of the board
- Monitors the effectiveness of policies and implementation plans
- Ensures that local provincial and federal politicians understand local issues and needs, and encourages them to make education a high priority.

For other tips and best practices of effective boards, please refer to the [Good Governance Guides](#) made available by each school board/trustee association.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the Board of Trustees**

Under the *Education Act*, the board as a whole is legally accountable for its decisions, rather than individual trustees, including the chair. In fact, the *Act* gives no individual authority to trustees. As members of the corporate board, trustees are accountable to the public for the collective decisions of the board and for the delivery and quality of educational services.

Specifically, section [169.1 of the Education Act](#) requires every school board to:

- Promote student achievement and well-being
- Promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all students
- Promote the prevention of bullying
- Ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources
- Deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its students
- Develop and maintain policies and organizational structures that promote the board's goals, and encourage pupils to pursue their educational goals
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies developed by the board in achieving the board's goals and the efficiency of the implementation of those policies
- Develop a multi-year plan aimed at achieving the board's goals
- Review the multi-year plan with the board's director of education or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education on an annual basis
- Monitor and evaluate the performance of the board's director of education, or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education, in meeting their duties under the *Act* or any policy, guideline or regulation made under the *Act*, including duties under the multi-year plan, and any other duties assigned by the board

This means that boards are accountable for their fiscal and overall performance, and for the academic achievement of students and the well-being of their students and staff. They are responsible for effectively communicating their performance to parents and the community – both where the board is succeeding, and where the board is struggling to meet expectations, and what steps are being taken to improve outcomes.

## Provincial Interest Regulation

In accordance with [Ontario Regulation 43/10: Provincial Interest in Education](#), the Minister may provide for a review of the performance of a school board, if the Minister has concerns regarding the performance of a school board with respect to the following areas:

- Academic achievement of students
- Student health and safety
- Level of cooperation among members of the board and between board and director of education
- Performance of the board and of the director of education in carrying out their responsibilities under the Education Act
- Level of parent involvement.

The review process would result in a report to the Minister, and may result in the Minister making recommendations to the board to address concerns identified. The board would be given an opportunity to comment on a draft report before it is submitted to the Minister. If a school board refuses to or does not fully participate in a review process, or refuses to give full and fair consideration to recommended changes arising out of the review, the Minister may consider an investigation of the board pursuant to section [230 of the Act](#).

As members of their school board, trustees collectively carry out many important duties. These include:

- Electing a board chair
- Establishing the board's mission, vision, and value statements
- Maintaining a focus on student achievement and well-being
- Developing and evaluating policies that are operationalized by the director
- Allocating resources by approving the annual board budget
- Managing board facilities by setting policies and approving capital plans
- Ensuring support services are provided
- Communicating with stakeholders and establishing processes for community input
- Adhering to policies that address the hiring, transfer, promotion and termination of all board staff
- Ensuring staff are well supported by setting policies about health and safety, accessibility, etc.
- Ensuring there are mechanisms in place to recognize students, staff, community members and volunteers
- Providing advice to the ministry and provincial trustee associations regarding regional and local implications for new policy recommendations
- Advocating on behalf of and communicating with board communities
- Striking and maintaining committees as required by legislation/regulation, or as needed locally
- Filling vacancies on the board

Two of the most important responsibilities that boards of trustees have are:

- the development and monitoring of the multi-year strategic plan (MYSP)
- the hiring and performance appraisal of the director of education

## Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP)

Under the *Education Act*, every school board must create a MYSP that spans a minimum of three years. The purpose of the MYSP is to help boards set long-term strategic priorities and goals. The plan must be based on evidence to ensure that it has a clear purpose and that it is effective. It is important that boards use a collaborative process at every step in its development, so that everyone can take ownership of the MYSP and feel responsible for its success.

The MYSP is a visioning and policy document that sets the direction for the board. It is fundamental to ensuring good governance and to building public trust in boards of trustees not only to safeguard our schools, but also to ensure that they are caring, equitable, innovative, and flexible. While schools make every effort to offer stability, they also strive to meet the changing needs and realities of our society. The operational and improvement plans created by the director of education and senior administration are based on the MYSP and map out how it will be implemented.

A strong MYSP addresses the needs of *all* students and is a driver for positive change in the board and its communities.

For more information about this process, please refer to [Module 6 – The Strategic Role and Multi-Year Strategic Planning](#), which was updated following the release of the Ministry of Education’s publication: [Multi-Year Strategic Planning – A Guide for School Board Trustees \(2017\)](#).

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