

SCHOOL BOARD FACTS

What is a school board?

The local board of education is a policy-making legislative body and the individual member is an official of the state. Except during an official meeting, a board member has no more power, authority or jurisdiction over school matters than any other citizen in the community. A school board's primary duty is to provide the opportunity for the best and most appropriate education for all children entrusted in its care. Tennessee currently has 136 public school districts.

Eligibility

In order to be elected to a Tennessee school board, one must be:

- A citizen of Tennessee
- At least 18 years old
- A resident of the school district
- A high school graduate (or G.E.D.)
- A registered voter in the county

Elections

All county school boards must be popularly elected by district, in non-partisan elections, to staggered four-year terms of office. City school systems also must be popularly elected to staggered four-year terms of office, but they may be elected by district or at-large. Boards of special school districts will continue to be elected pursuant to the provisions of private acts establishing such systems.

Duties of a school board

The two basic premises of school board operations are:

The board is a corporate body. The authority of a board member includes expressing an opinion and casting a vote in a board meeting. Outside a board meeting, a board member has no authority over school matters.

The board is a policy-making body. The board speaks through policy. Matters the board chooses not to address through policy are left to the discretion of the superintendent. School boards make policy and superintendents carry out the policy.

In addition, the legislature has specified the following mandatory duties:

Management and Control. The board of education is to manage and control all public schools established under its jurisdiction. This gives the board of education the primary authority over school matters, but management responsibilities are delegated to the superintendent.

Employment. The board has the duty to employ the superintendent, set salaries for employees, grant tenure, approve evaluation plans for employees and hold dismissal hearings when necessary.

Purchasing. The board may purchase supplies, furniture, fixtures and materials of every kind. All expenditures for such purchases estimated to exceed \$10,000 must be made by competitive bids.

Budget Preparation. The Board of Education is required to prepare a budget and to submit it to the appropriate legislative body.

Students. The board of education has several duties regarding students. The Education Code gives the board the duty to discipline students after a hearing as well as the duty to establish standards and policies governing student attendance.

Policies. Local boards of education are required to compile and publish an official policy manual.

Mandated school board training

State Board of Education Rules and Regulations require each member of a local board of education to participate annually in seven hours of training provided through the School Board Academy Program. All board members must complete five basic core modules (Policy, Board/Superintendent Relations, Vision, Advocacy, and School Finance). Any local board member who fails to attend training may be removed from office. Additionally, new school board members must attend a two-day orientation session in Nashville sponsored by the state Department of Education in their first year.