

Local School Governance

The hands-on work of equipping each student for adult success is done at the local level, led by local school boards, superintendents, school councils, and principals.

WHAT DOES A LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION DO?

Each school board sets policy and provides resources to help the students in all the district's schools learn and grow. For example, the board sets tax rates and school attendance boundaries and approves the district's annual budget. Boards usually have five members elected by the voters of their communities to serve four-year terms. Boards make their decisions by voting in public meetings.

HOW DOES A BOARD WORK WITH A SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT?

The superintendent is the district's top executive, responsible for leading its ongoing work on a full-time basis. The school board selects and evaluates the superintendent and sets the overall policy and planning direction for the superintendent's work. The superintendent implements those decisions, including making most personnel decisions and managing the school's system's day-to-day operations.

WHAT DO SCHOOL COUNCILS DO?

School councils set policy and make plans to strengthen student achievement at a single school. For example, council policies govern a school's curriculum, its instruction, and how students are assigned to classes and programs. Those policies are implemented on a day-to-day basis by the principal and school staff. Councils work with the district superintendent to select the school's principal, and they are consulted before the principal selects people to be hired for other vacancies. Most councils consist of three teachers elected by teachers, two parents elected by parents, and the school principal as chair. If 8% or more of a school's students have minority backgrounds, the council must include minority representation. Many councils establish committees of teachers, parents, and others to develop recommendations on major issues. Councils make their decisions in public meetings, often by consensus (a process for developing decisions that all can support, rather than by majority rule). School councils are also sometimes called site councils, school-based decision-making councils, or SBDM councils.

HOW DOES A COUNCIL WORK WITH THE PRINCIPAL?

The principal is a member of the council and participates in its decisions on improvement plans and policies. Outside council meetings, the principal is responsible for implementing those decisions, including working out how rules set by the council should be applied to decisions in individual situations. When it is time to hire new staff for the school, the principal consults the council and then makes the final choice.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN BOARD AND COUNCIL MEETINGS?

School boards and school councils follow the Open Meetings Law, including provisions on when and how they meet, and when the public can be present. Committees appointed by boards and councils must also follow those rules, which are explained in more detail in the Kentucky EdGuide on Open Meetings and Records. Each body makes its own rules about when and how audience members may speak during the meeting.

LEARNING MORE

The Kentucky School Boards Association offers helpful information about school board work at www.ksba.org.

The Kentucky Association of School Councils offers public information along with publications, workshops and other services at www.kasc.net.

Members of the board and councils at your schools can also answer questions about how they conduct their work and about current efforts to ensure that all students are moving toward graduating ready to succeed in college, career, and community.

The laws and regulations governing all this work can be searched and studied at www.lrc.ky.gov/Law.htm.

The state Office of Education Accountability can help clarify roles and resolve conflicts at (800) 242-0520 or www.lrc.ky.gov/oea

IS THERE MORE DETAIL ON HOW SPECIFIC ISSUES ARE HANDLED?

The chart below adds more specifics, but does not attempt to cover all questions and details.

ISSUE	SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT	SCHOOL COUNCILS AND PRINCIPALS
Buildings	The board decides to build, renovate, or close buildings and decides which students go to which schools.	The council sets policy (written rules) on how school space will be used during the school day. The principal implements that policy in making day-to-day space decisions.
Taxes	The board votes to raise or lower tax rates.	
Spending	The board votes on the budget for the whole district. The superintendent decides on central office spending, transportation, utilities, building repairs, and other needs that are not council responsibilities.	The school council, using an allocation of money from the district, decides how many people to employ and what books and other instructional materials to buy. (Often, the council decides to set a budget for the available money and allow the principal, committees, or individual teachers to choose specific purchases.)
Employees	The board sets the salary schedule and qualifications for all jobs. It hires and evaluates the superintendent and school board attorney. The superintendent works with school councils to select principals. The superintendent evaluates the principals and selects and evaluates employees who are not assigned to a single school (or supervises those who do).	The council works with the superintendent to select the principal. For other vacancies at the school, the council is consulted by the principal. The principal chooses the people who will be hired to fill school vacancies after consulting the council. The principal evaluates those employees.
Calendars and schedules	The board sets the calendar for the school year and the starting and ending times for the school day. The superintendent decides to cancel or delay school on a particular day based on weather problems.	The council sets policy (written rules) on the schedule of the school day, the use of staff time, and the ways students are assigned to classes. The principal implements the policy, deciding which teachers and students will be in each class and when each will occur.
Curriculum and Instruction	While the state requires 22 credits for high school graduation, the board can set policy requiring a higher number of credits to graduate from local schools.	The council sets policy (written rules) on what will be taught and the teaching methods that will be used. The principal applies that policy in making day-to-day decisions about the school's work.
Conduct and Discipline	The board sets the district wide code of behavior, including allowed consequences. The board decides on student expulsions.	The council sets policy (written rules) on how classrooms will be managed and discipline maintained. The principal applies that policy in handling situations with individuals.
Planning and Achievement Gaps	The board votes on the districtwide improvement plan and the school board chair signs an assurances document confirming that the plan follows state and federal legal requirements. The superintendent also signs the assurances and usually coordinates the work of gathering evidence used to develop the district plan and check whether it is working.	The council reviews student achievement data and decides on the school-level plan for raising achievement and reducing achievement gaps. The principal leads the implementation of the plan and coordinates the work of gathering evidence used to develop the plan and check whether it is working.