

REGION 12 BOARD OF EDUCATION



MEMBER HANDBOOK

Final Revised 5/28/14

Vision Statement

The Region 12 community educates, challenges, and inspires *all* learners to become compassionate, creative, and courageous individuals who are empowered by the knowledge, character, and perseverance to achieve their greatest potential within the global society.

Mission Statement

Through reflective practice, the mission of Region 12 is to:

- Optimize student achievement
- Build a collaborative learning environment
- Develop engaged citizens

Board Goals

Student Achievement

Each and every student in the Region 12 Public Schools will achieve established, rigorous performance standards in all areas of student learning by becoming independent strategic readers, problem solvers, and critical thinkers.

Communication

The Region 12 Board of Education will establish reciprocal communication that is accessible and understandable, and that unites all citizens around the belief that high-quality public education is a community's most valuable asset.

Facilities and Educational Adequacy

The Region 12 Board of Education will ensure all students have the opportunity to learn and achieve in safe and educationally adequate facilities by meeting the needs of the district with respect to adequate space and the quality of learning environments.

Board Governance

The Region 12 Board of Education will institutionalize a focus on continuous improvement leading to student achievement and student success through its development of policy, ongoing evaluation, and commitment to individual and Board professional growth.

Region 12 Strategic Goals 2011-2017

1. Revise and upgrade (unify and align) the pre K-12 curriculum to embed 21st century skills and Common Core State Standards.
2. Make the transition (infrastructure, policy, practice and culture) to a digital learning environment to better align the district with the world of learning and work Shepaug students will encounter.
3. Effectively address the issues of educational quality connected with concerns associated with consolidation, rising costs and declining enrollment.

Core Values

The Board will:

1. Deliberate in many voices, but govern in one.
2. Cultivate a sense of group responsibility; understanding that it is the Board, not the staff or administration, which is responsible for excellence in governance.
3. Be an active part of the school district's leadership team, striving to lead the district through a clear mission statement, an articulated vision for the district, shared and commonly understood goals, broad and clearly written policies, and a continual monitoring of the district's and students' performance.
4. Be willing to hold itself to high standards of excellence in governance and professional responsibility, including a willingness to hold individual Board members and the Board itself accountable for its actions.

5. Continually monitor its own process, performance and progress.
6. Vigorously and intelligently advocate for the school district and its students on the local, state and national level.
7. Commit, both individually and collectively, to being well-informed and educated on local, state and national educational issues, initiatives and practices.
8. Regularly communicate with all stakeholders about the school district's performance, direction, initiatives, issues and ideas.
9. Formally and informally recognize and celebrate the schools, staff and student success.
10. Insist on the pursuit of excellence on the part of all with a role in the school district – staff, students and board members.
11. Always strive to act in the interest of what is best for all students, believing that all students can learn and succeed at a high level.
12. Serve as a model of positive professional and ethical conduct.

Key Work of School Boards

The eight essential areas for Board focus and action developed by the National School Board Association are as follows:

Vision – establish a clear vision of student achievement as a top priority of the Board, staff and community.

Standards – set clear standards for student performance.

Assessment – support regular and valid assessments to measure district and student progress.

Accountability – establish a process that holds the school system accountable for student success.

Alignment – align all district resources to focus on student achievement.

Climate – create a positive climate throughout the school district to promote student success.

Collaborative Relationships – build collaborative relationships with the community to promote and develop a consensus and understanding of the priority of student achievement.

Continuous Improvement – commit all individuals within the school district to the idea of continuous improvement in the pursuit of student achievement and success.

Board Authority and Responsibility/Role of Board Members

The Board of Education is ultimately responsible for ensuring that Region 12 residents have access to a free, quality education through high school. Connecticut law imbues the Board with specific and often broad authority over the administration of Region 12 schools. For example, the Board of Education exercises control over school buildings and property, employs and supervises the superintendent of schools, adopts a budget, and approves textbooks. A lengthier and more specific listing of the Board’s authority can be found in Chapter 10 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

While the Board has broad authority over the Region 12 schools, much of this authority is delegated to the superintendent of schools and other district employees. The Board of Education functions, not as management responsible for the administration of the school district, but as a board of directors responsible for establishing a vision for Region 12’s schools, and monitoring its progress in reaching that vision.

Reference: BOE Policy 9000

Limits of Authority

Individual Board members have no authority except when they are meeting as a Board of Education. The Board of Education is a collective body and, by statute, can only act when a quorum is assembled in a legally constituted meeting. The statements or actions of individual Board members do not bind the Board of Education, except when that statement or action has been authorized by an official act of the Board. Board members should be careful not to act or speak in a manner that suggests they are speaking or acting on behalf of the board of education or the school district when they have not been so authorized by the Board.

Reference: BOE Policy 9010

Board Committees

The Board understands that not all of its work can be accomplished at regularly scheduled meetings of the entire Board, and that in order to dedicate the necessary time, expertise and focus on individual issues it is necessary to utilize committees of the Board. Committee members are appointed by the Chairperson.

Reference: BOE Policy 9132

Election of Board of Education Members

The Region 12 Board of Education is a twelve member, non-partisan Board. Board members serve four-year terms. There are three members from Bridgewater and Roxbury and six members from Washington, The towns are responsible for electing Board of Education members and filling vacancies that may arise.

Reference: BOE Policy 9110

When a vacancy occurs in the office of any member of the Regional Board of Education, the town affected, at a town meeting called within thirty days from the beginning of such vacancy, shall nominate and elect a successor to serve for the unexpired portion of the term.
Sec. 10-46

Resignation/Removal from Office/Censure

Board members who wish to resign from the Board of Education must submit a letter of resignation to the town clerk, with a copy to the Board president. A member's resignation is not effective until it is filed with the town clerk. The Board of Education does not have the authority to either accept or reject a member's resignation.

Although the Board of Education cannot remove individuals from service as Board members, it does have the authority and ability to discipline individual members. Since service as a Board officer is a privilege and not a right, Board officers can be removed from their position as an officer by a majority vote of the membership of the Board. Board members who violate the rules, regulations or policies of the Board, interfere with the orderly and efficient operation of the Board, or act in ways that are contrary to the best interests of the school district can be subject to a vote of censure by the Board. A censure vote is an expression of disapproval concerning an individual member by the Board and, hopefully, will be used rarely, if at all.

Reference: BOE Policy 9222

Conflict of Interest

The Board desires its members not only to adhere to all laws regarding conflict of interest, but to continually be aware of situations which have the appearance of conflict of interest and to avoid actions that might embarrass themselves or the Board. Board members are expected to identify whenever they have a personal or professional interest in an issue that might compromise or call their judgment into question. In all of their actions and statements, Board members are asked to be beyond reproach.

Reference: BOE Policy 9270

Board Member Orientation

As part of its commitment to having highly-trained individuals as part of a professional governing board, the Board will provide orientation opportunities for new members. As part of the orientation, new Board members will be provided a package of appropriate materials and will be provided additional orientation opportunities, including the opportunity to attend professional development opportunities such as the CAFE/CAPSS Convention.

Reference: BOE Policy 9230

Board Member Professional Development

The Board is committed, both individually and as an organization, to the principles of continuous improvement and ongoing education, and understands that in order to perform as a high-functioning professional organization its members must be well educated about the Region 12 schools, board governance and educational best practices. The Board will

look to identify and provide professional development opportunities for Board members, and Board members will be encouraged to participate in these learning opportunities. The Board will reimburse members for reasonable, pre-approved expenses for professional development.

Board Officers

The Board of Education has four officers, Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. The Board elects officers at its Annual Meeting held in July following the election. Officers are elected by a majority vote of those members present and voting.

The Board Chair presides at all meetings and serves as the Board spokesperson. He/she is responsible for appointing Board members to committees, and signs documents, and contracts on behalf of the Board. The Board Chair works closely with the superintendent of schools to plan meeting agendas and may call special meetings of the Board.

Reference: BOE Policy 9120

The roles of all of the elected officers are defined in the Policy manual. See BOE Policies 9121, 9122, 9123, 9126.

Superintendent's Responsibilities

The superintendent of schools, pursuant to state law, is the CEO of the Region 12 Public Schools. He/she is responsible for leading and managing the school district, hiring and supervising personnel, developing and administering the budget, and advising the Board on educational developments, board policies and applicable laws. The superintendent of schools shall regularly communicate to the Board the status of student learning and the district's progress in meeting its stated goals.

The superintendent of schools attends all meetings of the Board and works closely with the Board in developing goals and initiatives, and is responsible for the implementation of these initiatives. Although the superintendent of schools is directly employed and supervised by the Board, his/her working relationship with the Board is such that he/she is generally considered the Board's "thirteenth member."

Board Policies

One of the primary responsibilities of the Board is to develop policies to govern the school district and the Board, which will serve as guideposts and guidelines for the effective and efficient operation of a school district committed to providing an exceptional educational experience for each student. Board policies are developed according to requirements set forth in Connecticut Statutes, State Department of Education recommendations, and the Board's own bylaws, policies and mission statement. In order for Board policies to effectively perform their stated purpose, it is important that they are regularly reviewed and updated. In order to ensure that Board policies are current and in compliance with statutory requirements, the Board may utilize attorneys or other outside consultants. While the Board may be advised concerning its policies by the superintendent of schools, its attorney or other consultants, the adoption of

new policies, or the revision or repeal of existing policies is the sole responsibility of the Board.

The adoption of Board policies is governed by Board Policy 9311. Board policies require an initial public reading at a Board meeting, followed by a subsequent second reading and vote at a subsequent meeting before they can be adopted by the Board.

Board policies and bylaws may be suspended for a specific purpose and limited time by a majority vote of Board members in attendance when there is prior written notice; absent such written notice, suspension of Board policies requires a majority vote of the entire Board. The suspension of Board bylaws requires a two-thirds vote of the entire Board absent prior written notice.

Reference: BOE Policies 9311, 9312, 9314

Board Hearings

One of the responsibilities of the Board of Education is to conduct hearings. For many of these hearings, such as student expulsion hearings, school accommodation hearings, and teacher termination hearings, the Board serves as an impartial hearing board. In these instances, Board members who serve on the panel must make their decision based only on the evidence and information presented at the hearing. Regardless of whether the Board is serving as an impartial panel, or in a grievance hearing, Board members have an obligation to treat those before them respectfully and fairly, adhering to the highest standards of professional conduct.

Reference: BOE Policy 9350

Search, Selection and Appointment of Superintendent

The Board of Education is responsible for the appointment of the superintendent of schools. When conducting a search for a superintendent, the Board may vote itself as the personnel search committee. If so, it may meet as the personnel search committee without public notice of its meetings or a requirement to allow the public to attend.

The search for, and selection of, a superintendent of schools is one of the most important decisions that a board of education can make. Accordingly, this process should be thoughtful and informed, made with a clear understanding of the needs of the school district and the corresponding characteristics of an ideal superintendent, as well as an awareness of the availability of potential candidates. Although each search process is unique, generally the Board would be well advised to consult with the public and other informed individuals, both in and outside the district, when conducting a superintendent search.

Board Role in Hiring Process

Generally speaking, the Board does not have the primary role in the hiring process, except for the superintendent of schools. It is Board policy to authorize the superintendent of schools to hire teachers and other personnel without direct involvement on the part of Board members. The Board requests that all candidates for administrative positions are required to be introduced to the BOE prior to being hired.

Budget Process

The Board is responsible for the adoption of a budget for the school district. The superintendent of schools presents a proposed budget to the Board in February/March. During the month of January, the Board will hold a series of meetings in which it will consider presentations from school district administrators, prior to adoption of its budget in February/March. In April an annual budget meeting open to the public will be held and then on the first Tuesday of May the townspeople will vote on the school budget.

The Board is statutorily prohibited from expending more on its operating expenses than the amount allocated by the towns. When making its budget decisions, the Board should be guided by its stated goals and educational priorities.

Superintendent Evaluation

As the superintendent of schools is the only school district employee directly supervised by the Board of Education, the Board is responsible for evaluating the superintendent's performance, as well as making decisions concerning his/her contract of employment, such as compensation and extending the term of the contract. Following the conclusion of the school year, the Board shall conduct an evaluation of the superintendent's performance, utilizing a process and standards of performance that has been agreed upon in advance with the superintendent of schools.

Board Retreat

The Board recognizes that in order to properly develop a long range and in-depth plan for school improvement, it will be necessary to regularly meet in a retreat setting to allow for a more focused discussion of school district performance and initiatives. Although they are considered special meetings of the Board of Education, retreats are generally held at times and/or locations that are different from regularly scheduled meetings. In addition to the attendance of all Board members, the Board may invite the superintendent of schools, school administrators or other individuals to participate in its retreat.

Board Members Visiting Schools

Board members are encouraged to be informed about Region 12 schools, and visits to our schools can be part of that process. If a Board member wishes to visit one or more of our schools, he/she should first inform the superintendent of schools of his/her desire to visit a school(s) and the superintendent of schools will then work with the school principal to schedule a school visit for the Board member. When visiting any of our schools, Board members must be mindful that they do not serve in an administrative function and should not attempt to direct, criticize or discipline staff members.

Board Member Request for Information

It is important for Board members to be informed about the school district and the performance of our students. The superintendent of schools and school administrators regularly provide Board members with data and information via the weekly Board packet and presentations at Board meetings. Board members who seek additional information are encouraged to work through the standing Board committees to obtain this

information. If the information sought by individual Board members is not readily available through the work of the committees, Board members are to coordinate their information requests with the Board Chairperson to ensure that the information requests submitted to the superintendent of schools and schools do not overwhelm them so as to distract them from their primary responsibilities.

Reference: BOE Policy 9325.5/2230

Student Information

Except for statutorily mandated exceptions, such as expulsion and residency hearings, Board members do not get involved with individual student matters. Individual student information is confidential and Board members only have access to this information when that information is necessary for Board members to perform a function in their official capacity.

Indemnification of Board Members

Connecticut law provides that the school district must indemnify and hold school employees, volunteers and board members harmless from any claim, demand or judgment from negligence in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. This protection includes legal fees, expenses and other costs.

Reference: CGS 10-235, BOE Policy 9260

Board Meetings

Meeting Schedule

The Board of Education establishes its annual meeting schedule at its meeting in July.

Regular Meetings

Regular meetings of the Board of Education are those meetings listed on its annual schedule of meetings voted on at the annual meeting. Board meetings start at 7:00 p.m. and are generally held at the Shepaug Library. At regular meetings, the Board can add items to the meeting agenda.

Special Meetings

Meetings of the entire Board that are not on the annual schedule of meetings are special meetings. At a special meeting, the Board cannot add items to the meeting agenda for discussion or action.

Reference: BOE Policy 9321

Meeting Agendas

The superintendent of schools, in conjunction with the Board Chair, develops an agenda for each Board meeting. Meeting agendas, along with necessary documents and materials, are distributed to Board members prior to the meeting. Ideally, Board agendas are designed so that meeting time is dedicated to a focused, informed discussion on student achievement and educational priorities. Any Board member may have an item placed on the agenda by request to the Board Chair. Two-thirds approval by the Board members present at a Board meeting will be required to take up matters not on the agenda. Reference: BOE Policy 9323

Robert's Rules of Order

Except when superseded by these bylaws, *Robert's Rules of Order* will govern the proceedings of the Board.

Reference: BOE Policy 9325.3

Board Quorum

Seven members of the Board shall constitute a quorum. Unless otherwise specified by Board policy, a majority of board members voting on a particular item is sufficient for approval.

Reference: BOE Policy 9325.1

Consent Agenda

Agenda items that require a vote by the Board, but may not require discussion are to be placed on the consent agenda. The consent agenda is an item on the meeting agenda in which all voting items that do not require Board discussion or debate are listed. A vote to approve the consent agenda by the Board shall approve all items listed on the consent agenda. If a Board member wishes to discuss an item, he/she shall request that the item be taken off the consent agenda, and it will be discussed and voted on separately following a vote on the consent agenda.

Board Votes

The Board of Education is a collective body and, as such, can only act via a vote by its members. Board votes must be in public at a properly noticed meeting of the Board and recorded in writing. Pursuant to Robert's Rules, all motions must be made by one board member and seconded by another. Members may vote in favor, against or abstain from voting. Members may explain their vote, but are not required to explain it.

Board Member Attendance

Board members are expected to attend meetings of the Board, including meetings of their assigned committee. While it is almost inevitable that, on occasion, an individual member will have a personal or professional conflict that prevents him/her from attending a meeting; ideally this is a rare and unavoidable circumstance. Service on the Board of Education is a public trust on behalf of the community and children of Region 12, and it is expected that Board members will make this service a priority. The Board of Education functions best when all twelve members devote the time, energy, preparation and seriousness of purpose necessary to accomplish exceptional work and that is called for by public service.

Meeting Minutes

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), minutes must be taken at all meetings of the Board of Education. These minutes must be available within seven days of the meeting, but all votes of the Board must be reduced to writing and available within forty-eight hours. The FOIA requires that minutes must contain the recording of votes and the names of those members in attendance. These requirements apply to meetings of Board committees as well.

In order to appropriately apprise the public of the Board's work, Board minutes should contain the time of the meeting; members in attendance; a brief description of any business transacted by the Board, along with any Board action; the recording of Board member votes; and a description of any executive session held, along with the names of all individuals present for the executive session.

Reference: BOE Policy 9325.4

Executive Session

Although, as a public agency, the Board must meet and conduct its business in public, under certain narrowly-defined exceptions, the Board may exclude the public from a portion of its meeting by calling an executive session. The Freedom of Information Act provides that a board of education may hold an executive session by a two-thirds vote of those members in attendance and voting. Although the law allows for discussion in executive session, any action by the Board must be taken in open session.

The permissible reasons for holding an executive session are limited and, when in doubt, the Board should consult with its counsel. Some reasons are to discuss documents with respect to collective bargaining, personnel matters (with the permission of the individual who is the subject of the discussion), pending claims and litigation, confidential documents and student matters.

Reference: BOE Policy 9322

Notice of Meetings

The regular schedule of Board meetings, established at the Board's annual meeting, is forwarded to the town clerks. All Board meetings must be posted at least twenty-four hours prior to a meeting, except in emergency circumstances. Board members are to receive meeting agendas and relevant documents and materials prior to meetings.

Reference: BOE 9321

Open Meeting Requirements

As a public agency, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requires that all meetings of the Board be posted at least twenty-four hours in advance and that members of the public are allowed to be present. Additionally, the FOIA requires that all Board documents be made available to the public promptly upon request, with limited provisions for the redaction of confidential information.

Reference: BOE Policies 9321, 9330

Public Comment at Meetings

The Board may designate a meeting agenda item to allow for public comment, permitting any individual or group to address the Board concerning any subject that lies within its jurisdiction. Three minutes may be allotted to each speaker and a maximum of nine (9) minutes per topic, although the Board Chair may extend this time, as appropriate. The Board may modify these limitations at the beginning of a meeting if the number of persons wishing to speak makes it advisable to do so. No inappropriate or disrespectful conduct shall be permitted at any Board of Education meeting. Persistence in such conduct shall be grounds for summary termination, by the Chair, of that individual's

privilege of address and, if disruptive behavior continues, removal from the meeting. All speakers must identify themselves by name and address.

The public comment portion of a meeting is an opportunity for Board members to hear from the public. It is not an opportunity for Board members to engage in discussion or debate with members of the public. Accordingly, Board members will not comment on or respond to public comments during public comment.

Reference: BOE Policy 9325

Meeting Norms

It is the expectation that the Board of Education is a professional organization whose meetings model appropriate behavior for the school district. Members will be prepared for meetings and arrive on time, with those individuals who cannot timely attend giving prior notice to the Board Chair. Board meetings will be conducted via understood and established procedures as set forth in Board policy and bylaws.

In order to ensure that meetings of the Board are as effective and useful as possible, members will avoid surprises by articulating specific concerns in advance. The Board believes that informed, respectful discussion and debate is the best means of arriving at good decisions for the school district. Accordingly, during discussion, Board members will listen attentively, consider all points of view, support their positions with facts when possible, be prepared to answer questions from other Board members, focus on the issue at hand, avoid negative and personal comments, and be prepared to compromise, understanding that the goal of debate among Board members is not to prevail but to arrive at the best possible decision for the school district. Copies of materials and handouts will be made available to the public so that they can better follow the proceedings.