

# Board of Education Manual



**CORTLAND ENLARGED CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 P.M., 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <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 2022-2023, those goals are:

1. Develop new mission and vision statements for the district through a process that engages the community, fosters a positive culture and promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.
2. Commit to a progressive learning environment that promotes the development of every student, staff and board member as a whole person.
3. Cultivate pride in the school community through student empowerment, while celebrating success, supporting each other through growth, and honoring every voice.

## 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 Tuesday 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

### 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.

### 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.
- 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.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dos.ny.gov/coog/openmeetlaw.html>

## Protection of Counsel

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.<sup>3</sup>

- 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.

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<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba\\_pdf/Events/nsbma-06152018/legal-issues-members-may-encounter-2018.pdf](https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_pdf/Events/nsbma-06152018/legal-issues-members-may-encounter-2018.pdf)

## Regular Meetings

The dates and times of all regular meetings are decided at the annual organizational meeting, except as modified at subsequent meetings of the board.

### 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 Thursday 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
  - Audience Participation
  - Discussion Items
  - Board Committee Reports
- Consent Items
  - Minutes of Previous Meetings
  - Approval of CSE/CPSE Recommendations
  - Financial Reports
  - Transportation Requests
  - Personnel Action
  - Other Items as Needed
- Old Business
  - Items as Needed
- New Business
  - Items as Needed
- 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 an audit and finance committee, a community engagement committee, a facilities and transportation committee and a policy committee 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.

### **Mission Statements**

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

- Finance and Audit (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.

Ensure that the organization is operating with the financial resources it needs to provide programs and services to the entire school district, all students, and staff.

- Community Engagement (Co-chair: director of instruction, equity and instructional personnel)
  - Publicizes district messages
  - Responds to board correspondence
  - Publicizes accountability data
  - Coordinates community engagement

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 or facilities manager)
  - 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.
  - Maintains policy manual.

To review, update, monitor and create policies to serve as effective tools that guide internal procedures for the district, ensuring a high functioning learning environment for all students and staff

### **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 1<sup>st</sup> and ends June 30<sup>th</sup> 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 BoardDocs 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 Thursday 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 Frequently Asked Questions google document. 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)
    - iii. Financials
    - iv. Transportation requests
    - v. Personnel items
  - 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. 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"<sup>4</sup>

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 his/her 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.

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

## Appendix D – Organization Chart

# DISTRICT LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE - OVERALL (2022-23)

