



British Columbia  
School Trustees  
Association

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is sitting at a desk with a laptop. In the background, a man in a light blue shirt is looking down at a document, holding a pen. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an office or meeting environment.

# THE ROLE OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND TRUSTEES IN BC



# BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Boards of education share a co-governance relationship with the provincial government through the Ministry of Education. BCSTA supports member boards in this relationship.

The Ministry of Education sets the general direction for K-12 education, including the curriculum, funding amounts and the legal framework within which boards operate. Boards are responsible for governing school districts based on the educational aspirations of their local communities and in accordance with the policy direction established by government.

The respective responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and boards of education are detailed in the [School Act](https://bit.ly/bcschoolact) ([bit.ly/bcschoolact](https://bit.ly/bcschoolact)). The *School Act* outlines the primary functions of boards of education, including:

- Setting local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools.
- Employing the staff necessary for school district operations.
- Establishing conditions of employment for employees.
- Preparing and approving the school district's operating budgets and capital plans.
- Hearing appeals from parents and students. ■



# WHAT DOES A SCHOOL TRUSTEE DO?

School trustees are the members of their school district's board of education. They are locally-elected representatives of the public and are the community's advocates for public education. They are required to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under the *School Act*.

A trustee's role is to maintain a focus on student achievement and well-being, and to participate in decision making that benefits the entire district while representing the interests of the entire electorate.

## **TRUSTEES ESTABLISH THE DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

The board is responsible for setting the overall strategic direction for the school district. Trustees work together to

establish the board's strategic plan, which sets the goals of the district and its budget priorities.

The board also has the responsibility of oversight for the school district, including ensuring that the superintendent carries out the board's strategic plan. The superintendent acts as the CEO and leads the day-to-day work in this area, including delegation to various people and groups within the organization. For example, the board does not take on the responsibility for the evaluation of individual teachers or administrators. Instead, it ensures the superintendent has put in place the necessary procedures and actions to ensure teachers and administrators within the district are evaluated on a regular basis according to established board policy.

## **TRUSTEES ARE FINANCIAL STEWARDS**

School districts are significant community assets. Boards have important responsibilities for oversight of school district financial decisions. One of the most important aspects of governance for trustees is to connect district goals, strategic planning and finances, through the establishment of the school district's annual budget. The board oversees development of a strategic plan and the allocation of resources to support that plan. The board ensures that budget and staff allocations are in alignment with their plan, including the identified goals that are intended to improve outcomes for all students.

## **TRUSTEES ARE A PART OF A CORPORATE BOARD**

A school trustee is a member of a corporate board of education under the *School Act*. A trustee's power lies in membership on the corporate board. Only the board has the authority to make decisions or to take action; individual trustees in and of themselves do not have such authority.

While meaningful debate is an important aspect of good governance, it is the board's responsibility to act in a manner that promotes and upholds its decisions and to communicate the board's decisions to the public.

The issues that motivate an individual to run for school trusteeship can be deeply personal. A passion for public education is important to guide one's work.

However, it is vital to the success of the board for each member trustee to look beyond personal issues in order to make decisions that benefit the school district as a whole.

## **TRUSTEES ARE COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Trustees work with their board of education colleagues, staff and other community partners to ensure that all the students within the board's jurisdiction have opportunities to reach their maximum potential and chosen goals.

While members of the board act as representatives of their community, their primary job is to participate in governance and oversight in the interest of all of the district's students, and to ensure that they are grounded in promoting student achievement and well-being.

## **BOARDS REPRESENT THE EMPLOYER**

As employers, school districts have a legal responsibility for oversight of their management, teaching and support staff. For unionized staff, the terms and conditions of the relationship are established through legislation, board policy, and in collective agreements. Boards of education represent the employer in this relationship.

BC has a two-tier structure for collective bargaining through the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA). Various unions negotiate provincial issues with BCPSEA while union locals and boards of education negotiate local issues. ■

