

Cortland Enlarged City School District Board of Education Manual

This manual is intended to be a succinct reference for board members providing useful information and documenting agreed upon norms, goals and protocols.

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What the Board Is

The board of education is a group of district volunteers who oversee the district's public schools so that they have what they need and are responsive to community needs.

Responsibilities

Section 1804 of the Consolidated Laws of New York enumerates details of the board election, powers and duties.¹ Basically, the board:

1. Hires a superintendent and translates community priorities to superintendent goals
2. Sets rules and direction for the district through policies and goals
3. Oversees district finances and personnel actions

Board responsibilities overlap with superintendent responsibilities which are described in Section 2508 of the Consolidated Code. Again, in oversimplified form:

1. The board selects a superintendent to supervise operations, i.e. staff and assets.
2. The board approves major financial and personnel actions.
3. The superintendent makes the short-term decisions, i.e. less than annual ones.

Elections

Our board is comprised of seven members elected at large. Full terms are three years, but in the event of a resignation, a member is elected at the next election to fill out the remainder of the term. Terms of office begin on July 1 and run until June 30. The election is normally held on the 3rd Tuesday of May.

To be eligible for membership, you must be a citizen of the United States, be at least 18 years of age, have been a resident of the district for at least one year immediately preceding the election, not reside with another school board member, be a current employee of the school district or hold any City office other than police officer or firefighter.

To be nominated, a person must contact the district clerk for an application, gather at least 100 signatures of qualified voters and return the petition to the clerk of the board no later than 5 PM, 20 days prior to the election.

Training

New members are required to take training in fiscal oversight and governance within one year of being elected. The district pays for this training.

¹ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/1804>

Description

The board of education serves as the liaison between the community and the school district administration. Loosely stated, its mission is to:

1. Train literate, informed and creative citizens.
2. Ensure an open and sustainable operation.
3. Make the schools fun, safe and supportive.

Although members may sometimes disagree on how to realize their mission, they try to follow these norms:

1. Assume good intent.
2. Strive for consensus.
3. Exemplify respect.
4. Listen to hear and understand.

Goals

The board will have at least one workshop annually to set their goals. They will report on the progress of achieving those goals at regular board meetings. To realize its mission, the board sets annual goals based on community sentiment. In 2021-22, those goals are:

1. Improve overall academic performance and track individual student performance.
2. Make teaching in the district more attractive.
3. Improve instruction especially with remote learning.
4. Learn more about ways to improve the district.
5. Balance the budget while prioritizing students.

Officers

Board of education officers are nominated and elected by the board at its annual organizational meeting for a term of one year. They take their oath of office at this meeting along with newly elected members. Elected officers of the board are the president and vice president.

The president presides at all meetings, prepares the meeting agendas and calls special meetings as necessary or on request. Members are encouraged to suggest agenda topics prior to the Wednesday before board meetings.

The vice president has the power to exercise the duties of the president in case of the absence or disability of the president. In case of vacancy in the office of the president, the vice president acts as president until a president is elected.

Student Member

In addition to the members elected in May, the board may include an *ex officio* student member who has the same rights and privileges as other members but does not vote and or attend executive sessions. Every two years district voters must approve having a student member.

Per Education Law Section 1901 the student member be a senior and have attended the high school for at least two years. The student may be high school president, elected by the student body or be selected by the principal or superintendent.

Legalities

Although the school board will defend and indemnify members sued for the direct exercise of their duties, the following points are good to remember when one is taking initiatives, handling sensitive information or is sued.²

- Districts may be liable for wrongful actions of school board members.
- Members may be liable if they go beyond their defined duties or expertise.
- If sued, notify the school board clerk immediately (within 5 days of being served).
- The board has 10 days to appoint a legal counsel. Otherwise the member may choose one.

Open Meetings Law

As an entity requiring a quorum to perform governmental business, the board of education is a “public body” subject to Article 7 of the New York Public Officers Law, also known as the Open Meetings Law (OML).³ It requires that:

- All meetings of a public body or its committees, except those that qualify as executive sessions, must be open to the public or streamed online.
- Public notice of the time and place of meetings scheduled a week in advance must be provided to the media and be conspicuously posted at least three days beforehand.
- Meetings not scheduled a week in advance should be similarly announced as soon as possible.
- Minutes from public sessions must be made available to the public within two weeks of the meeting. Redacted minutes of executive sessions are due within one week.

Executive Sessions

The Board of Education may conduct an executive session for discussion of the matters outlined below only. No action by formal vote shall be taken during executive session except on an Education Law 3020-a probable cause finding.

- Matters that will imperil the public safety if disclosed.
- Any matter that may disclose the identity of a law enforcement agent or informer.
- Information relating to current or future investigation or prosecution of a criminal offense that would imperil effective law enforcement if disclosed.
- Discussions regarding proposed, pending or current litigation.
- Collective negotiations pursuant to Civil Service Law Article 14.
- Medical, financial, credit or employment history of any particular person or corporation, or matters leading to the appointment, employment, promotion, demotion, discipline, suspension, dismissal or removal of any particular person or corporation.
- Preparation, grading or administration of examinations.

² https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_pdf/Events/nsbma-06152018/legal-issues-members-may-encounter-2018.pdf

³ <https://www.dos.ny.gov/coog/openmeetlaw.html>

- Proposed acquisition, sale or lease of real property or the proposed acquisition of securities, or sale or exchange of securities, but only when publicity would substantially affect the value thereof.

Matters discussed in executive session must be taken as confidential; that is, not discussed outside of that executive session.

Ethics

Board members are volunteers, and service should not result in financial benefit. To this end:

- Members may not be district employees.
- Members should recuse themselves from voting on the employment of family members.

Regular Meetings

The dates and times of all regular meeting are decided at the annual organizational meeting, except as modified at subsequent meetings of the board. Our meetings are typically the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting Cycle

It is the responsibility of the superintendent to draft the agenda and review it with the board president and vice president before each board meeting. The district clerk presents the agenda to the entire board no later than the Friday before the regular meeting. If board members wish to bring a matter to the attention of the board, a request should be made to the board president so that matter can be discussed with the superintendent and be placed on the agenda.

In order to vote on any matter, there must be a quorum of at least four members present. No formal action shall be taken at any meeting at which a quorum is not present. When only four members are present, the board shall act by unanimous vote unless otherwise required by the laws of the State of New York.

The business of the Board of Education shall be conducted in accordance with the authoritative principles of parliamentary procedure as found in the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

Items of Business

- Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance
- Recognition
- Presentations
- Communications
- Consent Items
- Old Business
- New Business
- Personnel Action
- Leadership Reports
- Executive Session (if needed)
- Closing of Meeting

Minutes

The minutes of all board of education meetings shall state the type of meeting, the date, time of convening, time of adjournment, board members present and absent, board members' arrival and departure time if different from opening or adjournment times, all action taken by the board with evidence of those voting in the affirmative and the negative and those abstaining, and the nature of events that transpire in general terms of reference.

Communications and other documents that are too long and bulky to be included in the minutes shall be referred to in the minutes and shall be filed in the district office.

All board minutes shall be signed by the district clerk when approved and maintained in accordance with law. The minutes shall be available to the public within two weeks following the date of a meeting.

Minutes shall be taken at executive sessions of any action that is taken by formal vote. To the extent permissible, these minutes shall be available to the public within one week of the date of the executive session.

Committees

The purpose of committees is to provide members the opportunity to work together without the time constraints of full board meetings.

Organization

Our Board of Education has audit, communication, facilities, finance, policy and transportation committees which generally meet on a monthly basis.

There is a chairperson and a co-chair. The chairperson keeps minutes of the meetings and distributes them to the board members and the superintendent.

At a regular meeting of the board, the committee meeting will be listed as an agenda item where minutes may be discussed.

Missions

The committees work with the administration to track district performance and progress toward board goals. They have the following purviews and mission statements:

- Audit and Finance (Co-chair: business administrator)
 - Reviews annual district internal and external audits.
 - Reviews bi-weekly claims auditor reports.
 - Advise the larger board on questions of revenues and expenditures.
 - Monitor district assets and obligations.
 - Recommend multi-year plans for board consideration.

- Community Engagement (Co-chair: superintendent)
 - Publicizes district messages
 - Responds to board correspondence
 - Assists with hiring and staff support
 - Publicizes accountability data
 - Coordinates community engagement
 - Manages presentation schedule

To promote and support consistent and transparent communication related to the school district for the benefit of students, teachers, parents and staff as well as the greater community. The goal of the work is to help foster a culture that embraces communication through sharing information and ideas.

- Facilities and Transportation (Co-chair: business administrator)
 - Provide facilities for staff and students to do their jobs.
 - Keep staff and students warm, safe and dry.
 - Promote community use of district facilities.
 - Meets to understand bus purchases and explain nuances to the large board.
 - Monitors transportation system effectiveness and sustainability.

- Policy (Co-chair: superintendent)
 - Drafts district-specific policies.

- Updates policies to comply with state requirements.
- Drafts district-specific protocols.
- Maintains policy manual.
- Deals with legal questions.

Annual Report

The committees report to the full board each year on the status of their areas, whether they met their goals for the year and their goals for the next year.

Appendix A - New Board Members Quick Start Guide

A new board member's term normally begins July 1st and ends June 30th usually three years hence. Soon after the May election, the superintendent will provide your contact information to board members, and they will call to welcome you, offer advice and answer questions.

1. The first week in July, the board clerk will:
 - a. Provide a Board Docs ID, email account, default password.
 - b. Notify you of the first meeting date, time and location. It may come as a Google invitation in which case, clicking "yes" to accept will put it on your calendar.
 - c. Check your contact information and preferred method of communication, e.g. text.
 - d. Provide you with board members, board clerk and superintendent contact information.

2. At the first board meeting in July, the board clerk will:
 - a. Administer the oath of office.
 - b. Provide you with a ChromeBook.

3. Before the first board meeting
 - a. The board agenda comes out Friday before the Tuesday meeting. Look it over to see if there is anything you find confusing or controversial.
 - b. Check with another board member for advice, or research it for yourself.
 - c. Send any questions or concerns to the president, vice-president or directly to the superintendent. Try to avoid surprising people at the meeting.

4. At the first board meeting (All meetings are livestreamed, recorded and posted on the board website.)
 - a. If you have not already taken the oath of office, you will be sworn in by the board clerk.
 - b. You will have to vote to approve the "consent" agenda. It's a bundle of items voted on together to save time. It usually includes:
 - i. Minutes from the previous meeting (Is anything important missing?)
 - ii. CSE/CPSE evaluations (Special education placements, usually not controversial)
 - c. Other Business
 - i. The proposition is read, "moved" and seconded
 - ii. The president opens the floor to discussion. Speak clearly
 - iii. The board votes. These days it is usually a voice vote. Simple majority wins.
 - d. You may meet in executive session
 - i. It is not public because sensitive information is shared.
 - ii. What's said in executive session should never be repeated outside.
 - iii. Recall that the district can be sued for leaks of damaging information.

Appendix B - Getting “On Board”⁴

As we prepare for either a continuance with our current Board or welcome new Board members this spring, one thing is certain ... there’s an awful lot to learn. Whether you’re a “seasoned” member or a brand new member, we all need to assess our current attitudes, skills, and knowledge and think about how these might enhance our effectiveness as a board member.

Your orientation will change from being a school board candidate to being a school board member, from being a private citizen to a public school official, and from being an individual to becoming a member of a team. Even if you were a teacher before becoming a school board member, your focus as a board member will need to shift.

Our most important role is to ensure that each child in our district is educated to the fullest of their potential. Our four key roles should be:

Vision - setting the vision for education in our local community

Structure - establishing the structure and the environment to implement that vision

Accountability - establishing academic standards to achieve our vision, assessing performance progress towards achieving that vision, and creating strategies to help **ALL** students learn. Remember...**ALL MEANS ALL!**

Advocacy - being an advocate for public schools and our students

While you’re learning how to function as a school board member, often you will hear stories about school problems. School problems can serve as energy for a school board member, as they are opportunities to provoke discussion ... exploring, managing, solving.

The Hardest Lessons:

- Learning that you have no power or authority as an individual member.
- Understanding that you have a lot to learn.
- Recognizing the difference between setting policy (the board’s job) and administering the schools (the superintendent’s job).
- Representing ALL the students.
- Learning how to respond to the complaints and concerns of the citizens and the school staff. You, as an individual, can’t solve everyone’s problems by yourself.
- Thinking deeply and sometimes accepting a reality that is contrary to your own beliefs.
- Discovering how schools are funded.
- Understanding that effective board service means being able to hold the minority viewpoint when voting on a given issue; then openly supporting the majority vote of the board in your community.
- The PRIMARY FOCUS of all school board decisions MUST be student achievement.

⁴ reference from Janet

Appendix C – Community Chain of Contact

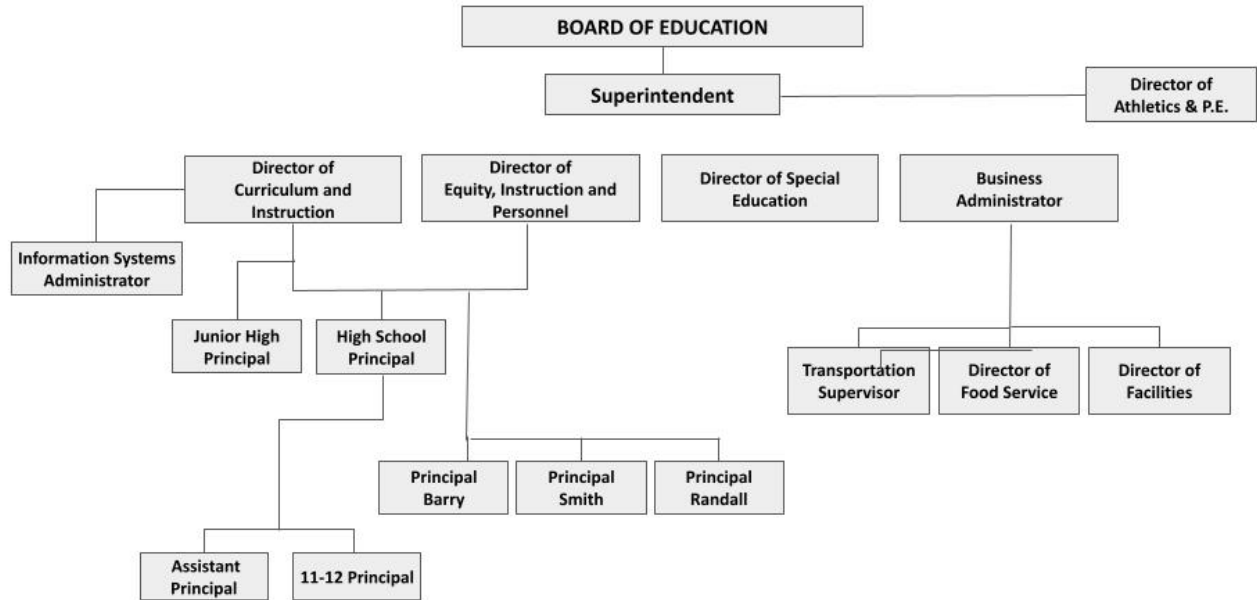
Comments, suggestions and complaints are best handled by the people who can address them. Table C.1 below has the suggested process for resolving issues in various areas.

Table C.1 Community Chain of Contact

Area	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Academics: Difficulties, Scheduling, Curriculum	Class/Course Teacher	HS/MS Guidance, School Counselor	Building Principal	Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Attendance	School Nurse	Principal	Superintendent	
Athletics	Coach	Director of Athletics & PE	Principal	Superintendent
Behavior and Classroom Procedures	Teacher	Principal	Superintendent	
Board of Education Policy	District Clerk	Superintendent	Board of Education	
Budget	Business Administrator	Superintendent		
Buildings and Grounds	Building Main Office	Director of Facilities	Business Administrator	
Counseling	Teacher/School Counselor	Principal	Director of Special Education	Superintendent
Employment	Personnel Office	Superintendent		
Extracurricular Activities	Advisor	Principal		
Food Service	Building Cafeteria Manager	Food Service Director	Principal	Business Administrator
Free/Reduced Meal Program	District Office			
Health/Medical	Teacher	School Nurse	Principal	Director of Special Education
Registration and Residency	Registrar	Direct of Curriculum & Instruction	Superintendent	
Safety	Building Principal	Business Administrator	Superintendent	
Scholarships	High School Counseling Office	Principal	Director of Curriculum & Instruction	
Special Education	Teacher	Principal	Director of Special Education	
Technology	Principal	Instructional Technology & Communication Specialist	Director of Curriculum & Instruction	Superintendent
Transportation	Transportation Center	Principal	Business Administrator	Superintendent
Use of Facilities	Principal	Athletic Office /Building & Grounds	Business Administrator	
Website	Building Main Office	Instructional Technology & Communication Specialist	Director of Curriculum & Instruction	Superintendent

Appendix D – Organization Chart

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE - OVERALL (2021-22)



Appendix E – Board Annual Calendar (Draft)

	Pre-Meeting Workshop	Programs	Facilities	Board Responsibilities
July		Organizational Meeting		<i>induct members & elect officers</i>
August				<i>goals retreat</i>
September		Positivity Project	School Improvement Planning	<i>review building "parking lot"</i>
October		HS Credit Report		
		1st Quarter Progress Report		<i>approve bus purchases</i>
	CSE Process Workshop			
November			Senior High School	
December		2nd Quarter Progress Report		
January				
	Building-Level Data Process		Randall Middle School	
February			Smith Intermediate School	
			Junior High School	
March	Building-Level SEL Workshop	3rd Quarter Progress Report	Barry Primary School	<i>approve cabinet raises</i>
April				<i>approve district budget</i>
		Monday BOCES Admin Budget Mtg		<i>extend superintendent contract</i>
May	Public Budget Hearing	Meet the Candidates		<i>board election and budget vote</i>
June		4th Quarter Progress Report		<i>committee progress reports</i> <i>evaluate superintendent</i>