

CABE

Board Member Handbook



Nicholas Caruso, Associate Executive Director for Field Services and Technology
Robert Rader, Retired Executive Director

CABE's Vision

CABE is dedicated to enhancing public education through high-performing, transformative local school board/superintendent leadership teams that inspire success for each child.

CABE's Mission

To support local and regional boards of education in delivering high-quality public education for all Connecticut children through effective leadership.

CABE Membership

CABE represents nearly all boards of education across Connecticut. These boards, composed of elected or appointed citizens, work with their superintendent to provide the best education possible in their communities.

Thank you to the support of the CT State Department Education in developing this document.

Dear Board Members,

Your commitment to this vital role is truly commendable. As a board member, you hold an important position in shaping the future of public education in your community. Your dedication and passion will create an environment where students can thrive. Your thoughtful deliberation and decisions will impact policies, budgets, curriculum, and the overall direction of your district.

Being a board member may come with challenges, but with them also comes the opportunity to make a lasting positive impact on the lives of students and our communities. The CAFE Board and staff are here to support you by providing resources, guidance, and a network of experienced individuals who share your commitment to public education.

We encourage you to take full advantage of the learning and networking opportunities that CAFE offers. Our professional development, both in-person and virtual, will enable you to connect with fellow board members, share best practices, and stay informed about the latest trends in education.

Your service as a school board member is a testament to your belief in the power of public education and the importance of effective governance. We look forward to supporting your work as we strive to ensure that public education uplifts and empowers ALL students. Please contact the CAFE Board of Directors or staff with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Leonard Lockhart
President, CAFE
Board Member, Windsor

Patrice McCarthy
Executive Director and
General Counsel, CAFE

Board Service Is About Your Legacy

As members of one of the most important branches of grassroots government, board members and their superintendents have certain obligations. One of the most important is to use appropriate, civil means of discussing issues, making decisions, and then implementing them. We have a system of government that encourages civil discourse.

Our political system, based on James Madison's belief that "ambitions counteract ambitions," leads to strong and vociferous informed discussion. This should lead to better decisions through the full airing of all appropriate commentary.

Being successful on a school board requires building coalitions. It always takes at least a majority of votes cast to adopt a proposal. However, it is incumbent upon all to conduct themselves with dignity. Lack of respect and incivility will not lead to success in the future, whether or not your position was adopted this time.

Board members and superintendents are role models for their communities, including their staff and students. Respecting others, adhering to a code of ethics, and understanding roles, responsibilities, and expectations lead to better decision-making and successful schools.

As a board member, you are building your legacy now. Think about how you would like to be remembered, for your words and actions will have an impact for years to come. Living up to high ethical standards, the spirit as well as the letter of your policies, and always remembering that you are a trustee of public education as both an agent of the state and a representative of your community may be the key to your success not only in your educational work but in leaving a great legacy!

Table of Contents

Who Goes to Our Public Schools?	1
What Are the Types of Schools They Attend?	1
What Is the Legal Authority for the Operation of Our Public Schools?	3
Board of Education Roles and Responsibilities	5
How Does a School Board Function?	6
• Building the Agenda	6
• Quorum.....	7
• Voting	8
• Public Participation	8
Expectations of Individual Board Members	9
• Indemnification and Defense of School Board Members.....	10
• Ethics.....	10
• Civility	10
Leading Through Policy	12
Board Members as Advocates	14
• Tips for Effective Lobbying.....	14
Communications	17
Finance and Budget	19
• Where Does Funding Come From?.....	19
• Educational Cost Sharing (ECS)	19
• Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR).....	20
• Special Education Funding.....	20
• School Board Budgeting Process.....	21
• Collective Bargaining	22

The School Board’s Role in Curriculum, Staff Development and Evaluation 23

- Focusing on Student Achievement.....24
- Textbooks.....24
- Professional Development and Evaluation.....25

Board/Superintendent Relations.....26

- School Governance Position Statement.....26
- Board/Superintendent Shared Responsibilities 26
- Board of Education Responsibilities 28
- Superintendent Responsibilities.....31
- Evaluation of the Leadership Team 31

Conclusion 33

Appendices

I. Board of Education Code of Ethics.....34

II. 24 Tips to Help Make You a Better School Board Member 35

III. CT Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 37

IV. Parliamentary Procedure.....39

V. CAGE Code of Ethics for Individual Board of Education Members 40

Who Goes to Our Public Schools?

What Are the Types of Schools They Attend?

There are approximately 513,000 students in our schools, down from approximately 540,000 over the last 10 years. Student enrollment has decreased particularly in many suburban districts while remaining pretty much status quo or growing in urban districts.

According to the State Department of Education (SDE), the percentage of students from racial/ethnic minorities has increased from 44 percent in 2015-16 to 52.2 percent in 2022-23, so “minorities” may no longer be appropriate nomenclature. 17.1 percent of students now receive special education and related services.

There are a little over 1,000 public schools in Connecticut, including 17 technical high schools run by the State Board of Education and 22 public charter schools. Charter schools serve nearly 11,000 students, 67 percent of whom come from low-income families and 94 percent of whom identify as students of color. There are also about 58 full-time magnet schools which have themes such as drama, sports, medicine, aerospace, finance, and banking.

According to the SDE, of these schools, 799 are elementary and/or middle schools and 242 are high schools. In addition to these 1,041 schools, 468 specialized programs provide targeted services. Most of these programs are designed for special education students (324), alternative/credit recovery (76), or prekindergarten (40).

Of the state’s 169 districts, there are now approximately 35 districts identified as “Alliance Districts,” which get additional resources from the state and must develop plans to address certain issues, as directed by the Commissioner of Education. These are the state’s lowest-performing districts. “Opportunity Districts” are the 10 lowest-performing districts based on SDE’s Accountability Index.

The SDE provides a wide assortment of state and district-level data that can be easily accessed at edsight.ct.gov.

In addition, there are a small number of Commissioner’s Network Schools that are designed as a partnership between local constituents

and the state and serve as a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for sharing effective practices, and a model for other schools and districts throughout the state.

Regional Educational Services Centers (RESCs) are nonprofit, fee-for-service, public education agencies with a mission to provide quality, cost-effective education resources, technology services, other programs, and services to the state's public schools. Every school district belongs to a RESC. Some RESCs operate magnet schools, and most were formed to provide intensive special education services that would be too difficult for a single district to provide on its own.

What Is the Legal Authority for the Operation of Our Public Schools?

According to Article Eight of Section One of the Connecticut State Constitution, “there will always be free elementary and secondary education in the state.” To ensure this heavy responsibility is carried out, the Connecticut General Assembly delegated this work to Boards of Education, which are generally established according to town or city boundaries.

School boards are subject to the laws adopted by the state, dictates of the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education (SDE), other state agencies, and court decisions.

School board members are both representatives of their communities and “agents of the state.” They must be faithful to all federal and state laws and regulations. This includes all the Governor’s Executive Orders.

Currently, almost all board members are elected in their school districts*. They represent the entire community, including all members of the public in their towns, not only those who voted for them or have a specific agenda. In special circumstances, the State Board of Education has the authority to intervene and reconstitute school boards.

**Footnote: The New Haven School Board is appointed by the mayor except for two elected members; Hartford’s School Board is composed of five members appointed by the mayor and four elected, pursuant to each city’s charters.*

The legal responsibilities of Boards of Education are set out in Connecticut General Statute §10-220. Each local or regional Board of Education must:

- I. Maintain good public elementary and secondary schools;
- II. Implement the educational interests of the state as defined in section 10-4a of the General Statutes; and,
- III. Provide such other educational activities as in its judgment will best serve the interests of the school district.

Boards have three main tasks to fulfill these responsibilities. While this handbook will explain these in more detail, here is a summary of these methods:

1. Developing, adopting, and monitoring policies, and when appropriate, amending them. The board's policies serve as the road map for the school district and provide direction to the administration, staff, and the public.
2. Preparing an itemized estimate of the cost of maintenance of public schools for the ensuing year and submitting such estimate to the board of finance. This itemized estimate is the board's proposed budget. The money appropriated by the city's or town's finalized budget for the maintenance of public schools must be expended by and at the discretion of the board of education. The board's annual operating budget is the most important policy it adopts.
3. Providing for the supervision of the schools under its control by the hiring and evaluation of a superintendent of schools who serves as the chief executive officer of the board. The superintendent has executive authority over the school system.

Most municipalities are governed pursuant to a town or city charter. Be sure you are aware of the requirements as they relate to board governance, as they are different across the state.

Board of Education Roles and Responsibilities

In fulfilling their legal obligations, boards of education have many roles and responsibilities.

As trustees of the school district, boards:

- Serve broad public interests
- Ensure the safety and adequacy of all school facilities
- Provide resources for the professional development of teachers, principals, and other staff
- Build public support and understanding of public education
- Communicate the school district's mission to the public
- Periodically evaluate its leadership, governance, and teamwork

As adjudicators, boards:

- Negotiate with employee groups
- Serve on various hearing panels on such issues as employee terminations, grievances, and student expulsions
- Rule on employee terminations

As legislators, boards:

- Adopt policies
- Adopt resolutions as appropriate
- Define the mission and vision of the district
- Transform the needs, wishes, and desires of the community into goals and policies that direct the schools

As advocates, boards:

- Speak out for the needs of their students and schools
- Speak to influential groups
- Communicate with members of the public

How Does a School Board Function?

Meetings, Special Meetings, and Non-Meetings

See Appendix III for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) information.

Building the Agenda

The agenda is the most important document at any board meeting. It is the key to an effective meeting. The board chair plays an essential role in determining whether the board spends most of its time on policy-making, “administrivia,” or other areas by ensuring the agenda contains appropriate discussion items.

Typically, the superintendent prepares a draft of the agenda, listing the issues the board needs to consider during the meeting. This draft is then shared with the chair for approval or changes. In some districts, the board chair and the superintendent meet before the board meeting to develop the agenda together. Many board bylaws state that if a member wants to add an item to the agenda, they must request this through the board chair.

Here are some effective ways to arrange the agenda:

1. ***Establish a “Consent Agenda.”*** Items like the adoption of minutes or acceptance of a leave of absence may require no discussion. They can be placed on a consent agenda and voted on as a block. If any board member wants to discuss an item, it should be removed from the consent agenda and considered separately.
2. ***Set time limits for each topic on the agenda.***
3. ***Procedure for public comment.*** The law requires the board of education to meet and perform its duties in public, but this does not mean it is a “public meeting” where the public can discuss issues. Instead, it’s an opportunity for the board to discuss and make decisions. To make a board meeting inviting to the public, have copies of the agenda and the board’s policy on public comment available to the audience.
4. ***Link agenda items to policy issues.*** Whenever possible, agenda items should reference board policy. However, some items, like leave of absence acceptance or financial reports, may not be policy-related.

5. *Review agenda items for their importance.* The board chair should habitually ask, “Does this item need to be included, and how does it relate to student achievement?”

Quorum

For any action to take place at your meeting, a majority or quorum of the board must be present. Unless your bylaws specify differently, a quorum is a simple majority of the board’s membership. If a quorum is not present, the board may not take action on any agenda item other than:

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Set a time for the next meeting
- Listen to committee reports
- Listen to members’ remarks and take emergency action
- Take action to secure a quorum

It is the chair’s responsibility to determine if a quorum is present. FOIA allows a board member to participate electronically, provided the member can hear all discussions and their comments can be heard, such as by using a speakerphone. A bylaw pertaining to such electronic participation is recommended.

The chair should call the meeting to order the moment the quorum is reached. If a quorum is present, it is not fair to delay the meeting until others arrive.

Following the Agenda

The agenda lists the board’s responsibilities for the meeting. It delineates what needs to be accomplished, the order in which it should be done, and who is responsible for each action. A well-crafted agenda makes it easier for the chair to manage the meeting.

As each item on the agenda is completed, the chair should move to the next item and not allow further discussion on topics already acted upon. (See Appendix IV for Parliamentary Procedure information.)

Voting

The primary role of the board of education is to make decisions. Most votes require a majority of the body in attendance, meaning that on a seven-member board, at least four votes are needed for a motion to pass. Some votes, like adding an item to the agenda or going into executive session, require a 2/3 vote. Abstentions do not count as part of the majority.

Public Participation

Boards of education must conduct their work where the public can observe. The law does not require the board to allow the public to speak or participate in meetings, but community input is desired.

Board members must hear public perspectives actions. The board can establish reasonable procedures for public involvement.

Your policies should outline what is allowable for audience participation. Establishing ground rules or meeting norms is often contained in the bylaws, and a “Code of Conduct” can help focus the board on its work.

Expectations of Individual Board Members

This handbook describes the roles and responsibilities of boards acting under their jurisdiction in legally constituted meetings. While boards have the authority and responsibility to perform their role, individual board members must act within certain parameters.

New board members learn that there is a whole new language with its acronyms and jargon. Take the time to learn this “new” language and use the *CABE Glossary*. It often takes a full year for a new board member to develop an understanding of the board’s role in various situations.

One of the most important contributions a board provides to help improve teaching and learning is effective professional development. boards should offer opportunities for their members to receive quality professional development. This can include workshops, conferences, statewide sessions, or online training. Whole-board activities, such as retreats, goal setting, or leadership team events, are also beneficial.

In June 2023, the Connecticut General Assembly passed and the Governor signed a new law that requires all first-time elected local or regional board of education members to participate in training within one year of taking office. The law states that the training “include, but not be limited to, the role and responsibilities of a board member, the duties and obligations of a board of education and school district budgeting and education finance.” The State Department of Education has contracted with CABE to serve as the provider of the training program. It is designed to help new Board of Education members understand the roles and responsibilities of the governing bodies for school districts and the individuals who serve on them. In order to fulfill the requirements under the new state law, BOE members elected for the first time since July 2023 can participate in training that is part of CABE’s “Ready. Set. Govern!” professional development program.

Remember that individual board members are “state officials functioning at the local level” and are responsible to the local community and the state government. The board of education is a collective body that can only act when a quorum is assembled in a legally constituted meeting. Individual board members have no more authority than any other citizen except when in a board meeting or when the board has authorized their action.

Statements or actions of individual board members do not bind the board of education unless authorized by an official act of the board. Board members should avoid suggesting they speak or act on behalf of the board or the school district without proper authorization.

Be careful when using social media. As a public official, your comments might be seen as representing the board. Think twice before responding to insults or attacks on integrity on social media. It may be better to ignore these comments or seek advice on whether a response is appropriate. Review the board policies on communication.

Indemnification and Defense of School Board Members

Board members are generally protected from legal liability if their actions are not wanton, reckless, or malicious, or do not exceed their statutory authority. If acting within the scope of your authority, the district is obligated to defend and indemnify board members in these cases. While lawsuits against boards as a whole are possible, individual members are rarely held liable.

Ethics

Board members are role models for their districts. In the era of 24-hour news cycles and “always-on” social media, staff, students, the media, and the community closely watch their conduct. Board members need to uphold the highest ethical standards and collaborate with other leadership team members to strengthen the educational program and provide high-quality services for all students.

Not all expectations of board members are set out in law. The CABA Board of Directors has adopted a Code of Ethics (See Appendix V) to help members understand their responsibilities.

Civility

Civility is a key element of a positive school climate and culture. A lack of civility interferes with the ability of public officials to fulfill their leadership roles, and with a student’s ability to learn. CABA asks public officials to model public discourse, while also urging School Boards to provide opportunities for students to develop their skills in civility.

The value of teaching our students civility is in both developing them as future citizens and improving school climate. In addition to academics, we must support the social development of our students to enable them to become productive members of our democracy. That has always been a function of our public schools and continues to be important today.

Developing empathy, training in problem-solving, anger management and self-esteem, supporting students who stand in opposition to harassment and hurtful speech, and developing skills to resolve differences and de-escalate tense situations are important elements of the educational experience, and critical life skills.

Developing the skills to discuss and disagree with others in a productive manner is critical. The instant communication and dissemination of views by social media exacerbate the tensions in our communities.

In a climate of incivility, intimidation, threats, harassment, discrimination, cyber-bullying and violence are much more likely. Among the strategies to increase civility is a focus on issues, not individuals, and offering solutions rather than placing blame.

Civility means a great deal more than just being nice to one another.

A resolution adopted by the CAFE Delegate Assembly in November 2017 addressed civility. It was a response to a growing concern about an increasing lack of civility in all levels of government and society. At CAFE's urging, the National School Boards Association Delegate Assembly also adopted the following resolution in the spring of 2018:

CAFE urges public officials at all levels of government to model civil discourse in their deliberations, allowing for the thoughtful, beneficial, productive exchange of ideas and perspectives.

CAFE urges School Boards to provide opportunities for students to develop their skills in conflict resolution and consensus building, and for school Board members to model these skills in their own conduct.

Leading Through Policy

Board of education policies establish the purposes and outline the organization and programs of the school system. They create a framework within which the superintendent and district staff can effectively carry out their duties.

Policies function as the “local laws” of the school district, providing leadership and governance through:

- Ideas that guide the direction of the district.
- Guidelines and directions adopted by the board to chart a course of action.
- Tools to implement prudent changes in the district.
- Clear statements requiring or authorizing actions to guide current and future operations and ensure compliance with state and federal mandates.

Every district maintains a policy manual containing all board policies. Policies are categorized and numbered according to subject matter. During discussions, the board should reference the applicable policy. For example, bylaws, which are policies setting out the rules for board meetings, are typically found in the 9000s section of the manual and include rules on policy adoption, often requiring two readings for adoption.

Policies ensure the district functions in accordance with the law. The law often requires the board to address specific topics in written policy. Generally, boards of education must adopt policies governing their operations (bylaws) and those of the district and its schools. Policies authorize administrative regulations set by the superintendent, providing detailed directives for school staff.

Policies specify what the schools aim to achieve and the concerns defining those objectives. They assign responsibility to administrators and may include broad guidelines for implementing the policy.

Policies remain in effect until the board, following its bylaws, decides to override or change them. Many districts have permanent policy committees to address policy matters required by law or regulations and to draw the board’s attention to situations requiring policy direction.

Board policy manuals are usually available on the district website. Board members often receive a hard copy but should ensure it is up-to-date before relying on it. Familiarity with the manual is essential since policies define the board's authority.

Individual policies should include their adoption date, and, if necessary, a revision or review date. Citations of Connecticut statutes, administrative codes, and case law may be included. Federal laws sometimes will be cited as the authority for the board's actions.

Policies allow the board to focus on areas of concern to members and the public. For example, there has been a strong focus on increasing student achievement, reflected in federal mandates, state initiatives, and community desires. Local school boards face the challenge of improving student achievement for all children, representing an opportunity to positively impact each child's life and enhance the board's role in education and governance.

Boards of education can support student achievement by focusing on vision, performance standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, school and district climate, collaborative relationships, and continuous improvement.

Boards also play a role in ensuring positive school culture and climate, creating environments that bring out the best in students, staff, and the community. Every board must focus on its role as a visionary policymaker. Policies and administrative regulations are essential for smooth, efficient, consistent, and forward-looking operations and should be periodically reviewed to ensure they promote best practices.

Board Members as Advocates

Board members must prioritize advocacy as a crucial role. Advocacy offers numerous opportunities to support their districts.

As elected officials and state agents, board members are uniquely positioned to advocate for students and staff at the district, state, and national levels. Unlike many lobbyists, board members are unpaid volunteers advocating for students, who often cannot advocate for themselves. Additionally, as elected officials, board members share the same constituents as other representatives.

Advocacy can occur in various ways, with public, local officials, and legislature members being top priorities due to their significant impact. While face-to-face meetings are valuable, advocacy also includes writing op-eds for local newspapers, speaking at town meetings or community groups, and engaging with political party members.

Effective Lobbying

Advocacy Before Congress

Connecticut is represented by five House members and two senators. While traveling to Washington, D.C. to lobby can be challenging, congressmen also have home offices and opportunities to hear from the public within the state.

Advocacy at the State Legislature

Connecticut board members often advocate at the state Capitol for funding, mandate relief, and beneficial programs. The Connecticut legislature alternates between “long” sessions (adopting a biannual budget in odd-numbered years) and “short” sessions (fewer changes to the budget and legislation).

The legislature comprises a 151-member House of Representatives and a 36-member Senate.

Recommendations for Effective Legislative Participation:

1. ***Be Informed:*** Determine priority issues for your board, collect relevant information, and ensure accuracy to maintain credibility with legislators.

2. **Know Your Local Legislator:** Understand their interests, committee assignments, and past positions on related issues. Seek their support and contact legislators on education committees.
3. **Stay Informed:** Keep up with newsletters, newspapers, and other sources. During sessions, staying informed helps you better engage with legislators. Even between sessions, continue to discuss and influence issues.
4. **Communicating with Your Legislator:**
 - **Email or Letter:** Be brief, focus on one issue and write early in the session. Support legislators who align with your positions.
 - **Telephone:** Be direct and concise. Follow up with a note emphasizing key points.
 - **Lobby:** Build relationships with staff and committee members, stay brief, and follow up periodically.
 - **Testify:** Sign up early, provide written copies of your testimony, state your position early, avoid redundancy, and end positively when possible.

When Testifying

- Have written copies of your testimony or position. These should articulate your position in detail because you may not get the opportunity to provide sufficient information at the hearing due to the time limits.
- Identify who you are, indicate if you are testifying as an individual Board member, a representative of your Board of Education and/or a CABA representative.
- State your position early in your testimony.
- Don't be redundant.
- Indicate agreement or disagreement with previous speakers and state why.
- If you provide statistics or other facts, indicate their source.
- If in conflict with other witnesses or committee members always remember there are two sides to every issue.
- Talk directly to the committee. They vote, the audience does not.
- When possible, end on a positive note with the committee.

Follow-Up: Track your bill's progress and stay engaged. Commend legislators for favorable actions and offer constructive criticism when necessary.

You Can't Always Get What You Want: Understand that legislators may change positions with more information. Engage with both supporters and adversaries and never take any vote for granted.

Communications

The Iowa Lighthouse research project identified community engagement as a major factor in effective board governance, yet often the most in need of improvement. Effective communication builds engagement and is key to a successful board of education.

Effective communication is not one-way. Boards must disseminate information and engage the public in dialogue. Most boards have policies focusing on official communications between the board and the public, identifying specific audiences, key communicators, and messaging.

The superintendent is usually the chief spokesperson for the district, while the chair serves as spokesperson for the board. Depending on the situation, other leadership team members may address specific subjects.

Boards should also have internal communication policies consistent with the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act. Communication should be deliberate and strategic, covering staff, unions, the community, media, parents, taxpayers, town councils, state government, CAFE, and CAPSS.

Recommendations for Effective Communication:

- Understand the district's "chain of command" and guide community members accordingly.
- Remain neutral when necessary to avoid conflicts of interest.
- Focus on student achievement and celebrate success in board meetings.
- Treat everyone with civility and respect, including the superintendent and district staff.
- Engage positively with body language and facial expressions.
- Allow public expression of opinions and seek community input for major decisions.
- Appoint a designated spokesperson for consistent messaging.
- Advocate for public education and share real-life information from your district with legislators.

Superintendent/Board Communication:

The superintendent should share pertinent information with the board, balancing confidentiality and transparency. Regular updates on budget, labor issues, or programmatic problems are essential.

Establishing clear communication protocols minimizes misunderstandings and ensures board members receive the necessary information.

Finance and Budget

According to the CT State Department of Education (SDE), in 2022-23, the state's overall school expenditures (excluding investments in land, buildings, and debt) totaled approximately \$11.4 billion. Instructional costs represented the majority of these expenditures, with 61 cents out of every education dollar devoted to this area.

School districts are multimillion-dollar enterprises. Board members, tasked with adopting budgets, must understand how district revenues are generated and how funds are spent. In most communities, board of education spending constitutes the largest part of the municipal budget.

On average, per-pupil expenditures in Connecticut exceed \$20,000 annually, with about \$13,000 of that amount allocated to instructional costs. Other expenses include support services, facility operations, and student transportation. Your superintendent can provide a copy of your district's spending plan. Further information on all districts in the state is available on the Connecticut State Department of Education website edsight.ct.gov.

Where does funding come from?

Educational funding primarily comes from three sources: local taxes (especially property taxes), which account for about 55 percent of the total; state funding from the ECS (40 percent of total revenue); and federal funding (4.5 percent of total revenue). Boards of education do not have taxing authority in Connecticut. Taxes are levied according to the budgets adopted in each municipality, as outlined in the town or city charter.

Education Cost Sharing (ECS)

The state primarily sends funding to school districts through the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, a general grant used at the discretion of each board of education. There are also categorical grants, which must be expended under the specific requirements of the grant.

ECS for each district is determined by three factors, known as the ECS Formula: the foundation amount, set at approximately \$11,525 per student; total student need, based on student count with weightings for high-need students; and base aid, based on the town or city's wealth.

Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)

To protect districts from municipalities cutting educational expenditures, state law mandates the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR), which requires that the budgeted appropriation for education in each district must not be less than the budgeted appropriation for the prior fiscal year. There are exemptions for decreased enrollment, new efficiencies, districts without high schools, new and documentable savings, school closures, or designation as an Alliance District.

Special Education Funding

To protect students with disabilities, both the state and federal governments have passed laws ensuring these students receive an appropriate education. The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) governs policies, practices, and procedures for students identified as having a disability, with state law complying with IDEA.

Considerations for board of education members in this area include:

- Special education as a significant budget component. While the average percentage of students with disabilities in a school district is around 12-15 percent, districts often spend over 20 percent of their budgets on these students.
- Confidentiality of all individual student information.
- Differences between the discipline of special education and non-special education students.

Because the cost of educating a student with a disability can be very high, the legislature provided reimbursement to districts after they spend 4½ times the average per-pupil expenditure for such a student. However, the legislature has capped the appropriation for this grant, so districts only receive a portion of the funds they are entitled to receive.

While it was anticipated that the federal government would cover 40 percent of special education costs, it has never met that goal. In 2023, it provided less than 13 percent of the cost nationwide, with Connecticut receiving approximately 7 percent of its expenses.

School Board Budgeting Process

Connecticut boards of education hold a unique position, acting as agents of the state when carrying out their responsibilities. However, they are also subject to local charter requirements for some purposes. Section §10-222 of the Connecticut General Statutes outlines the process for adopting the board of education budget. The administration is responsible for preparing the budget in accordance with the goals, plans, and policies adopted by the school board, as well as federal, state, and local requirements.

The board reviews the budget to ensure the established goals, plans, and policies are funded. They may shift priorities and direct the administration to make adjustments. In conjunction with district administration, the board prepares an itemized estimate of broad budget categories, which is then submitted to the town.

The municipal finance authority considers the request and may make spending recommendations to the board of education. The board may accept or reject these recommendations but must respond in writing if rejecting them. The municipality sets the total budget amount through legislative action, town meetings, or referenda. The board of education then applies any changes to line items, with the administration implementing, monitoring, and reporting on the budget.

The school board approves all new funding sources and reviews periodic financial reports. They are generally responsible for making budget transfers between line items at public meetings, although the statute allows designated personnel to make limited transfers under emergency circumstances. These transfers must be announced at the next regularly scheduled meeting and explained in writing to the town's legislative body.

If additional funds are needed, the chair of the board of education must notify the chair of the board of finance or other appropriating authority, submitting a request for additional funds.

Footnote: "New School Business Official Primer," A Practical Guide to Connecticut School Law, Thomas Mooney.

Collective Bargaining

One of the most important responsibilities of boards is negotiating employment terms for their employees. Salaries and fringe benefits often constitute close to 70 percent or even 80 percent of a district's budget.

There are two statewide unions representing teachers: the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT Connecticut). These unions have local and statewide representatives who advocate for their members and provide experts for local negotiations and grievance procedures. Other unions represent administrators and non-certified staff, such as custodians and school nurses.

Negotiations for teachers' and administrators' salaries and other employment conditions take place under the Teacher Negotiations Act. Compensation of the superintendent is determined by the board and the superintendent through a separate contract. Excluded from the Teacher Negotiations Act are assistant superintendents, certified professional employees responsible for negotiations or budget preparation, temporary substitutes, and all non-certified employees.

Most teacher contracts are for three years. Issues arising within the contract period are processed through the grievance procedure outlined in the contract. The district's Negotiating Committee usually consists of two or three board members, the superintendent or their designee, and the district's chief negotiator, often an attorney specializing in labor law.

The School Board's Role in Curriculum, Staff Development, and Evaluation

The primary purpose of school districts is to provide each child with a quality education. Delivering a high-quality curriculum through effective teaching is central to this mission. Student achievement measures the success of this teaching.

What Is Curriculum?

Curriculum establishes the foundation for all instructional programs in a school district, identifying, describing, and measuring the learning outcomes required for mastery. It outlines what teachers will impart to students, starting in kindergarten and culminating in high school graduation.

School districts develop curricula based on the desires of their communities, state, and federal requirements. The state government has been the most prescriptive, requiring courses such as English, mathematics, social studies, and science. The school board, in collaboration with its staff, ensures that subjects are age-appropriate and follow a prescribed order.

Educators consider the developmental levels of students, areas requiring mastery, and overall needs when developing curricula. As students progress through grades, educators ensure that curriculum complexity advances appropriately.

Occasionally, state or federal mandates introduce specific subject requirements for public education. For example, in 2019, the state required all regional and local boards of education to offer the course on African-American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino contributions to U.S. history, society, economy, and culture beginning in the fall of 2022.

While teachers and administrative staff develop curricula, the board of education retains the authority to approve curriculum. How this authority is exercised depends on the policies adopted by the board. CABE offers a model curriculum policy (6140) and a model bylaw (9132), which identifies the membership and duties of a board curriculum committee.

The policy charges the board's curriculum committee with:

- Reviewing proposals concerning student courses throughout the district
- Ensuring the board's familiarity with district educational programs
- Reviewing curricula-based goals and achievements
- Monitoring planning, development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement/maintenance of curricula

CABE's model policy assigns the board of education the ultimate authority for curriculum approval. Boards have broad discretion in establishing courses to meet curriculum requirements. Students may be required to participate in the curriculum, with specific excusals authorized by the state for certain subjects.

Generally, boards of education have broad discretion in establishing courses to address curriculum requirements. Students enrolled in public school may be required to participate in the curriculum except in specific topics authorized by the state. These include AIDS instruction, family life education, firearms safety programs, sexual abuse and assault awareness, and dissection. Parents or guardians are required to submit a request for excusal in writing.

Student Achievement

Boards should consider current research on student achievement and learn from successful districts. For example, the Iowa Association of School Boards' Lighthouse Project found a direct correlation between board actions and student achievement. High-functioning boards focus on student learning and convey their expectations through the administration to teachers and staff.

Textbooks

Boards of education can also exercise authority over textbook adoption. While the State Board of Education requires districts to adopt textbooks that accurately present the achievements of diverse groups, districts have substantial discretion in deciding which textbooks to use.

There is no express requirement for the board of education to approve textbooks, and this decision can be delegated to the superintendent or a committee. However, any proposed change in a textbook requires a two-thirds vote of all board members after one week's written notice.

Teacher and Principal Professional Development and Evaluation

Professional development and evaluation of school staff are crucial for effective curriculum implementation. While the board and superintendent must determine how the latter will be evaluated, every board is required to have a professional development and evaluation committee (PDEC) for teachers, principals, and other administrators.

The PDEC and the board adopt a Teacher/Leader Evaluation and Support Program for the district. If they cannot agree, they must consider a model program adopted by the State Board of Education.

The best-case scenario would be for the board and PDEC to arrive at a mutual agreement. The PDEC must include at least one teacher, one administrator, and one paraeducator, each appointed by their exclusive bargaining representatives, and "such other school personnel as the board deems appropriate."

Board/Superintendent Relations

School Governance Position Statement

The relationship between a board of education and its superintendent is crucial for the effective functioning of a school district. The success of the district depends on both parties working collaboratively. To assist individual districts in developing the best possible relationship, CAFE and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) crafted a Governance statement in 2016. This statement serves as a discussion tool for boards and their superintendents, incorporating insights from board members, current and former superintendents, and other leadership experts. It is designed to outline the best path to building a strong relationship.

We recommend that all boards and their superintendents discuss their mutual expectations whenever any member of the leadership team (the board of education and the superintendent) changes. The Governance Statement, which details shared responsibilities, board responsibilities, and superintendent responsibilities, should be familiar to both new and experienced board members and superintendents.

To strengthen student achievement, we encourage your leadership team to regularly review and discuss these responsibilities. Revisiting the Governance statement during times of difficult or contentious issues can be particularly helpful in clarifying expectations.

Board/Superintendent Shared Responsibilities

The primary responsibility of the board and superintendent is to foster a district culture where student achievement is the primary focus. Key shared responsibilities include:

- ***Vision Development:*** Collaborate with the community to develop a vision for the school district focused on student achievement.
- ***Goal Setting:*** Develop goals aligned with the district's vision to promote continuous improvement.
- ***Strategic Planning:*** Institute long-range and strategic planning processes aligned with the district's vision.

- **Communication:** Communicate and interpret the district's mission to the public, incorporating appropriate community perspectives into board action.
- **Community Leadership:** Provide community leadership on educational issues by creating strong linkages with relevant organizations and agencies to support the healthy development and high achievement of all children.
- **Professional Development:** Participate in professional development specific to their roles and responsibilities and relevant content areas.
- **Support and Execution:** Support board actions and decisions and collectively execute legal responsibilities.
- **Regular Discussions:** Set aside time, at least semi-annually, to discuss board/superintendent relations and conduct the annual superintendent evaluation as required by Connecticut law.
- **Professional Organizations:** Actively support and participate in professional organizations.
- **Development Opportunities:** Ensure professional development opportunities are available to all board members and school district employees.
- **Legal Compliance:** Ensure adherence to federal and state laws and board policies.
- **Advocacy:** Advocate at national and state levels for students and the school district, promoting the benefits of public education.
- **Collaboration:** Work with other school boards, superintendents, agencies, and bodies to inform policymakers of local concerns and issues relative to education.

Board of Education Responsibilities

School Governance Position Statement

<i>Board of Education's Responsibilities</i>	<i>Superintendent of Schools' Responsibilities</i>
To hire, support, evaluate and work effectively with the superintendent of schools.	To work effectively with the board, serving as the school board's chief executive officer and educational leader for the board, district, and community.
To establish and regularly review all policies, ensuring they are lawful and designed to improve the quality of the school district.	To implement policies approved by the board and recommend changes, if appropriate, and to develop, implement and inform the board of administrative procedures necessary to implement board policy.
In consultation with the superintendent, to 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 student achievement in the proper context.	To participate, as appropriate, in his/her annual evaluation, by providing data and other information that will inform the evaluation.
To inform the superintendent, through the established chain of command, of potential barriers to the realization of the board's vision for the school system.	To proactively identify and address potential barriers to the realization of the board's vision for the school system.
To refer communications such as questions complaints and personnel inquiries to the superintendent, as appropriate, and to encourage adherence to the established chain of command.	To respond to communications, as appropriate, and ensure the adherence and appropriate response through the chain of command, and to keep board members informed about district issues in a timely manner.

<i>Board of Education's Responsibilities</i>	<i>Superintendent of Schools' Responsibilities</i>
To seek the superintendent's recommendation before taking action.	To provide the board with well-informed recommendations.
To make decisions based on data.	To facilitate effective, data-driven decision making.
To adopt, advocate for and oversee the school budget, which is responsive to district goals and meets the needs of all students.	To prepare, advocate for and implement the annual budget that addresses district goals and meets the needs of all students; and report regularly to the board on the status of the budget and any concerns or other issues about which the board should be informed.
To delegate to the superintendent responsibility for all administrative functions, except those specifically reserved to the board through board policy.	To oversee the organization and management of the district's day-to-day operations.
To conduct an annual self-evaluation of its own leadership, governance and teamwork and take appropriate action pursuant to that evaluation.	To participate, as appropriate, in the annual self-evaluation of the board, and assist with follow-up.
To provide leadership development opportunities for the superintendent.	To engage in leadership development opportunities provided by the board.
To have the board leadership work with the superintendent to develop meeting agendas that include student achievement.	To work closely with the board leadership to develop meeting agendas that include student achievement.
To determine and include in district policy, hiring procedures that clearly define board and superintendent responsibilities, and to participate in termination procedures and decisions as prescribed by Connecticut General Statutes.	To, as pursuant to board policy, hire personnel for the school district and ensure that each employee is properly supervised and evaluated; and to make recommendations for termination of employment.

<i>Board of Education's Responsibilities</i>	<i>Superintendent of Schools' Responsibilities</i>
To establish, in accordance with state statute, a professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance.	To implement the board-established professional staff evaluation process that is based on effective performance, in accordance with state statute.
To ensure there is a supportive, smoothly-operating board/superintendent leadership team, which results in an effective and efficient school district.	To serve as a key, effective member of the board/superintendent leadership team and to lead the district staff to meet the district's goal.
To share relevant information for the betterment of the district with the board/superintendent leadership team.	To communicate research information, performance results and educational needs to the board for possible board action.
To hold superintendent accountable for alignment of district activities with district vision.	To ensure that actions of the entire district align to the district vision.
Belongs to, actively supports, and participates in professional organizations (e.g., CABA, NSBA and encourages the superintendent of schools to actively support and participate in their professional organizations. (CAPSS, AASA)	Belongs to, actively supports, and participates in professional organizations (e.g., CAPSS, AASA and encourages the board of education to actively support and participate in their professional organizations (CABA, NSBA)

For more information on the specific duties of the superintendent, it is recommended that the board and superintendent examine the Connecticut superintendent Leadership Competency Framework, developed by LEAD Connecticut.

Superintendent's Responsibilities

The hiring of qualified teachers and administrators is arguably the single most important function of the school district's leadership team. It is essential that the board of education and superintendent understand their roles in the hiring process and work together to ensure only the best and most qualified individuals are hired to work with our children. Generally, the superintendent is responsible for hiring all teaching and classified staff and will regularly report on teaching vacancies, transfers, and new hires to the board.

Evaluation of the Leadership Team

To provide boards and superintendents with procedures and instruments for evaluations, CAFE and CAPSS developed and adopted *Success Strategies for Leadership Team Evaluation: Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools*. This document is a companion piece to the Governance Statement and is available on both the CAFE and CAPSS websites. It contains information on legal responsibilities, procedures, and actual evaluation instruments. Superintendents must be evaluated by the board annually. Although not required, it is good practice for boards to conduct self-evaluations, often incorporated into a retreat. CAFE staff is available to facilitate these sessions.

Success Strategies communicates the belief that the board of education and superintendent must function as the district's leadership team, sharing and advocating for the same goals and a vision of learning with high-performance expectations for the entire school community.

The Board Chair

The board chair plays a key role in ensuring the effective functioning of the leadership team, serving as the liaison between the board and the superintendent. The chair's ability to conduct board meetings effectively can significantly impact the board's public perception and operational efficiency.

The chair and superintendent typically collaborate on developing meeting agendas and addressing operational issues. The superintendent depends on the chair for guidance, and the chair should seek the superintendent's input on various matters, fostering a close, positive working relationship.

The chair is responsible for ensuring effective communication among board members and between the board and the superintendent. They must ensure the superintendent can perform their duties without undue interference and help individual board members understand their roles and responsibilities.

Hiring Teachers and Administrators

The hiring of qualified individuals to serve as teachers and administrators within the school system is arguably the single most important function of the school district's leadership team. As such, it is essential that the board of education and superintendent understand their roles within the hiring process and work together to ensure that only the best and most qualified individuals are hired to work with our students.

In virtually all districts, the superintendent is responsible for the hiring of all teaching and classified staff pursuant to board policy. The board should receive regular and timely reports of all teaching vacancies, transfers, and new hires.

The superintendent is responsible for the posting of administrative positions, recruitment and screening of candidates, and when policy requires, bringing candidate(s) to the board of education for consideration. The superintendent will solicit the advice of the board of education when conducting an administrative search and, when appropriate and as agreed upon by the board of education and the superintendent, will involve board members in the search process.*

**Footnote: For more information on the work of the Board Chair, please see the CABE publication, "Who's In Charge? A Guide for Board of Education Chairs".*

Conclusion

We hope this handbook provides sufficient information to help you begin your service as a school board member. It is not exhaustive, but it offers a strong foundation for your new roles and responsibilities. Following the Codes of Ethics established by the CABA Board of Directors and continuously seeking new ways to approach issues will enhance your effectiveness.

As a school board member, you are part of a great tradition of voluntary local board service, entrusted with one of the most important institutions in your community. Nelson Mandela famously said, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” Your role in providing high-quality education will impact generations of students.

Many former school board members have found their service to be among the most significant endeavors of their lives. We hope you will feel the same and that your service will be both an opportunity and a legacy. CABA stands ready to support you on your school board journey.

Appendix I

Code of Ethics for Boards of Education

1. Ensure the opportunity for high-quality education for every student, making their well-being the fundamental goal of all decision-making and actions.
2. Be staunch advocates of high-quality free public education for all Connecticut children.
3. Honor all national, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to education and public agencies.
4. Recognize the importance of clear and appropriate communications for the successful operation of the school district.
5. Conduct roles with the highest levels of professionalism, honesty, and integrity.
6. Represent the entire community and ensure it remains fully informed on school-related matters.
7. Recognize that the superintendent serves as the Board of Education's agent and will apply board policies and contracts faithfully.
8. Confine the board's role to policy-making, planning, and appraisal while the superintendent implements board policies.
9. Serve as part of an educational team with mutual respect, trust, civility, and regard for each other's roles and responsibilities.
10. Commit to the superintendent as the educational leader of the school district.
11. Promote ethical behavior in the boardroom as a model for all district employees.
12. Consider and decide all issues fairly and without bias.

Adopted by the CABE board of Directors on April 17, 1997. Readopted September 13, 2023.

Appendix II

24 Tips to Help Make You a Better School Board Member

1. Put your students' needs first and stay true to your district's mission.
2. Drop your party affiliation at the boardroom door.
3. Represent ALL the children in the district, not just those whose parents voted for you.
4. Know your roles and responsibilities.
5. Understand the superintendent's roles and responsibilities.
6. Communicate often and honestly with other board members and the superintendent. One-to-one conversations build strong relationships.
7. Learn what drives other board members and the superintendent to develop strong bonds within your Leadership Team.
8. Be an advocate for your students and district.
9. Inspire others.
10. Strengthen your board's image by conducting yourself with respect and civility.
11. Let others shine and recognize their contributions.
12. Speak your piece and actively listen to others.
13. When confronted by a mistake, generally assume incompetence rather than malfeasance.
14. Never criticize others in public.
15. Pick your battles; sometimes, others just need to vent.
16. Apologize when necessary.
17. Be aware of your implicit biases.
18. Remember your power as a board member is equal to other citizens, except at the board table.
19. Do not try to solve every problem; explain the chain of command.
20. Follow the money; your budget is your most important policy document.
21. Hone and use your emotional intelligence.

22. Use your sense of humor to defuse situations.
23. Take time for yourself and your family.
24. Focus on the big picture with optimism and think long-term.

Appendix III

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Meetings, Special Meetings, and Non-Meetings

Boards of education do their work at legally constituted meetings. Most gatherings of the board of education are defined as “meetings.” The bringing together of members of a board of education to discuss business is subject to various laws, especially the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). It is the responsibility of the board chair to know how to proceed properly, although all board members and the superintendent have the responsibility of ensuring that the rules are followed. Thus, all board members should be aware of these requirements.

By law, the board of education is required to adopt an annual calendar, posted at the town hall and on record at the Secretary of the State’s Office, containing a list of all “Regular” meetings of the board.

“Special” meetings can be called at any time, provided proper notice is provided. The meeting announcement must include the topic of the meeting and list possible actions (agenda). At no time can the board discuss or take action on anything not listed in the special meeting agenda. The board may add items to the agenda in a regular meeting through a vote of the board consistent with board bylaws (usually a 2/3 vote), but cannot add items to the posted special meeting agenda.

Workshops, retreats, grievance or disciplinary hearings, or other non-regular meetings are special meetings and subject to the same rules and regulations. The board may be called to decide on a disciplinary action, such as a student expulsion or a teacher termination. In both cases, care must be given to protect the rights of those who are the subject of the meeting, and proper notice must be given.

The board also meets when there is a challenge to a union contract that cannot be resolved at a lower level. These grievance hearings have their own set of rules.

Most of these rules are included in the board’s bylaws, which are board policies and specify how board meetings are to be conducted.

Non-Meetings

Some types of official board functions are not defined as meetings and are often called “non-meetings.” The board can exclude the public and does not need to keep minutes in these gatherings. When the board meets to discuss contract negotiations, for example, it is not in an official meeting, as defined by law. Other non-meetings include meetings of a personnel search committee for executive-level employment candidates and any chance meeting or social meeting where no business is planned; and single-party caucuses (with no one outside of the board present). These meetings are not subject to the FOI requirements.

Preparation for the Board Meeting

Notice

The law requires that all meetings of the board of education be legally noticed. Notice of special meetings must be made 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting and posted in the town clerk’s office and on the district website. In the case of an emergency, where notice cannot be provided 24 hours before the start of the meeting, the reason for the emergency must be clearly identified in the minutes and made available to the public no later than 72 hours following the holding of the meeting. Written notice for an emergency meeting must be delivered to the home of each member of the board so that it is received before the meeting.

Appendix IV

Parliamentary Procedure (Robert's Rules of Order)

Rules of procedure allow a deliberative body to make decisions in an orderly manner. They are designed to:

- Ensure the rights of the majority.
- Protect the rights of the minority.
- Defend the rights of individual members.
- Safeguard members absent from the meeting.

It is the responsibility of all members to:

- Treat one item at a time.
- Extend courtesy and fairness to all.
- Let the majority rule.
- Guarantee the rights of the minority.

Boards can adopt the rules as written or modify them as they see fit. The key to a successful meeting is the consistent, fair application of the rules.

When a board member raises their hand, the chair must recognize them before they can speak. The recognized speaker may only discuss what is on the agenda unless the agenda allows otherwise.

Boards act through adopting motions, which are formal requests to take action. Motions can be debatable, allowing board members to ask questions or speak for or against the motion. Some motions are not debatable; when such a motion is moved and seconded, the chair must call for an immediate vote.

Motions follow an order of precedence, determining when motions can be made. The chair's responsibility is to know this order and govern when motions may or may not be made for certain actions.

The chair (or the board secretary) must track all motions and their status, ensuring that only the motion on the floor is discussed and that members understand the motion before the vote.

Appendix V

CABE Code of Ethics for Individual Board of Education Members

1. *I will* be a staunch advocate of high quality free public education for all Connecticut children. In fulfilling my responsibilities, I will think of “children first.”
2. *I will*, as an agent of the state, uphold and enforce all laws, rules, regulations and court orders pertaining to public schools. I will strive to bring any needed change only through legal ethical procedures.
3. *I will* strive to help create public schools which meet the individual educational needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
4. *I will* support culturally responsive teaching and supervision that promotes understanding of and respect for the many diverse cultures which strengthen our democratic society.
5. *I will* work unremittingly to help my community understand the importance of proper support for public education, whether it be in providing adequate finance, optimum facilities, staffing and resources, or better educational programs for children.
6. *I will* join with my board, staff, community and students in becoming fully informed about the nature, value and direction of contemporary education in our society. I will support needed change in our schools.
7. *I will* strive to ensure that the community is fully and accurately informed about our schools, and will try to interpret community aspirations to the school staff.
8. *I will* recognize that my responsibility is not to “run the schools” through administration, but together with my fellow Board members, to see that they are well-run through effective policies.
9. *I will* attempt to confine my Board action to policy-making, planning and appraisal, and will help to frame policies and plans only after my Board has consulted those who will be affected by its actions.

10. I *will* arrive at conclusions only after discussing all aspects of the issue at hand with my fellow Board members in public meetings. I will respect the opinions others, and abide by the principle of majority-rule.
11. I *will* recognize that authority rests only with the whole board assembled in a meeting and will make no personal promises nor take any private action which may compromise the Board.
12. I *will* acknowledge that the board represents the entire school community, and will refuse to surrender my independent judgement to special interest or partisan political groups. I will never use my position on the board for the gain of myself or my friends.
13. I *will* hold confidential all matters pertaining to schools which, if disclosed, might needlessly injure individuals or the schools.
14. I *will* insist that all school business transactions be open and ethical.
15. I *will* strive to appoint the best professional leader available when a vacancy exists in the chief administrative position.
16. I *will* strive to appoint the best trained technical and professional personnel available, upon recommendation by the appropriate administrative officer.
17. I *will* support and protect school personnel in the proper performance of their duties. I will strive to ensure that all personnel have not only the requisite responsibilities, but the necessary authority to perform effectively.
18. I *will* refer all complaints through the proper “chain of command” within the system, and will act on such complaints at public meetings only when administrative solutions fail.

**Footnote: The Code of Ethics is based upon “Standards of Leadership for Members of Boards of Education” recommended by the CAFE Board of Directors in 1974, and on the preliminary “Code of Ethics” recommended in 1977. The Code was readopted in 2023.*

Education

CABE provides in-service education throughout the state to school board members via workshops and webinars, including customized workshops upon request. CABE also offers in-depth, timely knowledge through concise periodicals, videos, and research reports, equipping board members with the tools they need to serve their school districts effectively.

Advocacy

CABE advocates for boards of education at the state and federal levels, engaging with the Legislature, Congress, courts, and agencies. CABE also provides legal assistance to boards of education and superintendents, participating as amicus curiae in cases of statewide significance

Policy

CABE assists boards of education and school administrators in managing numerous state and federal laws, regulations, and judicial decisions. CABE offers accurate, up-to-date information to develop and maintain comprehensive manuals of school board policies, administrative regulations, and bylaws. Services include the Connecticut Reference Manual, Connecticut Online Policy Service, Customized Policy Service, Policy Audit Service, Policy Update Service, and Basic Policy Information.



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

*The Leading Voice for
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**81 Wolcott Hill Road • Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242
860-571-7446 • CABE.org**

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