

# School Board Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct has been developed and recently revised by the Vermont School Boards Association to help school boards carry out the important education decision making role while maintaining effective relationships with school administrators, staff, and community members. Given the complexity of Vermont's education governance structure, nothing is more important than clarifying appropriate roles and responsibilities for the school board, superintendent, and principal(s).

A school board member has no legal powers unless participating at a legally warned school board meeting, or acting on behalf of the school board after the board formally grants authority to do so. Thus, it is essential that every school board member work as a member of the broader leadership team to perform board duties and act in a manner consistent with the Code.

*Board members can demonstrate personal commitment to the Code by signing this document signifying agreement to uphold the principles of the Code, both, in letter and spirit.*

Many school boards post a copy of the signed Code in the front entrance of the school(s). This public display of school leadership team commitment sends a powerful message and sets the tone for how the business of education will be conducted in the community.

As citizens of the United States, board members have certain Constitutional rights, including freedom of speech that cannot be taken away, whether or not you choose to sign this document. The only sections of this Code that require legal compliance are the “*conflict of interest*” and “*act only as a member of the board.*” All other sections represent effective practice.

## **BOARD GOVERNANCE**

- Attend all regularly scheduled board meetings, insofar as possible, and review advance materials about the issues to be considered on each agenda.
- In consultation with the community, principal, staff, and superintendent, set the vision for the school(s).
- Maintain confidentiality of information and discussion conducted in executive session.
- Review essential facts, consider others' ideas, and then present personal opinions during board deliberations but, once the board vote has been taken, support board decisions regardless of individuals positions.
- Act only as a member of the board and do not assume any individual authority when the board is not in session, unless otherwise directed by the board.
- Rely on school policies, that are continually updated and aligned with Vermont and federal education laws, and guidance from the superintendent, when making board decisions.
- Request recommendations from the superintendent and seek legal counsel, when required, for full and informed board consideration of issues requiring legal expertise.
- Expect an equitable amount of board meeting time be spent both learning about educational programs and conducting the business of the board.
- Maintain a priority board focus on increasing student achievement and ensuring efficient use of education resources.

## **BOARD-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONS**

- Recognize that a board member's responsibility is to see that schools are well run, but not to run them.
- Provide policy support for school administrators in the performance of their duties and delegate authority commensurate with those responsibilities.
- Expect the superintendent to keep the board adequately informed through regular written and oral reports.
- Refer complaints, requests, and concerns to the superintendent or other appropriate staff members.
- Avoid making commitments that may compromise the decision making ability of the board or administrators.
- Maintain open and candid communication with the superintendent.
- Hold the superintendent accountable by jointly creating job performance standards and at least annually perform a comprehensive evaluation process based on the job description, contract, and identified performance standards.

## **BOARD MEMBER RELATIONS**

- Retain independent judgment and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.
- Voice opinions respectfully and maintain good relations with other board members, administrators, school staff, and members of the public.

## **PERSONNEL RELATIONS**

- Seek to employ the most qualified school staff and insist on regular, impartial employee evaluations.
- Hire no superintendent, principal or teacher already under contract with another school district unless assurance is first secured from the proper authority that the person can be released from his or her contract.
- Individual board members shall not give directives to any school administrator or employee, publicly or privately.

## **COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

- Perform a liaison communications role by interpreting the attitudes, wishes, and needs of both the community and the school.
- Consider the needs of the entire community and vote for what seems best for students.
- Encourage collaboration between the school and community.
- Request that periodic surveys be conducted with the community to assess the quality of education services and use the data to establish and monitor goals.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

- Do not use board membership for political, personal, or financial advancement.
- Do not solicit or receive directly or indirectly any gift or compensation in return for making a recommendation or casting a vote.
- Do not receive anything of value, by contract or otherwise, from the school district or supervisory union you serve unless it is received:
  - as a result of a contract accepted after a public bid.
  - in public recognition of service or achievement.
  - as a board stipend reimbursement or expense allowed by law for official duties performed as a member of such board.
- Agree to recuse and remove oneself from board deliberation and votes when necessary to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest.

## **BOARD PREPARATION AND TRAINING**

- Be informed about educational issues through individual study and by participating in board development opportunities such as those sponsored by the Vermont and National School Boards Associations, the Vermont Department of Education, and other education organizations.
- Support new school board members by sharing your experience and knowledge.
- Ensure that adequate board orientation and team building opportunities are available for board members and administrators.
- Associate with board members from other school districts to discuss school problems and collaborate on school improvement initiatives.

***I agree to abide by the principles outlined in the School Board Code of Conduct and will do everything in my power to work as a productive member of the leadership team.***

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Board Member

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Date

Signed by all Brookline and Newfane Board Members January 19, 2012.