



## What is it?

A Board of Trustees, sometimes called a Board of Education, is the **governing** and **policy-making body** of a charter, municipal, or independent school district. There is only one municipal district in Texas, located in Stafford, and the large majority of Texas students are enrolled in independent school districts.

## Who are they?

Independent school district (ISD) boards are made up of **7 or 9** members who are elected on an **at-large** (district-wide) or a **single-member basis**, or a combination of the two. School board elections are **nonpartisan** and members serve **3 or 4 year terms**. Charter school district board members are appointed, not elected, but all school board members in Texas, regardless of district type, serve in a volunteer capacity (without pay).

Boards typically elect a **President**, **Vice President**, and **Secretary** from their membership and may choose to elect additional officers, such as a Second VP or Assistant Secretary.

## What do they do?

School boards are responsible for lots of things, including:

- Adopting the annual **budget** and setting a **tax rate**
- Appointing a **superintendent** to serve as CEO of the district
- Setting a **vision & goals** for the district and monitoring progress
- Working with the superintendent to ensure **student success** & meet community needs
- Holding **bond elections** to fund certain projects

## What do they do? (cont.)

- **Setting district **policy** around various topics. Here are a few examples:**
  - **While **curriculum** is determined by state agencies, not school boards, districts have the power to censor what is taught and to ban books, or alternatively, to create policies that ensure a safe & welcoming environment for students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.**
  - **School boards make policies around **police** in schools and **disciplinary** actions that disproportionately affect Black and brown students, and those with disabilities.**
  - **They also set district **health** policies, like requiring masks and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.**



## When do they meet?

When the board meets varies by district, but typically school boards meet **once or twice a month**. They may also hold special meetings or public hearings as needed. The Texas Open Meetings Act (OMA) requires meetings of governmental bodies to be open to the public, except in very specific situations where closed sessions are allowed. School boards may hold part of their regular meeting in private, which is called going into **executive session**. Specific information about when and where the board meets can typically be found on the district's website, and meeting agendas are often posted online at least three days in advance. Texas law makes no requirement for citizenship or residence status to attend or testify at these meetings.

# How do they pass policies?

Typically, school boards go through the following process to adopt new policies:

- 1. Board members work with the superintendent to create the meeting agenda**
- 2. Each item is presented during a board meeting**
- 3. Public comment on that item is heard**
- 4. Items are discussed by the board**
- 5. A vote is taken**

Usually a simple majority is needed for a policy to pass

Per the OMA, all votes must be taken publicly, meaning that even if something is deliberated in an executive session, any further action taken on that item must occur in an open meeting.

## How to get involved

### Testify at meetings and public hearings

- Members of the public, regardless of age or citizenship status, have the **right to comment** on agenda items at open meetings of the board.
- Many districts designate a separate general public comment period where members of the public can speak about any topic they wish, regardless of whether or not it relates to an item on the agenda.
- School boards can also schedule separate public hearings to solicit comments on any given issue, and some public hearings are required by state law, for example on the annual district budget. These budget hearings are the perfect time to advocate for projects and resources you think should be funded (building renovations, classroom & extracurricular equipment, mental health programming, etc.)
- Each district has their own rules for **how to sign up, how long** you can speak, and whether you may be able to testify **remotely**, so it's a good idea to call or check your district's website ahead of time.
- Remember, school board trustees are responsible for serving the needs of the district and its students and it's their job to take community members' views and opinions into account when forming district policy. Speaking before the board is a great way to let them know what's important to you and what issues the district should address.

# How to get involved



## Contact your school board members directly

- You can usually call and/or email board members to discuss an issue in depth, provide your expertise, and share why it's important to you and your community. During official board meetings, members can only discuss and take action on topics that are on the agenda, so this is likely the best way to get your cause on a future agenda!

## Participate at meetings in other ways

- Organize a group to attend when important issues are being discussed or voted on. Whether you testify or not, wearing matching attire and attending as a group can demonstrate that there's popular support for your position. Signs and posters may or may not be allowed at board meetings, depending on the district.

- Each district has rules regarding permissible actions and behavior at board meetings and on district property, and these policies can be found on their website. Generally, threatening or offensive language, loud booing, yelling, or applause, and any type of physical interruption of meetings are prohibited and may be grounds for removal or, in some cases, even arrest and prosecution. Familiarizing yourself with these policies and potential consequences can be helpful as you plan your advocacy efforts.

## Other ideas

- Start a petition, create email or social media campaigns, reach out to local press, write a letter to the editor or an op-ed, etc. Be creative!

## Additional Resources

Engaging with Your School Board -

<https://www.stuvoice.org/school-board#ways-to-engage>

You Run Your School Board -

<https://cdfutexas.org/policy/policy-priorities/education/you-run-your-schoolboard/>

Student Advocacy Guide -

<https://cdfutexas.org/policy/policy-priorities/education/student-advocacy-guide/>

Independent School Districts in Texas -

<https://texapedia.info/education/independent-school-districts/>

Texas Education Agency - <https://tea.texas.gov/>

State Board of Education -

<https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/leadership/state-board-of-education>

Texas Constitution, Article 7: Education -

<https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/CN/htm/CN.7.htm>

## Contact Us

We're here to help! Send us an email at [info@texascivilrightsproject.org](mailto:info@texascivilrightsproject.org) if you have more questions about navigating state and local government or making change in your community.