

CABE/CAPSS GOVERNANCE DOCUMENT

LEADING TOGETHER:

The Responsibilities of Boards and Superintendents



This guidance document was originally created in 2016 and was updated by the Executive Committees of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) in 2026. CABE and CAPSS are grateful for the assistance of Karen Kaplan in compiling this document.

PREFACE

Together, Superintendents and Boards of Education have the potential and power to improve teaching, learning, and overall student success in our public schools. Robust working relationships between school Boards and Superintendents that are cooperative, purposeful, professional, and based on proven practices consistently prove to be key drivers of high-achieving school districts.

This document describes the perspectives of both CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) and CAPSS (Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents) on the nature of, and expectations for, effective working relationships between Boards of Education and Superintendents. It is intended as a statewide reference for both groups to work toward strengthening strategic partnerships whose efforts result in student success. Best practices are described in this document, designed to serve as a starting point for discussions between Superintendents and Boards, recognizing that many of the areas addressed must be customized at the local level due to specific district characteristics and individual Superintendent/Board relationships.

For success, the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools in any school district must share the same goals and vision for providing students with quality education. While Board and Superintendent roles are different, they should complement each other. For the greatest success, a school district's Board Members and Superintendent must work collaboratively as a governance team, each with clear understandings of their own roles and areas of responsibility, respecting the others' focus/responsibilities/expertise, and collaborating effectively on shared responsibilities.

Both the Superintendent and Board of Education share responsibility for leading the district to succeed, but each role has different areas of expertise and focus: The Superintendent's work is focused on advancing student success and wellness; the Board of Education's efforts are focused on creating the conditions within the district (appropriate policies, budgets, and communication with the Superintendent) to enable the Superintendent's efforts to succeed. This understanding aligns with the AASA-NS-

BA (The School Superintendents Association and National School Boards Association) foundational position: "The Board is a legislative body that develops, evaluates and oversees education policies. The Superintendent is the professional educator chosen by the Board to implement policies and to provide professional leadership (and vision) for a district's schools."

"A school district's success hinges on the partnership between the board and the superintendent. When this relationship is built on a foundation of genuine trust, transparency, and a shared vision, it moves beyond a simple administrative structure to become the engine for student achievement. It isn't about constant agreement, but about maintaining a commitment to our students through honest communication and unwavering professional respect."

Verjeana McCotter-Jacobs
Executive Director and CEO,
National School Boards Association

Although the functions of Boards and Superintendents are subject to frequently shifting demographic, cultural, and regulatory pressures and influences, many good practices remain constant and relevant, even in a continually evolving context. It should also be remembered that whether elected officials (like Board members) or a hired professional (like superintendents), discussions among these district leaders should remain nonpartisan, focused on issues related to district goals and success rather than specific political viewpoints.

It is hoped that this document assists both existing and new members of the Leadership Team (Board Members and Superintendent) to create and maintain environments and practices for establishing and achieving those goals, and that the document remains relevant as a reference throughout the year, to facilitate ongoing discussions and as a reminder of expectations and roles among and between Boards of Education and Superintendents.

USES FOR THIS DOCUMENT

This Governance Statement is intended to clarify responsibilities and to be used as a tool for discussion between Boards and Superintendents. It reflects the input of Board Members, former and current Superintendents, and others versed in school district leadership. Recognizing the diversity and needs in different Connecticut towns and cities, it is not designed as a one-size-fits-all recipe. Rather, it is based on a compilation of best practices in school district leadership, including what the authors see as the most important areas of focus to discuss and clarify, toward the goal of building strong and effective working relationships between Superintendents and their Boards.

This document may also serve as a good starting place for discussions whenever there is a change in members of the Leadership Team. This would include changes due to Board elections, appointment of a new Board member, the hiring of a new superintendent, or at other times the Band superintendent believe it is in the interests of their relationship to discuss expectations. When such changes occur, it is recommended that these discussions happen

as soon as possible, ideally in a retreat format with the entire Board and Superintendent, and optimally with a trusted facilitator.

“When school boards and superintendents are aligned in purpose and approach, it creates the stability and trust that strong districts rely upon. That partnership doesn’t happen by accident - it is built through clarity, communication, and a shared commitment to students.”

David Schuler
AASA Executive Director

Every district has different Board members, a different superintendent, different demographics, and other unique characteristics that will help inform such a retreat. That is to be expected and is actually a strength of Leadership Teams: local control is based on an understanding that different localities have different needs and wants.

It is recommended that this Governance document, with its list of Board responsibilities, superintendent responsibilities, and those they share, be reviewed regularly and understood by both new and experienced Board Members and Superintendents. Each district Leadership Team is encouraged to discuss the various responsibilities and determine how best to work together to ensure they are carried out in a thoughtful, positive way, all aimed at strengthening student success and wellness in the district. Difficult and contentious issues will inevitably come before the Board, and at these times it can be helpful to return to this Governance Statement and again review and discuss expectations.



BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Board member and Superintendent roles differ in many areas. Under Connecticut law, local Boards of Education maintain three core statutory responsibilities: Adopting the district budget, setting educational and operational policies, and hiring and evaluating the Superintendent. While the Board establishes this governing framework, the Superintendent operates as the chief executive officer, respon-

sible for day-to-day administration, staff hiring, program oversight, and the execution of Board policy. Effective district leadership relies on this unified partnership, but there are distinct boundaries between governance and administration. The chart that follows clarifies the different responsibilities of each role, to help Boards and Superintendents work optimally together.

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

HIRING	
■ Hire, support, evaluate and work effectively with the Superintendent of Schools. Invest in a coach when hiring a "first-time" Superintendent. Strongly consider also providing a mentor for new Board Chairs.	■ Work effectively with the Board, serving as the school Board's chief executive officer and educational leader for the Board, district, and community.
■ Determine and include in district policy specific procedures that clearly define Board and Superintendent roles in hiring staff. It is strongly recommended that final hiring decisions are the responsibility of the superintendent.	■ Pursuant to Board policy, hire personnel for the school district and ensure that each employee is properly supervised and evaluated;
■ Participate in termination procedures and decisions when needed as prescribed by Connecticut General Statutes.	■ Make recommendations for termination of employment when necessary.
DISTRICT VISION/GOALS	
■ With community and Superintendent input, establish a vision as well as broad, long-term goals for the district, communicating desired direction, priorities, and expectations.	■ Provide data and recommendations to the board to help determine district goals; determine and implement programs to achieve goals, including monitoring, evaluation, and modifications as needed
■ Inform the Superintendent, through the established chain of command, of potential barriers to the realization of the Board and Superintendent's shared vision and goals for the school system.	■ Proactively identify and address potential barriers to the realization of the Board and Superintendent's shared vision and goals for the school system.
■ Have the Board leadership work with the Superintendent to develop meeting agendas that include student success and wellness updates (related to goals).	■ Work closely with the Board leadership to develop meeting agendas that include student success and wellness progress updates (related to goals).
■ Hold the Superintendent accountable for alignment of district activities with district vision.	■ Ensure that actions of the entire district align to the district vision.

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

DECISION MAKING

■ Seek the Superintendent's recommendation before taking action as a Board	■ Provide the Board with well-informed recommendations.
■ Make decisions based on data and relevant information/input.	■ Provide relevant data and facilitate effective, data-driven decision making.

COMMUNICATIONS/ADVOCACY

■ Refer communications such as questions, complaints, and personnel inquiries to the Superintendent, as appropriate, and encourage adherence to the established chain of command.	■ Respond to communications, as appropriate, and ensure the adherence and appropriate response through the chain of command, and keep Board Members informed about district issues in a timely manner.
■ Share relevant information for the betterment of the district with the Board/Superintendent Leadership Team.	■ Communicate research information, performance results and educational needs to the Board for possible Board action.
■ Create policies related to school and district social media usage; Board Chair/Full Board consult with the Superintendent when major issues/events are to be shared on social media.	■ Oversee social media posts and engagement within the district. When a major event or issue occurs, consult with the Board Chair (and when needed, the full Board) on messaging for these events before sharing publicly.

EVALUATION

■ In consultation with the Superintendent, develop and conduct an annual formal evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools that: 1. reflects the significant complexities and wide variety of responsibilities inherent to the role; 2. identifies areas of success and targeted professional development; and 3. focuses on a "growth mindset" related to student achievement in the district.	■ Participate, as appropriate, in his/her annual evaluation, including providing input on the process and/or tools that will be used for the evaluation and by providing data and other information that will inform it.
■ Conduct an annual self-evaluation of its own leadership, governance and teamwork and take appropriate action pursuant to that evaluation.	■ Participate, as appropriate, in the annual self-evaluation of the Board, and assist with follow-up.
■ Establish, in accordance with state statute, a professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance.	■ Implement the Board-established professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance, in accordance with state statute.

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

POLICY

Openly deliberate on policy positions and language informed by public and staff input, data, best practices, and other relevant information.	Provide the Board with data, sample policies, experiences of similar districts, and other relevant information to assist in policy deliberation, creation, and adoption.
Establish and regularly review all policies, ensuring they comply with the law and judicial decisions and are designed to improve student outcomes and the overall quality of the district.	Implement policies approved by the Board and recommend changes, if appropriate, and develop, implement and inform the Board of administrative procedures necessary to implement Board policy.
Remain aware of newly proposed and enacted legislation, executive orders, and judicial decisions that require the creation of new policies or changes to those existing.	Inform the Board of proposed and newly enacted legislation, executive orders, and judicial decisions requiring policy changes; suggest other policy changes to align with current research-based best practices.

BUDGET

Adopt, advocate for, and oversee the school budget, which is responsive to district goals and meets the needs of all students.	Prepare, advocate for, and implement the annual budget that addresses district goals and meets the needs of all students.
Monitor the status of the budget throughout the year.	Report regularly to the Board on the status of the budget and any concerns or other issues about which the Board should be made aware.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Provide orientation for new Board members, with Chair offering frequent "check-ins" and support as needed; Encourage professional development for all Board Members. Chair should periodically review duties/responsibilities with members.	Support Board Members' professional development and understanding of their roles by providing relevant resources, and make them aware of upcoming conferences and training opportunities.
Support leadership development opportunities for the Superintendent.	Engage in leadership development opportunities
Belong to, actively support, and participate in professional organizations (e.g., CABA, NSBA) and encourages the Superintendent of Schools to actively support and participate in professional organizations of Superintendent (CAPSS, AASA).	Belong to, actively support, and participate in professional organizations (e.g., CAPSS, AASA) and encourage the Board of Education to actively support and participate in professional organizations for School Boards (CABA, NSBA).

OTHER

Delegate to the Superintendent responsibility for all administrative functions, except those specifically reserved for the Board through Board policy.	Oversee the organization and management of the district's day-to-day operations.
Ensure there is a supportive, smoothly-operating Board/Superintendent Leadership Team, which results in an effective and efficient school district.	Serve as a key, effective member of the Board/Superintendent Leadership Team and lead the district staff to meet the district's goals.

COLLABORATIVE BOARD/ SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Beyond their distinct roles, Board members and the Superintendent share a number of responsibilities that help advance the district in achieving its goals. These include the following five areas:

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Work together with the community to develop a vision for the school district, with the primary focus on student achievement.
- Communicate and interpret the school district's mission to the public, and listen and incorporate appropriate perspectives into Board action.
- Provide community leadership on educational issues by creating strong linkages with appropriate organizations, agencies, and other groups to provide support for healthy development and success for all children. Work collaboratively with the local municipality, community organizations, agencies, and other bodies as appropriate, on an ongoing basis.

STUDENT SUCCESS

- Develop goals that align with the vision for the district and foster continuous improvement.
- Institute a process for long range and strategic planning that aligns with the vision for the district
- Advocate for and promote educational equity.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & TEAMWORK

- Ensure that professional development opportunities, consistent with district goals, are available to all Board members and school district employees.
- Participate in professional development, specifically targeting individual roles and responsibilities and on relevant content areas.

- Support Board actions and decisions.
- Discuss, at least semi-annually, Board/Superintendent relations.
- Belong to, actively support, and participate in professional organizations, and encourage each other to do so.

ADVOCACY

- Advocate at the local, state, and national levels, for students and the school district, and promote the benefits of public education.
- Collaborate with other school Boards, Superintendents, agencies, and other bodies to inform state and federal policy makers of local concerns and issues related to education

LEGAL ADHERENCE

- Collectively execute legal responsibilities.
- Ensure district adherence to federal and state laws and Board policies.



COLLABORATIVE BOARD/ SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Beyond their distinct roles, Board members and the Superintendent share a number of responsibilities that help advance the district in achieving its goals. These include the areas of

Community Support, Student Success, Professional Learning and Teamwork, Advocacy, and Legal Responsibilities.



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BOARD CHAIR AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

By the nature of the position, the Board Chair plays a key role in ensuring the effective functioning of the governance team. The Chair serves as the liaison between the Board and the Superintendent. The Board Chair will often have a very different relationship with the Superintendent of Schools than do others on the Board. Because of this relationship, it is crucial that Board Chairs be chosen carefully. Ability to serve as representative of the Board and, as appropriate, partner with the Superintendent, should be critical considerations in selecting the Board Chair.

The Chair should also recognize that his or her role is dependent upon the support of the Board, and that action generally requires a vote of the Board.

Usually, the Chair and Superintendent collaborate on developing the meeting agenda and other operational issues facing the Board. (Sometimes Board officers do this with the Superintendent.) The Superintendent will depend on the Chair for guidance, and the Chair should look to the Superintendent for the same, not only in setting the agenda, but also in carrying out other joint Board/Superintendent responsibilities. Both the Board Chair and the Superintendent should develop and maintain a close, positive working relationship.

The Superintendent is a non-voting member of the District Leadership Team, and should be accorded the proper respect. The Board and the Superintendent work together to ensure that they make all decisions consistent with established ethical standards.

The Chair has the unique role of communication with all Board members and provides them with appropriate information on any issues that arise in the district. The Superintendent also has a role in seeing that the Chair

gets any help or information needed to make sure this communication takes place.



The Chair has a responsibility to ensure that the Superintendent can do his/her job without undue outside interference. The Chair must also ensure that individual Board members understand their roles and responsibilities, not only in terms of the Board/Superintendent relationship, but also as the Board relates to the students, community, staff, government agencies, and others affected by the Board. Understanding that Board members are individuals, with different opinions and priorities, the Board Chair still has the responsibility, to the extent possible, for keeping everyone "on the same page." In particular, the Chair must make every effort to ensure that once district policy has been properly established, the Board speaks "in one voice" as the Superintendent implements that policy. This will, in the long run, pay dividends in terms of credibility of the Board and will lead to more efficient and effective Board action.

For more information on the work of the Board Chair, please see the CUBE publication, *"A Guide for Board of Education Chairs"*.

CONCLUSION

While this Governance document attempts to outline the various roles and responsibilities of Boards of Educations and Superintendents of Schools, its primary purpose is to emphasize the importance and necessity of a close working relationship between the two, based on trust, an understanding of each other's unique roles and abilities, and a shared vision for the

school district's success. Not only is such a relationship a necessary prerequisite for this success, but conversely, the lack of a trusting, collaborative relationship between a Board of Education and its Superintendent is a blueprint for failure. Both CABE and CAPSS are available to facilitate discussions with Boards and Superintendents to enhance this collaboration.





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