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Roles & Responsibilities of a School Board Trustee

Every school board in Ontario is governed by a Board of Trustees. Trustees play a key leadership role in ensuring that schools operate within the standards established by the province, and that programs and services remain responsive to the diverse communities they serve. The HDSB Board of Trustees is responsible for governing the school board in the best interests of all its students in Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville.

The Board of Trustees provides oversight, direction and decision making through a governance process which includes defining roles, relationships, structures and processes.

Both the Board as a whole and individual Trustees have roles and responsibilities.

[Roles and Responsibilities](https://www.ontarioschooltrustees.org) - [OntarioSchoolTrustees.org](https://www.ontarioschooltrustees.org)

Individual Trustees

A Trustee is a member of the Board, and as such, Trustees cannot act unilaterally. Each Trustee holds no individual authority.

Trustees must familiarize themselves with the Board's By-Laws, Rules of Parliamentary Procedure (Robert's Rules of Order), policies, governance procedures, duties and responsibilities of the Board and individual Trustees as outlined in the Education Act, Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, the Trustee Code of Conduct and other relevant legislation.

As required under the Education Act, individual Trustees are to:

- Carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the Board in fulfilling its duties under the Act, the regulations and the guidelines issued under the Act, including but not limited to the Board's duties under [169.1](#);
- Attend and participate in meetings of the Board, including meetings of Board committees of which they are a member. There are some Committee obligations which are statutory. These include appointment of Trustees to various committees; Special Education Advisory Committee, Suspension and Expulsion Committee, Audit Committee, Supervised Alternative Learning Committee and the Parent Involvement Committee. There are also other non-statutory committees that have Trustee participation;
- Consult with parents, students and community of the Board on the [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#);
- Bring concerns of parents, students and community of the Board to the attention of the Board. Trustees are required to listen to the concerns and needs of their communities, and bring those to the attention of the whole Board while ensuring that programs and decisions of the Board help all students;
- Uphold the implementation of any Board resolution after it is passed by the Board. Once the Board of Trustees have voted, individual Trustees are legally bound by the majority decision, regardless of whether they supported it during debate or voted against it. All Trustees are required to uphold the implementation of resolutions passed by the Board. Although they may not agree with the decision, Trustees should be able to explain the rationale for the policy and ensure that it is understood, implemented, and monitored;
- Entrust day to day management of the Board to its staff through the Board's Director of Education;
- Maintain focus on student achievement and well-being; and
- Comply with the [Board's Code of Conduct](#).

Community Representation

Individual Trustees interpret the role of representing their community in different ways. Some community members expect a Trustee to be very active, others do not. Trustees may be asked to attend events such as school council meetings, community groups, municipal council, meetings with MPPs and MPs, etc.. Some Trustees hold Family of School / Super Council meetings to regularly interact with their school communities. Trustees may attend school events and community functions as another way of interacting with their community.

While the job of school Trustees varies widely across Ontario, what all have in common is serving the community as elected representatives while focusing on the primary task of acting as members of a Board that makes policy decisions, oversees curriculum and program delivery and fulfills its responsibilities as an employer.

As outlined in sections [283 and 283.1](#) of the Education Act, Directors of Education shall:

- Develop and maintain an effective organization and the programs required to implement board policies;
- Annually review the multi-year strategic plan with the Board of Trustees;
- Ensure that the multi-year strategic plan establishes the board's priorities and identifies specific measures and resources that will be applied in achieving those priorities and in carrying out its duties under the Act;
- Implement and monitor the implementation of the multi-year strategic plan;
- Report periodically to the board on the implementation of the multi-year strategic plan;
- Act as Secretary to the Board;
- Immediately upon discovery bring to the attention of the board any act or omission by the board that in the opinion of the Director of Education may result in or has resulted in a contravention of this Act or any policy, guideline or regulation made under this Act; and
- If the board does not respond in a satisfactory manner to an act or omission brought to its attention under clause (f), advise the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of the act or omission.

This means that Directors of Education carry out many important duties, including managing all facets of school board operations, maintaining a positive and productive relationship with the Board of Trustees, and reporting to the board and ministry. For example, the Director is also responsible for providing an annual report to the Minister. [Section 283\(3\)](#) of the Education Act requires that reports be submitted at the first meeting of the board of Trustees each year in December. Posting on the board's website, on or before January 31 of each year, will satisfy the requirement to submit the report to the Minister.

Distinction between the Board of Trustees and the Director of Education

It is important to note that the Act distinguishes between a board's responsibility for *policy development* and the responsibility of the Director of Education for *operationalizing policies*. It is important that the Board of Trustees be clear about roles and responsibilities and determine, through policy, which matters are operational and therefore addressed by the Director, and which matters are policy and, therefore, decided on by the board.

Advocates of Public Education

Local – work on behalf of the community and must consider the unique needs of their community when deciding on any issue, while respecting their fiduciary duty to the board as a whole.

Municipal – connect with municipal counterparts

Provincial – liaise with their local Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and other MPPs regarding public education.

Meeting Commitments

- The HDSB typically has regular Board meetings on the 1st Tuesday of the month and Committee of the Whole meetings on the 3rd Tuesday of the month. The annual schedule of meetings is established by the Board in the previous year.
- The Education Act requires that **all members of the board be physically present in the meeting room of the board at every regular meeting of the board and every regular meeting of a committee of the whole board**, unless otherwise permitted to participate electronically, as outlined in [O. Reg. 463/97 Electronic Meetings and Meeting Attendance](#).
- Trustees may also participate in other Board committees which can take place during the day.

Trustees collectively carry out many important duties. These include:

- [Electing a Board Chair](#);
- Establishing the school board's mission, vision, and value statements;
- Maintaining a focus on [student achievement and well-being](#);
- Developing and evaluating [policies](#) that are operationalized by the Director;
- Allocating resources by approving the [annual board budget](#);
- Managing board facilities by setting policies and approving [capital plans](#);
- Ensuring support services are provided;
- Communicating with stakeholders and establishing processes for community input;
- Adhering to policies that address the hiring, transfer, promotion and termination of all board staff;
- Ensuring staff are well supported by setting policies about health and safety, accessibility, etc;
- Ensuring there are mechanisms in place to recognize students, staff, community members and volunteers;
- Providing advice to the ministry and provincial Trustee associations regarding regional and local implications for new policy recommendations;
- Advocating on behalf of and communicating with board communities;
- Striking and maintaining committees as required by legislation/regulation, or as needed locally; and
- Filling vacancies on the Board.

Two of the most important responsibilities that Boards of Trustees have are:

- the development and monitoring of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP); and
- the hiring and [performance appraisal](#) of the Director of Education.

School Board Chair

The Board Chair and Vice-Chair are elected for a one year term on the first meeting of their term, and for every year thereafter in November. This is done through an election process as designated in the [Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair Governance Procedure](#).

As outlined in section [218.4 of the Education Act](#), the Chair of the Board shall:

- Preside over Board meetings;
- Conduct the meetings in accordance with the Board's policies and procedures;
- Establish agendas for Board meetings, in consultation with the Director of Education;
- Ensure that members of the Board have the information needed for informed discussion of the agenda items;
- Act as spokesperson to the public on behalf of the board, unless otherwise determined by the Board;
- Convey the decisions of the Board to the Director of Education;
- Provide leadership to the Board in maintaining the board's focus on the multi-year strategic plan and the board's mission and vision; and
- Assume such other responsibilities as may be specified by the Board.

The Chair may vote on all matters but only has one vote, the same as any other Trustee. The Chair must adhere to the Board's directions and may not act unilaterally. The Chair is also an individual Trustee and has no greater rights or powers than any other Trustee other than the above mentioned additional duties.

Director of Education

The Director of Education is the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Education Officer of the HDSB and acts as Secretary of the Board. The Director of Education is the sole employee who reports directly to the Board of Trustees, usually through the Chair or their delegate. All school board staff report either directly or indirectly to the Director of Education.

Through the Director of Education, a school board holds all of its schools accountable for improving student achievement and well-being, providing an equitable and inclusive environment and enhancing public confidence in publicly funded education, based on expectations set at the provincial and board levels.