

# Community member guide to the role of the school boards



## What is a School Board?

Every state and state-integrated school/kura in New Zealand is governed by a school board (formerly known as a board of trustees). The school board is a crown entity – that is, an organisation that is part of the New Zealand public sector.

**One of the board's primary objectives is making sure every child reaches their highest possible standard in educational achievement.**

## What do boards do?

The board has overall responsibility and accountability for the school/kura. School board's legal responsibilities are determined by the Education and Training Act 2020.

The Act sets out boards' four primary objectives. These are ensuring student achievement for all of its students, including for those of differing needs, making sure the school is a safe place for all, and giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi.

As part of its focus on these four objectives, boards' responsibilities include:

- Setting the strategic direction for the school
- Protecting the school's values
- Monitoring and evaluating student learning outcomes
- Approving policies
- Financial stewardship
- Building community engagement and support

It's important to note that the board does **NOT** get involved in the day-to-day running of the school.

## What skills do board members need?

Board members (formerly called 'trustees') are active leaders in their school/kura. People often think board members need to have a legal or business background - but that's not the case at all.

The most valuable skills board members can bring to the board table are:

- Work well as part of a team.
- Not afraid to ask challenging questions.
- Have good communication skills.
- Be connected to their community.

## Who can become a board member?

Anyone in the community can become a board member. There are board members who are tradies, office workers, farmers, doctors, stay-at-home parents and caregivers, bus drivers and retired people.

It doesn't matter what you do – it matters that you care about education in your community and you want to make a difference. It's also really important for boards to reflect the diversity within their school community.

## How do I become a board member?

Schools elect board members every three years ('triennial elections'). Some schools also run 'mid-term' elections (held every 18 months), and if a board member resigns during their 3-year term, the school may hold a by-election to fill the vacancy.

All parents, legal guardians and immediate caregivers of students enrolled full-time in a state, state-integrated school or kura can, and should, vote in the elections for parent representatives.

To find out when your school's next election is, get in touch with them or go to the school trustee elections website: [www.trustee-election.co.nz](http://www.trustee-election.co.nz)

## How are boards structured?

Boards are typically made up of between 3 and 7 members. It all depends on the size and structure of the school.

Boards also include a staff representative - voted in by staff, and schools with students in year 9 and above, have a student representative - voted in by students.

Everyone has equal standing on the board – that means an equal voice and opinion on the issues being discussed, an equal vote and equal accountability.

The Education and Training Act 2020 provides some discretion and flexibility around how boards can be structured. This is to ensure boards are able to attract candidates with the required skills to deliver good governance and also that they reflect the diversity within their community.

## What help do board members get?

NZSTA provides free advice and support to all boards to help them do the very best for their students and community.

We have a dedicated team of advisors who help boards with governance and employment issues.

We also run a comprehensive programme of professional development workshops – most of which are free to attend. They will help you understand your role as a board member and you will gain valuable knowledge and skills.

You can find out more about our workshops and online modules by visiting our Knowledge Hub website: [www.nzstaknowledgehub.org.nz](http://www.nzstaknowledgehub.org.nz)



Board members play an important role in shaping the education experience and achievements of students.

## Boards are a vital part of the community

The board works in partnership with its school and wider community, as well as the principal, teachers, support staff, and the government to ensure the best possible outcomes for all students. The school's community includes its students and their parents, families and whānau, the Māori community associated with the school, and others in the wider local community.

## The board's strategic plan

The board is responsible for determining the strategic vision for the school/kura. When developing its charter/strategic plan, the board considers the school's vision, aims and objectives. The plan will detail the board's targets and guides its future decision-making.

The strategic plan is a binding agreement between the school board and the Minister of Education. School communities are encouraged to participate in its development and review.

## What does the work of the board look like?

The key areas of focus for school boards are:

### Leadership

Governance model, clear purpose, roles and responsibilities, effective meetings, relationships.

### Accountability

Student progress and achievement, review, financial monitoring, resource management.

### Employer role

Good employer, performance management system, effective relationships, health and safety, recruitment.

### Representation

Community consultation and engagement, board consultation, trust and relationships.

## How do the principal and board work together?

The school board is the governor of the school/kura. The principal is responsible for the management of the school/kura. The principal is a member of the board and acts as the board's educational leader and chief adviser. Governance and management work in partnership.

### Governance determines:

**the what** - designing the future

**the ends** - the outcomes to be achieved

**policies** - statements of what is expected

### Management determines:

**the how** - designing how to get there

**the means** - strategies to achieve the ends

**procedures** - steps to meet expectations

## What are the roles within the board?

### Parent representatives

- represent the parent community. They do not necessarily need to be parents of current students at the school/kura, but must be nominated by someone who is on the school/kura's electoral roll.

### Board chair

- leads the board
- chairs the meetings
- works closely with the principal to ensure seamless communication between governance and management
- cannot be the principal, staff or student representative

### Principal

- is a full member of the board
- is the educational professional leader of the school/kura
- is the board's chief executive officer (CEO) and chief advisor

### Staff representative

- is elected by the staff (teaching and non-teaching)
- is not a staff advocate (they must make decisions in the best interests of all students at the school/kura using all the information available)

### Student representative

- is elected by students
- is not a student advocate, (they must make decisions in the best interests of all students at the school/kura, using all the information available)

### Co-opted trustees

- provide the board with specific expertise – eg. finance, strategy, gender or ethnic balance

### Proprietor appointee

- is appointed by the school's proprietor or by bodies corporate which have been approved by the board for this purpose

## What can parents expect from the school board?

### Responsibility

The role of the board is to design the future of the school/kura and ensure that plans and targets are developed, monitored, reviewed and achieved.

The board receives regular reports from the principal about student learning and achievement and progress towards the school/kura's strategic aims and targets. The board uses this information to prioritise resourcing to meet the needs of students.

### Respect and integrity

Each board member is expected to make decisions in the best interests of all students at the school/kura and to ensure culturally-appropriate policies and processes are in place.

Board members are entrusted to govern the school/kura, on behalf of the community, to ensure the provision of a high-quality learning environment for all.

### Consultation

School boards are elected to represent the school/kura community. Community consultation is a critical part of the board's process and success.

Consultation processes provide information to guide future development and give feedback on current progress towards the goals defined in the strategic plan. When things don't go to plan, the school/kura should have a procedure outlining the handling of concerns and complaints.

This procedure should be readily available to the school/kura community. School boards are not the immediate point of contact for parent concerns as these should first be dealt with by the school/kura, according to the school's/kura's procedure.

### Communication

The board should provide the school/kura community with regular updates on how it is performing in relation to the strategic goals.

### Professional learning

Board members are encouraged to take up the many chances offered for learning, so they can work effectively as a member of their board. This includes understanding:

- their role as trustees
- governance
- student learning and achievement data

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What support do board members receive?

Each board is responsible for ensuring that its members have the knowledge and skills necessary for the board to be able to function effectively. NZSTA offers a comprehensive professional development programme to ensure that board members are supported and confident in their roles.

### How much time do board members spend on board business?

The time commitment varies from board to board. It is important to attend board meetings. Boards have regular meetings (usually 2 to 3 per term) that usually last for approximately 2 – 2.5 hours. Board members are sent all documentation prior to the meeting and are expected to have read this thoroughly prior to the meeting.

### Are board members paid?

Board members are paid an honorarium for attending board meetings. The amount is set by each board.

### Who looks after the finances of the school?

The board is responsible for the finances of the school/kura.

The board approves an annual budget that allocates government and local funding appropriately to ensure a learning environment that meets the needs and wellbeing of all students. The board monitors the school/kura budget at each board meeting.

The board must ensure that annual accounts are prepared and they meet audit office requirements. They must then be made available to the school/kura's auditor. These accounts form part of the school/kura's annual report.

### How do we know if our school/kura board is effective?

The Education Review Office (ERO) undertakes regular reviews of every school/kura in New Zealand. Individual school/kura review reports can be found at [ero.govt.nz](http://ero.govt.nz).

The 3-5-year charter/strategic plan is the board's key policy document, which clearly outlines the strategic intent of the board. The board consults with its community as part of the development and review of the strategic plan. The school/kura will have copies of the strategic plan available for its community, usually on its website, along with its annual report, annual plan and a record of its meetings (the minutes).

### What happens if our board is ineffective?

If the ERO has concerns regarding the school/kura board, it will recommend additional board support and professional development or Ministry of Education intervention.

### What information does the board have about my child?

One of the board's four primary objectives is to ensure every student reaches their highest possible standard in educational achievement. To do this, the board needs to examine student learning and achievement data in order to set targets and priorities.

Individual students should not be identified in reports made to the board. However, the board will, from time to time, have access to information regarding individual students, for example when concerns or complaints arise or for student behaviour management.

### What is the board's role in student behaviour management?

The management of individual student behaviour remains at the operational level within the school.

The board gets involved only with serious issues of misconduct. If a principal suspends a student, the board must hold a meeting to determine the outcome of the suspension.

The student, the student's family/whānau and any support people are entitled to attend the suspension meeting.

It's important to note that in the context of student behaviour management, legislation requires all schools to follow the principles of natural justice – acting fairly in the circumstances.

### Can the public attend board meetings?

Board meetings are open to the public, but they are not public meetings. The board can give permission to non-board members to speak, if it decides this is appropriate.

### What does 'in committee' mean and why does the board have the right to use this?

When dealing with confidential issues, the board may go 'into committee'. Members of the public, including media, are not able to attend this part of the meeting unless they have been invited for a specific purpose – e.g. their expert advisory skills in the employment area. This part of the meeting is called public excluded business.

### What are communities of learning?

Communities of learning/Kāhui Ako are a way for schools/kura to group into clusters that reflect the student learning pathway. Communities of learning/Kāhui Ako can also include licensed early childhood centres and playgroups, and tertiary education services.

Together, they develop agreed achievement challenges across all of their individual schools/learning places, while keeping their own boards.

**School boards bring families,  
communities and schools together  
to deliver quality education for our  
children.**



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