

Board Committees



Ohio School Boards Association

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Introduction to board committees

The Ohio School Boards Association supports using board committees to sustain the work of the board of education as it governs the district to reach its vision and mission and accomplish its goals.

Often, committee work allows individual board members to gain insight into governance or operational areas of the district and share that expertise with the board as a whole.

Two key items should be remembered. First, board committees are not a requirement, and many boards of education in Ohio do not have them. Instead, these boards of education act on all issues as a committee of the whole or with all board members participating in all work related to the items at hand. Second, when using board committees, it is critical that committees understand they do not act for the board. Board action can only be taken during a properly noticed board meeting with a quorum of its members present.

Committee structure

Board committees often serve as “standing” committees, existing every year for a similar purpose. Board members are appointed to these standing committees, such as the policy committee, at the yearly organizational meeting in January. Often, individual assignments rotate so that all members of the board have opportunities to serve in different capacities. Other times, an ad hoc committee can be appointed for a single initiative or period of time, such as for strategic planning or a new building effort. These committees are used to accomplish a major project when many meetings are often required, making it difficult for every board member to participate.

Appointed by the board, board committees present their work to the board for deliberation and subsequent action. The board relies on the committee and board members

serving on that committee to complete its work in a timely and thorough manner. When this happens, the goal is for the full board to accept the recommendation of the committee based on its expertise and investment of time. The right committee appointment for a board member can build a sense of ownership and commitment to proper board governance.

In Ohio, a board committee is not the same as an administrative committee. Nearly all districts use a variety of administrative committees — sometimes referred to as superintendent committees — to do the necessary daily work of the district. These committees report to the superintendent, treasurer or another district administrator. Administrative committees may include a board member but most often do not. An administrative committee that is appointed by the superintendent is not a committee of the board, and therefore not subject to the Sunshine and Public Records laws that pertain to board of education meetings. Administrative committees are not required to give notice of their meetings or take minutes for each meeting.

Board committees are charged by the board, members are appointed by the board, and the committee works on behalf of the board. Individual board members are often appointed to board committees, but a board committee may exist without any individual board members appointed. If the committee is appointed by the board and doing work that will be used by the board for its action, it is a board committee, regardless of the titles or roles of its members. Board committees must be scheduled and noticed in the same way board meetings are scheduled and noticed. They must be held in public and minutes must be taken.

Successful committee work relies on the board possessing a high degree of confidence in board members who serve these committees and in the district administrators and staff who support such work. Lack of administrative support or board confidence will likely have a negative influence on the success and function of the committee.



Types of committees

Committee of the whole

There are times when the work required of the committee is critical to the ongoing success of the district or when its decisions could have lasting impact. In these cases, a committee of the whole — meaning each individual member of the board serves on the committee — is formed. Examples of work often done with a committee of the whole include the search to replace the superintendent or treasurer or a community engagement and strategic planning effort.

The value of a committee of the whole is that it provides knowledge to all simultaneously; facilitates immediate discussion; and all members benefit from the expertise of consultants. In Ohio, boards who accomplish work as a committee of the whole often will not recognize it as such but instead will call special meetings to do the work of the board. Special meetings for specific purposes are the same as a committee of the whole.

Standing committees

Standing committees are those that are used by districts nearly every year. Examples of standing committees existing in many Ohio public school districts include policy, facilities or finance committees. Again, district policy, practice and culture will determine which standing committees are necessary for appropriate board work. Standing committees allow board members who serve on that committee to become more knowledgeable in given areas and help the full board make decisions in a more confident or timely manner.

The board's standing committee structure should reflect the work of the board and the district's administration. The following are common standing committees in many Ohio public school districts:

Curriculum and Instruction — This board committee typically is responsible for the review of the school improvement plan, the overall academic performance of the district or the assessment of data to make improvements identified by the administration. This committee is often structured as an administrative committee.

Negotiations — In many districts, board members do not serve as part of the negotiation team or committee. When used, this board committee may be responsible for all negotiations with recognized bargaining units.

Finance — This board committee often is served by the treasurer, who is the ex officio chair of the committee. Responsibilities often include the review of long-term financial plans and investments, and for providing advice to the board about the district's current and future financial position.

Policy — This board committee may be responsible for the review and update of current policy, designing new policies as needed and the review and updating of district handbooks, such as board, staff and student handbooks, to ensure consistency and currency.

Facilities/Grounds and Transportation — This board committee may be responsible for reviewing long-term maintenance and purchasing schedules, providing advice to the board on building projects and ensuring district safety plans are current and in compliance with state and federal rules and regulations. However, this committee often is structured as an administrative committee.



Ad hoc committees — An ad hoc committee typically is formed for a specific purpose, especially one in which a start and end time to the project is relatively known. Ad hoc committees should receive a specific charge from the board and be formally dismissed or dissolved when the work has been completed. Ad hoc committees may be appointed by the president of the board as needed. Committee members may consist of board members, administrators, certificated staff and/or community members or parents who may be considered an expert in a particular field. Examples might include:

- redistricting committee;
- new building committee;
- strategic planning committee.

If each individual board member plans to fully participate in any special district initiative, a committee need not be formed, and the board may move forward as a committee of the whole. A good example of this would be an initiative to do a search for a new superintendent or treasurer.

Business advisory councils

To help foster relationships between businesses and schools, Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.82 requires every school district and educational service center (ESC) to have a business advisory council. The law also allows a district to enter a service agreement with an ESC to use the ESC's business advisory council as its own. The superintendent of public instruction has developed and published standards for the operation of business advisory councils.

The school district board of education or ESC governing board must appoint the business advisory council members or authorize district administrators to appoint those members. Board members or authorized administrators can identify potential business advisory council members, or they can ask local businesses, business organizations, labor unions or other appropriate organizations to recommend members.

The appointing authority should duly approve the appointments and document them in writing. There is no statutory requirement for members' terms of service. However, it is recommended that boards of education or ESC governing boards consider rotational, three-year terms, which allow for both continuity and change. The school board or district administration also should identify who will serve as the district's primary contact to the council. In many cases this could be the district superintendent.

Each school district board should decide how to best form and operate its business advisory council. There is no required configuration. Some districts have small business advisory councils, while others form large groups. Still others complement the business advisory council membership with representatives from local government agencies and community organizations. Some districts choose to operate councils informally, while others prefer a more formal approach.



Creating a committee

Committee appointments

The appointment of board members to committees is the responsibility of the board president at the organizational meeting. He or she will likely have conversations with the superintendent and other individual board members prior to this meeting to determine potential interest. Board members do not have the right to appoint themselves to committees. The board president should consult board policy to ascertain any specific language governing appointment of board committees. In the absence of a defined process in policy, consider tradition or work cooperatively among board members to define the most effective committee structure. There are varying ways to approach assignments, but whomever serves on the committee will be important in any recommendations brought to the board.

Each board committee should be provided a charge or mission at the beginning of each year when board members are appointed to them. Information and data for the committee to do its work is provided by the administration and staff. Committees do not take formal action but support the board as a whole in making informed and considered decisions. Most often, a district's particular board committees, their makeup and appointment practices and structures are documented within board policy.

In reviewing appointments, consider the following:

Term limit — At what point is it in the best interest of the committee to bring about a fresh approach to the charge of the committee? The board must balance individual expertise with the idea that all board members can contribute to any committee.

Board member preferences — Most board presidents will seek to provide colleagues their preferred assignments. The final decision remains with the board president, but the process should allow board members to express personal interest and gain or share knowledge or expertise.

Rotations of duties — The board president should consider whether rotating board members is the most efficient way to staff the committee. For some committees, consistent membership, or continued membership for a given period of years, may move work along at a faster pace. Each board should consider the position of the district and the charge of its board committees on an annual basis.



Defining a committee's charge or purpose

Below are some variables that should be considered when designing or appointing a committee. The answers to these questions will determine if the committee is properly assigned as a board committee — reporting to the board — or an administrative committee — reporting to the superintendent, treasurer or other administrator. Answers will also help the board determine if the board committee should be a standing or ad hoc committee or committee of the whole.

Goal of the committee — The specific purpose for this group.

Product or desired outcome — What the group is expected to achieve and when it is expected to complete its work.

Scope of responsibility and level of authority — The extent to which the group can act on its own or to whom the committee will report for approval. This outlines to whom the committee is accountable.

Timeline — When the work must be completed and benchmarks for reporting and action in between.

Resources — Human and capital available to the group.

Expectations of members — What each member of the committee is expected to do, regardless of job title; who will report to/for the board; how often the committee will meet; whether an ex-officio administrator is needed; who develops the agenda; and communications between the board and committee.

Board committee agendas and minutes

All board committees must abide by all rules of the Sunshine and Public Records laws pertaining to board of education meetings. Agendas must be created for each committee meeting, and minutes must be taken. Board committee meetings must be noticed appropriately and held in public. The chair or a designee will take minutes of the committee meeting and attach these to the agenda for record keeping. For the benefit of board members who are not members of the committee, items to be brought forward for discussion and/or board action should be highlighted. In most cases, the board member or members who serve on the board committee are expected to provide a report to the full board at the next regular board meeting following the committee meeting.



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