The Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) is a private, nonprofit, membership organization that has been providing leadership, training, advocacy, and specialized services to the locally elected school boards of Arkansas since 1955. ASBA is an affiliate of the National School Boards Association, a federation of state school boards associations.

This publication is a service of the association to enable school board members to effectively govern the school district they have been elected to represent.

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The handbook contains a great deal of information that should be helpful to you in your service as a locally elected school board member. It is our hope that it will familiarize you with the duties and responsibilities of school board service and how you may best represent the citizens of your community in striving for the education success of all Arkansas students.

A very special thanks to Ann Brown Marshall for her diligent and thoughtful oversight of this new publication and her skillful writing that pulls it all together.

Dan Farley
Executive Director
Now is an exciting time to be engaged with education in Arkansas! The status quo has been swept aside with the millennial winds that have shifted the needs and resources of our growing state and nation, creating new demands and new opportunities for education leaders.

The continuing changes present us with a steep learning curve. We’re challenged to think more creatively, broaden our knowledge, boost our skills, and cement our will to keep children squarely at the center of public education. To fulfill our mandate, we must continually sift our work through the filters that lie at the heart of our mission: Is each decision good for children? Do our plans hold everyone appropriately accountable? Are our actions strengthening the education ethic in our communities and state?

This handbook is a guide to help school boards gain the understandings that, coupled with substantive training, build the confidence and competence to keep the focus on children. From the legal perspective of school board responsibilities to a framework for boards’ key work, the handbook reviews the many aspects of board operations. All school district leaders will find value in its pages:

- **If you’re new to your role**, the handbook will orient you to school board basics.
- **As a seasoned school district leader**, the panoramic overview will help you stay abreast of new requirements and resources.
- **For those not presently on a school board** but considering whether to seek a seat, here’s a comprehensive summary of what board service entails. Reading about the demands and opportunities can help you decide whether you have sufficient time and depth of interest to devote to the job.
- **Superintendents and other school leaders** will find information and insights into building a strong, productive partnership with their board.
- **For all readers**, the handbook will prompt awareness of the additional training needed to grow in the skills and understandings of leadership proficiency and wisdom.

In these chapters, you’ll not only learn the nuts and bolts of school board operations, but also explore the board’s appropriate relationship with the superintendent and other district personnel, the community, and the state. You’ll stock your toolbox with templates for a board agenda and tips on effective advocacy. You’ll walk step by step through the legislative process and thumb through the glossary to clarify terms, concepts, and acronyms.

You’ll also learn how to boost your effectiveness with the invaluable resources available through membership in the Arkansas School Boards Association, including legal consultation, Study Circles, and the Model Policy Service. Pages of Internet resources will point you to models, ideas,
and data that can be a springboard for action, and an appendix includes sample forms for you to adopt or adapt.

For the first time, you can choose the form of this updated handbook that best fits your style. This publication is available in a bound paper booklet or on a compact disc for your computer. It’s also posted on our website, www.arsba.org, for you to peruse or download.

So, whether you’re just beginning service to your school district, an experienced veteran, or contemplating a role, this handbook is for you.
Public Schools in Arkansas

This chapter will explain the concept of education as a partnership and also review the basic organization of the education structure in Arkansas, the sources of authority, and the general scope of state and local responsibilities.

Terms in this chapter include:

**ADE** - the Arkansas Department of Education, which is the administrative agency that carries out the state’s education laws and the policies of the State Board of Education.

**equity** - the right to treatment without discrimination on the basis or race, religion, color, creed, national origin, sex, handicap, lifestyle, or age. Within the education arena, equity means that children are to be treated fairly by receiving services according to their individual needs and strengths.

**ex officio** - literally meaning “by virtue of one’s office,” the term refers to the practice that allows a member of an official group, such as a school board, to designate someone to fill a certain role at the group’s request. For example, a superintendent might serve as a board’s ex officio financial officer.

**lawsuit** - a legal action between persons or organizations in a court of law where one party seeks justice from the other as determined by a judge or jury.

**school board** - the local legislative unit of school district governance, charged with operating the district according to the mandates of laws and regulations.

**school district** - a defined geographic and governmental area, overseen by a locally elected school board and managed by a superintendent, in which the public schools serve students who either live within the area’s borders or enroll through school choice or a legal transfer from a different school district.

**State Board of Education** - serves as the regulatory body for public elementary and secondary education throughout Arkansas.

**statutes** - laws that are created by state or federal legislation.

**Partners for Progress**

In the early 1980s, a national commission warned that the United States was a nation at risk of failing to adequately educate its youth to take a productive place in American society and the growing global economy. Since that time, leaders at all levels of government, education, and business have devoted a great deal of attention and resources to revitalizing and retooling the public schools for success. Terms such as school reform, school restructuring, equity, and accountability have taken on new meaning and energy as the country has mobilized toward ensuring that every school delivers first-rate education for all students.
Federal legislation and initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, have provided a powerful impetus to change the status quo, and individual states have launched sweeping reform measures. Arkansas continues to take bold steps to revamp public schools at all levels and in every area of the state so that all children, whatever their walk of life or abilities, have access to an equitable, high quality education.

Reaching consensus among leaders and legislators on how to proceed with reform is challenging, indeed. No single “right” way will ever emerge to magically transform our schools into outstanding institutions. Change is difficult and even frightening. Disagreements are inevitable, and resolving them sometimes involves resorting to lawsuits that lead to court rulings. In such an adversarial scenario, one side is usually viewed as winning and the other as losing, a “win-lose” tilt.

But when we embrace the concept of partnership, that is, shared responsibility and authority, we alter our thinking and our relationships to aim at a “win-win” balance. As partners, we share responsibility for reaching the goals we mutually embrace, and we use our collective authority for the benefit of all.

Although our perspectives and affiliations may differ, all of us can commit to the goal of keeping children at the center of education. By focusing on children, we’re more likely to work harmoniously and build on one another’s strengths to find workable—even creative—ways to meet the challenges we face. Through the power of collaboration, we can ensure that all Arkansans equitably share in our state’s education responsibilities and opportunities in a public school system that shines.

**Education as a State and Local Partnership**

Maintaining and operating a school district is, in a very real sense, a partnership between the state as the parent and the local school district as the offspring. Throughout the nation, this arrangement has proved its merits: It keeps schools close to the people, stimulates wholesome and creative flexibility within schools, allows for adaptability to local needs, and promotes working toward equitable opportunity without imposing uniformity that could stifle creativity and experimentation.

The rest of this chapter is an overview of the complementary responsibilities the state and school districts share for operating a constitutional public school system.

**State Responsibility and Governance**

The framers of the United States Constitution, recognizing the importance of autonomy among the states, didn’t specifically address public education.
Instead, the Tenth Amendment assigns responsibility for education to the states, rather than the federal government.

In Arkansas, responsibility for public education rests with the General Assembly, which is the combined bodies of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Arkansas Constitution provides for taxes to support the schools and delegates operation and oversight of the education system to state agencies.

To carry out the state’s constitutional mandate for free public education, the General Assembly created school districts and school boards. It also established the State Board of Education and the Arkansas Department of Education.

**State Board of Education**

The State Board of Education serves as the regulatory and policy-making body for public elementary and secondary education. The board has nine members, all appointed to six-year terms by the governor.

The powers of the state board include:
- general supervision of the public schools.
- preparing and distributing plans and specifications for building and equipping schools.
- approving plans and expenditures for all new school buildings.
- setting accreditation standards and recommending courses of study for the public schools and for teacher training institutions.
- prescribing regulations for inspecting all buildings and for examining pupils to detect contagious diseases and certain physical defects.
- issuing licenses based on the credentials of applicants to teach in the public schools.

**Arkansas Department of Education**

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is the administrative agency that carries out the state’s education laws and the policies of the state board. ADE’s functions are regulatory, directive, interpretative, supervisory, and evaluative. The agency also conducts necessary research. The department doesn’t make policy, but it is authorized to adopt the regulations, directives, and guidelines needed to carry out legislative mandates or state board policies.

Even though education is a state function, most of the day-to-day operation of schools is at the local level in geographic and governmental units known as school districts. Each of them is governed by a local school board elected by the people of that district. To qualify for school board membership in...
Arkansas, a candidate must be a bona fide resident and a qualified elector of the district (and sometimes a specific zone) he or she wants to serve.

**Local Responsibility and Governance**
From a legal perspective, an Arkansas school district is a minor political subdivision of the state. A school board is a locally elected body charged with operating the district. Thus, a school board is a legislative—not administrative—body. Its members are officials responsible for carrying out the mandates of the General Assembly. They must set the direction and establish the policies that will promote education quality, equity, and adequacy throughout the school system.

A school board has no powers except those that are specifically given to it by actions of the General Assembly or reasonably implied by legislative action. However, other factors influence the powers of local school boards:

- provisions of the Arkansas Constitution.
- statutes (laws) enacted by the General Assembly or the U.S. Congress.
- policies and standards adopted by the State Board of Education.
- regulations and directives of the Arkansas Department of Education.
- opinions and interpretations issued by the Arkansas Attorney General and the U.S. Department of Justice.
- court decrees.
- regulations and guidelines for using federal funds.

**Annual Reorganization**
Once a year, every Arkansas school board organizes for the coming academic year by electing officers during its first official meeting after the annual school election. That election is held the third Tuesday in September, with any necessary run-off election three weeks later.

From its membership, each board chooses a president, a vice president, and a secretary. The secretary may be a member of the board but doesn’t have to be. The board must also designate one of its members as the district’s primary board disbursing officer. The signature of this individual and that of the superintendent must appear on all district checks or warrants, with few exceptions.

Each newly elected school board member is required, within 10 days after receiving notice of his or her election or appointment, to subscribe to the following oath:

I ___________________ do hereby solemnly swear or affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Arkansas, and that I will not be interested, directly or indirectly, in any contract made by the
district of which I am a director, except that said contract be for materials bought on open competitive bid and let to the lowest bidder and that I will faithfully discharge the duties as school director in ____________ School District, Number ____ of ____________ County, Arkansas, upon which I am about to enter.

This oath is a serious commitment to fairness and integrity in all business that comes before the board. Board members who violate the oath could be subject to civil or criminal charges either individually or as a group.
The Legal Aspects of School Board Service

A school board acts as an agent of the state to guide and support public education at the local level. In this section, we’ll review the various legal aspects of the authority and responsibilities the state delegates to school boards.

Among the terms in this chapter are the following:

- **compensatory damages** - an award made by a court, usually of money, intended to make up for damages or losses.
- **due process** - an orderly procedure that protects an individual’s legal rights. Due process gives an individual a meaningful hearing and opportunity to defend himself or herself before the person or body that has the authority to limit or withdraw that individual’s rights.
- **good faith** - the duty to act in a fair and equitable manner, without coercion, intimidation, or threats of coercion or intimidation.
- **liability** - legal responsibility for the consequences of an action or situation.
- **proprietary functions** - in a school district, they include such activities as hosting athletic contests, leasing or renting school-owned facilities to some group, or engaging in any similar revenue-yielding activity.
- **punitive damages** - an award, made by a court, intended to punish rather than to compensate for damages, such as with a monetary award.
- **self-insurance** - a system in which an organization sets aside an amount of its funds to cover any type of losses that could ordinarily be protected by an insurance program.
- **slander** - a false and malicious spoken statement.
- **tort liability** - legal responsibility for harm brought to someone due to negligence.

The Board as the State's Agent

The actions of a school board can be viewed as the means by which the community translates its ambitions for its children into decisions about the education those children will receive in the local public schools. All of these actions, of course, must be consistent with and authorized by state law.

As we review the legal aspects of school board service, keep three general principles in mind:

1. Education is a state function.
2. School boards are agencies of the state, and their purpose is to carry out the acts of the legislature pertaining to public education.
3. The state legislature delegates operation of the public education system to school boards, empowering them to act by means of laws.
that are consistent with the Constitutions of both Arkansas and the United States.

Public Corporation

A local public school district in Arkansas is, in effect, a corporation in that it legally may enter into contracts and also own real estate. As a public corporation, a school district’s powers are more limited than those of a private corporation. As a result, the courts generally consider a school district a quasi (incomplete) corporation.

A key difference between the two types of corporations is this: A private corporation’s board of directors may take virtually any desired action, so long as that action is legal. In contrast, the directors of a public corporation (such as a school district, which is an agency of government) can only take actions that are specifically authorized or reasonably implied by law.

Even though various laws limit their authority, boards still have rather wide-ranging powers. Arkansas school boards are authorized to:

- prescribe the form that school organization takes in their district, such as the grade levels assigned to the elementary, middle, and high schools, for example.
- specify the size, type, style, quality, and location of buildings in the district, within ADE guidelines and with its approval.
- choose the superintendent and hire teachers, subject to state licensing requirements.
- determine the types and amounts of equipment for the schools.
- decide what will be taught in order to meet or extend state standards.
- determine the extent of student transportation.
- adopt appropriate policies and procedures for students, staff, parents, and volunteers, so long as such directives are reasonable and consistent with the law.

Remember that the board is a continuing body. That is, while members may come and go, the board continues to exist as a legal entity beyond the terms of its individual members. Board members sometimes hesitate to take action that will be binding on those who will later join the board. But such a view has no legal basis and is actually counterproductive: The effective continuity of school district operations depends greatly on plans and commitments continuing even when board membership changes.

Delegating Authority

The legal authority vested in a school district rests primarily with the school board, so the board is always ultimately responsible. Yet the board has the right to delegate some of its powers, and it usually does so to the district’s superintendent.
Specific duties that the law or a governmental agency, such as ADE, have delegated to a board can’t be “re-delegated” and must remain the direct responsibility of the board. In other words, certain final action can’t be assigned to the superintendent or anyone else. For example, all the mechanics and details of employing the district’s personnel should be in the superintendent’s hands, but by law the final act of forming the employment contracts must be done by the board.

A more complete discussion of delegated powers and the relationship between the board and the superintendent is found in Chapter 5.

Keep in mind that boards are corporate bodies, meaning that they can act only as a group. No single board member has the right to make any decision for the rest of the board. The only time board members have any legal power to transact any sort of business is when they meet together in a legally convened session.

Occasionally a citizen will approach a board member to ask for a favor or commitment about a school district matter. The public may not know that individual board members can’t make promises on behalf of the board and that, if they did, such promises wouldn’t have legal standing. Board members can significantly contribute to good public relations, as well as improve board efficiency, by courteously explaining why such requests can’t be granted.

School Board Liability

As a general rule of common law, the state can’t be sued without its consent. Because a school board is an agency of the state and is performing a government function, the prohibition against being sued has generally been extended to the board. The effect has been to protect boards from tort liability, that is, legal responsibility for harm brought to someone due to negligence.

Boards also have been protected (or held immune) from tort liability, because they have no funds other than those for operating the schools and can’t legally spend them for anything else. A court judgment that required a district to spend money to compensate an individual for injuries would, in effect, compel the board to use public funds for purposes not authorized by law.

In Arkansas, tort immunity was created by the General Assembly in 1969. That law still protects school districts and other political subdivisions of the state from liability for damages. Even so, Arkansas school boards shouldn’t be nonchalant about the matter of liability for these reasons:

- The doctrine of non-liability has several exceptions.
The growing national trend is to seriously question school districts’ immunity from liability. Immunity may not extend to individual board members.

Despite any immunity, the law requires school districts either to carry liability insurance for all of their vehicles or to self-insure up to the minimums of the Motor Vehicle Safety Responsibility Act. Presently those amounts are from $25,000 to $50,000 for personal injury in an accident and $15,000 for property damage.

Proprietary Functions

Many courts in other states have held boards liable for injuries connected with what have been termed proprietary functions of the board. Proprietary functions are different from the board’s usual governmental duties in that they include such activities as hosting athletic contests, leasing or renting school-owned facilities to some group, or any similar profit- or revenue-yielding activity.

While the nation’s courts haven’t been unanimous in their decisions in such cases, many have ruled that school districts and school boards weren’t acting as governmental agencies when they were involved in such activities. As a result, school districts and their boards could be liable for injuries received by spectators or participants.

Other Liabilities

The immunity from tort liability that usually extends to school districts and their boards as a whole doesn’t always extend to individual board members. For example, members may be held personally liable if the board intentionally exceeds its authority or doesn’t act in good faith. Members also may be personally liable for misused or lost school funds or for injuries someone sustains when the board or one of its members has failed to perform mandatory duties. Members could be personally liable if they exceed their authority as a board member or otherwise act illegally, such as by slandering a parent, teacher, or administrator.

The liability of an individual board member would be for punitive rather than compensatory damages, that is, to punish rather than to compensate for damages, such as with a monetary award. Punitive damages may be assessed only for “willful, wanton, or malicious” conduct by a board member. Although courts have been extremely reluctant to assess punitive damages against a school board or administrator, such awards have been made.

The federal and state civil rights acts represent other potential sources of liability for individual board members. They could be held personally liable if they were to deny anyone the rights these acts guarantee.
For example, lawsuits have been brought and damages awarded over such illegal actions as suspending or firing a teacher who refused to shave off his beard, depriving an athlete of his right to participate in sports because his hair was too long, suspending teachers who became pregnant, and dismissing personnel without due process. A school employee alleged to have violated a rule of employment has the right to a due process hearing at which that employee can defend himself or herself against the allegation.

While the vast majority of such cases as those just described have occurred in other states, the possibility that similar instances could happen in Arkansas is strong enough that school boards should protect themselves by:

- becoming thoroughly acquainted with the statutes and court decisions related to school liability in Arkansas.
- obtaining rulings or official opinions from state legal authorities when the meaning of statutes affecting schools is unclear.
- always acting in good faith, with neither corrupt nor malicious motives and in strict conformity with state law.
- considering special types of insurance, known as director’s liability or errors and omissions insurance, to protect board members and possibly other school personnel. Also consider buying insurance to cover potential punitive damages.
- seeking the advice of an attorney as necessary.

**Legal Consultation Services**

Among ASBA services is legal consultation for member districts. These services are a supplement to the guidance a school district may receive from its school board attorney or other local counsel.

The association has a lawyer on staff who is available to answer members’ questions about school laws and related matters. Another attorney serves as general counsel for ASBA and can be hired by school boards for litigation purposes. Both lawyers have strong backgrounds in school law. They often conduct ASBA seminars on school and board legal matters and are well qualified to answer your questions.

ASBA-member boards needing legal consultation should contact ASBA.
The Duties and Responsibilities of School Boards

This chapter examines the primary responsibilities of school boards, concentrating on the broad categories within which the board’s duties fall.

Some of the terms you’ll find in this section include:

- **accountability** - being held responsible for one’s actions which, for schools, is their duty to help all students meet standards of academic achievement.
- **curriculum** - the subject matter, skills, and processes that are taught so students will learn to achieve identified standards. Curriculum is singular and curricula is plural.
- **education philosophy** - a blend of basic beliefs and principles that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to the overall education program.
- **evaluation** - the process of measuring the actual result of certain actions and resources, such as programs and materials, in relation to the desired results.
- **Freedom of Information Act** - often abbreviated as FOIA or FOI, this law requires that public business be performed in an open and public manner. The law applies to any agency, including a school district, that is supported by public funds or spends them.
- **goals** - broad statements of overarching aims that flow from an education philosophy.
- **mandatory statutes** - laws that school boards are required to carry out.
- **monitoring** - the deliberate process of remaining aware of actions and resources as they are currently being applied toward goals and objectives.
- **objectives** - the specific steps that will be taken to achieve a certain goal. Objectives identify necessary actions, the people and resources for carrying them out, and the schedule for starting and completing the actions.
- **permissive statutes** - laws on which boards may choose to take certain action or not, depending upon a district’s needs.
- **prohibitive statutes** - laws that specifically forbid a certain course of action.
- **scope and sequence** - pertaining to curricula, scope refers to what and how much is covered in the content of certain subject areas or courses; sequence is the order in which content or courses are presented to students, so that learning builds from the basic to the more complex.
Scope of Board Authority

As a newly elected school board member, you may be in for a number of surprises. Someone may congratulate you and then quickly tell you about a friend who’s eminently qualified for a certain job in the district. You suddenly learn that pressures aplenty come with school board service, some of which you’ve never anticipated.

Your first important lesson as you take your position on the board is to recognize that you’re a single member of a body that must function as a unit. No individual board member has any power or authority and must never attempt to act as an administrator of the school system. Collectively, the board has the authority to set district policy but does not have the power to execute those policies.

Instead, the board is responsible for setting the direction of the district, ensuring that it is properly administered, establishing policy, and representing the education interests of the community. The superintendent is the school district’s chief executive officer (CEO), in whom rests the responsibility for carrying out policy and day-to-day administration of the schools.

Major Board Responsibilities

In many ways, a school district’s board of directors has duties that are similar to those of boards that oversee private corporations. The comparison between these two types of boards can be carried only so far, but both of them generally are responsible for:

- establishing the organization’s goals.
- determining major policies and operations.
- establishing the general organizational structure.
- appraising the performance of the CEO, which in school districts is the superintendent.

More specifically, a board of education is obligated to:

- comply with state and federal laws and the policies and regulations of the state education authorities.
- determine the district’s education philosophy and the goals that flow from it.
- choose the superintendent of schools and work constructively with him or her.
- contribute to improving the education opportunities of every child in the district.
- develop, adopt, and regularly review policies that will attract and keep the personnel who can promote the district’s education aims.
- follow a wise budgeting process and adopt policies and procedures to ensure finances are legally and effectively managed.
• review and approve an annual audit of the school district.
• provide appropriate and sound physical facilities.
• appraise the activities of the district in relation to the established goals and objectives.

While school boards have many other duties beyond those listed above, these are the major categories of responsibilities, each of which we’ll examine more closely below.

**Complying with Laws and Regulations**

Board members sometimes forget that the board has no inherent powers of any kind other than those conferred by state statutes. As an agency of state government, the board can only take action that is specifically authorized by law or reasonably implied in statutory authorization. In instances where boards have exceeded this authorization, the courts generally have restrained them, insisting that they perform their functions within the limits of the law.

Arkansas school laws, or statutes, are of three types. Some are *mandatory*, meaning that school boards are required to carry them out. Others are *permissive*, giving boards the option of exercising their own discretion to take certain action or refrain from acting, in keeping with the needs of their district. Finally, some statutes are *prohibitive* in that they specifically forbid the board or individual members from taking some course of action. A board’s policies and actions are valid only to the extent to which they are consistent with the law.

School board members should strive to acquire at least a general knowledge of the laws that affect schools. Moreover, each board should establish channels through which the district can obtain competent, professional legal advice when needed. Members of ASBA have access to a staff attorney who can answer questions about education statutes and how to follow them.

In addition to state law, districts must comply with the various regulations and directives of ADE, such as those concerning teacher licensing, guidelines for preparing reports, and so on. For the most part, board involvement in such matters is indirect, because the board delegates these responsibilities to the superintendent. Yet the board must remain fully aware of the superintendent’s actions and hold him or her accountable, because the board is ultimately responsible for the district’s compliance with all laws and regulations.

**Education Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives**

A vital duty of the local board is to determine the education philosophy and goals of the school district. Such a philosophy can be thought of as a master set of consistent ideas, fundamental beliefs, and theories about teaching
and learning in relation to the entire education process. More simply stated, a philosophy of education is a combination of beliefs and principles upon which goals are based to determine the direction of the education program.

An education philosophy is the foundation for developing a successful program of instruction that has meaning and direction in relation to life. So, such a philosophy should reflect not only the common goals of education, but also the individual character of a community and its special needs, conditions, and resources. A farm community, a suburb, an industrial city—each will have some different expectations for its schools. The philosophy of the school board in each locality should reflect these differences.

Sometimes the terms goals and objectives are used interchangeably in conjunction with the concept of education philosophy, but they aren’t synonymous. While they grow out of the education philosophy, goals and objectives are expressed very differently so they establish criteria for selecting, organizing, and overseeing the work of the school district.

Goals are the broader, overarching aims of the district, while objectives are very specific and identify the resources, actions, and timeline (the “who, what, where, and when”) that are necessary for achieving each goal.

To illustrate the difference between goals and objectives, let’s say a district adopts a goal that all students will be proficient readers by the third grade. This goal indicates the desired end, but it doesn’t specify how to achieve it. The “how-to’s” for reaching the goal will be identified in statements of objectives, which designate the various methods and programs (such as a whole language approach or the Reading Recovery program, for example) and other actions (perhaps after-school tutoring) that will be used to ensure that all third graders are competent readers.

In addition, these objectives will specify the people who are responsible for each program and action, as well as the dates for each phase of planning, implementation, and completion. The objectives also will reflect how success will be demonstrated and measured, such as by performance on standardized tests.

Carefully planning and clearly expressing objectives is very important so people understand their responsibilities and those of their colleagues. When processes, people, and schedules have been established, communicated, and understood, then implementation can be monitored and progress compared against the desired standards. Any differences between what was intended and what is actually happening will be apparent, and corrections can be made to maintain timely progress toward the goals.
Statements of philosophy and goals are actually policymaking at the highest level, so the school board is responsible for establishing the education philosophy and goals that will guide the district. For such statements of belief and intent to fit the community and to genuinely benefit its schools, formulating them must be a collaborative endeavor that involves not only the school board, but all stakeholders: representatives of the administrative and teaching staffs, support personnel, the students and their parents, and citizens of the community.

Only after such broad-based input can the professional staff then assume primary responsibility for identifying the supporting objectives, budgeting resources accordingly, taking all necessary action, monitoring and making adjustments, evaluating results, and reporting progress.

The process of monitoring and evaluating goals and objectives is discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

Seeking and Selecting a Superintendent

When the position of superintendent becomes vacant in a school district, the local board must find the best person to fill the job. In carrying out this challenging task, the board is fulfilling its most important single duty. How wisely and well the board completes it will determine in large measure the subsequent success or failure of the school system.

Selecting the superintendent is of paramount importance because, as the district’s chief executive officer, the superintendent is the hub around which the entire school system revolves. Recognizing this fact, ADE has established rather demanding certification requirements for school administrators. But relying on these legal requirements alone won’t guarantee that a board chooses the person who is the best fit for the district.

Bear in mind that state requirements are minimums designed to eliminate from consideration those who aren’t prepared for the demanding professional duties of the superintendency. Most communities add to these standards, recognizing that hiring a superintendent is much more than merely contracting for the services of a professionally qualified person; it also means acquiring his or her philosophy, values, practices, personal style, and approaches to public education.

For each candidate, two important considerations are:

• the relative value of experience and preparation beyond state certification requirements.

• whether his or her professional background, personality, and leadership style are appropriate for the community.
Finding and selecting a new superintendent is a process involving several steps and considerable time. Wise boards prepare themselves by formulating a well defined procedure for finding and hiring a new superintendent before a hastily prepared plan is forced by pressures of the moment. Each local board should form its own recruitment plan that includes some or all of the steps described below.

1. Develop a comprehensive description of the type of person desired as superintendent.

2. Prepare a statement outlining the nature of the superintendent’s role in the district. Include a description of the authority granted the superintendent, a list of the duties and functions he or she will be assigned, and a very clear statement of what the board expects in its relationship with the superintendent.

3. List the desired qualifications, including professional preparation, extent of experience, and any other professional or personal qualities the board deems important.

4. Decide the approximate salary the new superintendent will be offered after researching salary levels in comparable school districts to determine a competitive salary range that the district can reasonably afford.

5. Actively seek the best person for the job. Under no circumstances should the board limit its consideration to those who voluntarily apply, for some of the very best prospects won’t apply and have to be sought out. Recruitment procedures might include:
   • publicly advertising the vacancy, outlining the nature of the position, the necessary qualifications, the approximate salary, and the procedure for applying.
   • writing or visiting colleges and universities that prepare school administrators, as they often can recommend possible candidates.
   • announcing the opening to professional organizations for school administrators, such as the Arkansas Association for Educational Administrators.
   • extending a personal invitation to apply to qualified local staff members, as well as to individuals highly recommended by knowledgeable others.
   • contracting with a professional job placement or search firm specializing in locating prospective superintendents from both in and out of state.

6. Decide whether the board as a whole will screen all candidates or if a screening committee is needed. Remember that FOI and
other requirements about open meetings also apply to school board committees.

7. Carefully evaluate the applications and credentials of all candidates. Narrow the field to only those who meet all the board’s stated qualifications and who merit serious consideration for the job. Applicants who don’t meet the board’s standards deserve the courtesy of being so notified.

8. Invite several of the most promising candidates to the district for an interview. To comply with state law, interviews must be conducted after 5:00 p.m. Plan each interview to allow the candidate to learn more about the school system and to help the board become better acquainted with him or her. Well planned questions can help elicit the following information about each prospect:
   • education philosophy and views about the purposes of public education.
   • length and level of experience.
   • understanding of current education issues.
   • technical knowledge of school district administration.
   • attitude and approach to working with the professional staff, the board, and the community.
   • contributions the candidate has made to the communities he or she has previously served.

9. Summarize in writing the results of each interview with every candidate, filing the summary along with the candidate’s other records. Complete the notes immediately so reactions and impressions won’t be forgotten or confused with other interviews.

10. Visit the communities in which the three or four leading candidates work or have worked to gather first-hand knowledge of performance level, record of achievements, and general influence on the district and community. Such visits should be with the knowledge and approval of the candidate, who should inform his or her board or other employer of the planned visit.

11. Recall the one or two most promising candidates for a second interview and arrange for them to meet some of the staff, talk at length with the present superintendent, and visit the community. Observe the reactions of the candidates to other staff leaders, as well as the response of the staff leaders to each prospect.

12. Select the person for the position. While not absolutely essential, unanimous agreement among board members is a goal worth seeking.
13. Meet with the chosen candidate to discuss final points, answer any questions, and agree on salary and other terms of employment.

14. Announce that the position has been filled, using the same channels through which the vacancy was communicated. The exact date for announcing the appointment should be agreed upon by the newly appointed superintendent, his or her current employer, and the board. This date is usually July 1, which is the beginning of the fiscal (budgetary) year.

15. Work with the media to announce the new superintendent’s appointment, considering a news conference at which the superintendent can be present for photographs and comments.

16. Express the board’s thanks to those who helped with the search. Return all confidential letters and credentials to every candidate, along with a letter announcing the board’s decision and expressing appreciation for the candidate’s interest in the position.

A school board can alter these suggestions to suit a particular situation. The most important aspect of searching for a new superintendent is for each board to develop a well defined, orderly selection plan that all agree to follow. Never should individual board members take any action that might interfere with the adopted selection process.

See Appendix A for a Sample Application Form for Superintendent and consult the Resources section for related information. Call the ASBA office for additional ideas or help with the process of finding and hiring a superintendent.

The Instructional Program

A noted authority on school boards has pointed out that a major stumbling block to board effectiveness has been a tendency to give major attention to the business side of school operations but only minimum consideration to the education curricula and programs. Other areas of school board functions, as important as they are, exist only to support the instructional program, because the basic purpose of all school systems is educating children. School districts are organized, boards elected, superintendents appointed, buildings erected, and teachers employed so that students can come to school to learn.

As school boards and officials make decisions about budgets, buildings, personnel, and other school matters, the overriding consideration should be...
whether each action will contribute to or detract from each school’s mission to provide a sound education for its students. Those decisions also must be made in concert with state and federal standards and mandates that shape school services.

Education programs also vary according to the expectations of citizens, which naturally differ from one community to another. A board member must understand what the citizens of a particular locality expect of school graduates in terms of knowledge, skill, proficiency, physical and mental health, and civic and social attitudes. Unique community needs must be recognized, such as a demand for specialized technical training, the need to speak a certain second language, or specific employment opportunities in the area.

At the same time, each school also serves the state and the nation. A large proportion of any graduating class won’t remain in its hometown, but will eventually live and work in other regions of the country or even the world.

As a result, a school’s curriculum can’t be restricted to purely local conditions, but also must reflect the needs and realities of the national and global community. For example, computer skills have become a necessity in our high-speed technological society. Graduates of any school system must be ready to participate in our democracy as productive citizens, whether they immediately join the workforce, move into specialized vocational training, enter college, or establish their own homes and families.

To make sound decisions, school board members must have a general knowledge of district operations, with particular emphasis on education programs and school functions. Each board must become familiar with such aspects of the school district as:

- the alignment (relationship and progression) of the schools according to the grade levels they house, such as which grades an elementary school offers and whether those students go on to a middle school or junior high, for example.
- the way in which the schools’ programs are organized, including their regular offerings as well as early childhood, kindergarten, adult education, special education, and alternative and compensatory education.
- the scope and sequence of subjects and courses in all grades.
- special education classes or services for exceptional children, including those who are gifted or talented, physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded.
- programs and services for children who don’t speak English as their primary language.
- auxiliary services, such as counseling and health.
extracurricular activities and their relationship to the instructional program.
• the grading system, types of standardized tests, and the district’s reporting methods.
• behavior standards for both students and staff, the district’s discipline system, and alternative learning environments.
• the condition and adequacy of the physical plants and the supplies and equipment that support the instructional program.
• the scope and quality of training for staff’s professional development, both preservice and inservice.
• avenues for parent and community involvement, including organized volunteer programs, parent-teacher organizations, and partnerships between the schools and local businesses and other organizations.

Overall, the board must decide on the general scope of the local education program in keeping with:
• the needs and desires of the local community.
• the needs of the state and nation.
• the provisions, requirements, and limitations imposed by state and federal law, the State Board of Education, and ADE.
• the willingness and ability of the local community to provide financial support.

In the process, boards obviously must depend heavily on the professional recommendations of the superintendent and his or her staff as they work together to develop programs for the schools.

Quality Personnel

The extent to which a school system achieves its goals depends primarily upon the quality of its leaders, teachers, and other personnel. Thus, a major function of the school board in seeking to create a sound instructional program is to employ an adequate number of qualified, competent staff to carry out the necessary tasks.

Many years ago, school boards fulfilled this function entirely on their own. They hired and fired teachers and other employees, granted promotions, and took employees to task for infractions of various kinds, all without consulting anyone.

But today, the law requires school boards to hire a qualified superintendent to carry out the necessary administrative duties. Suspension, termination, or non-renewal of a district employee must come only after the recommendation of the superintendent. A school board doesn’t have the legal authority to take action against an employee’s contract without the superintendent’s recommendation. Moreover, before a superintendent can
make such a recommendation, he or she must comply fully with the district’s personnel policies and all requirements of due process to fairly protect the employee’s rights. (See Personnel Policies in Chapter 4.)

Because the superintendent, as the board’s chief executive, is held responsible for running the district effectively, then he or she must have considerable freedom to choose those who will be assistants.

Even so, the board doesn’t surrender its authority or lose its importance in personnel matters. The board determines the standards and terms of employment, the working conditions and facilities, and the number of employees. The board’s decisions affect staff workloads, salary schedules, local sick leave provisions, and similar matters that directly relate to personnel efficiency. Those decisions also have a significant bearing on the relationship between the board and staff.

Remember that all legal authority rests with the school board. The superintendent recommends candidates for employment but can’t actually hire anyone. Only the board can perform this function. By the same token, dismissing personnel must be done according to certain legal requirements. Boards must constantly keep current on the legal aspects of procedures involving suspending, non-renewing, or terminating staff.

**Budgeting**

The effectiveness of a public school system depends heavily on adequate financial support, along with prudently spending district funds. The board must help ensure that the district has sufficient financial resources, and it must maintain policies and procedures to ensure that those resources are used legally and wisely.

State law and the need for competitive wages mean that every school district devotes the highest percentage of its budget to funding staff salaries. As a result, the amount of discretionary spending is proportionately low. State law not only forbids school districts to operate at a deficit, but requires adherence to certain guidelines to promote fiscal responsibility. Thus, the school board has a crucial responsibility for making wise budgeting decisions.

At the same time, boards must put finance and business management in proper perspective to avoid spending a disproportionate amount of time on this area. Overemphasizing financial matters can overshadow equally important responsibilities and divert attention from critical issues pertaining to teaching and learning.

The budget should be derived directly from the education goals and objectives, so that it reflects the plans for operating the entire system. The budget document should include a statement about the purposes of the
The budget document should result from the cooperative efforts of all who are concerned with the education needs of the district’s students, including principals and teachers.

The comprehensive budgeting process has three sequential phases. They are listed below, along with suggestions to help the board gauge the effectiveness of the district’s budgeting practices.

Phase 1. Understand the facts of the budgeting foundation, which are:

• The superintendent is ultimately responsible for preparing, presenting, interpreting, and administering the budget document.
• The budget document should result from the cooperative efforts of all who are concerned with the education needs of the district’s students, including principals and teachers.
• Preparing and modifying the budget should be a continuous process, with the annual budget viewed as part of the long-range management program.

Phase 2. Build and adopt the budget document in these steps:

• Define the education plan, which encompasses the district’s education philosophy, goals, and objectives.
• Prepare the spending plan, which translates the education plan into estimated costs.
• Construct the revenue plan, which itemizes all sources of income, including local, state, and federal funds, private grants and foundations, and any others.
• Compare the spending and revenue plan for balance, making adjustments as necessary.
• Carefully review and analyze the budget document to ensure that it accurately reflects and adequately supports the education plan.
• Adopt the budget, preferably before the beginning of the fiscal year for which it will serve, so that it guides district spending from the onset of the new budget year.

Phase 3. Follow up.

• Record the budget accurately in the official board minutes and submit it to ADE according to the prescribed format and deadline.
• Develop a procedure and timetable for continuously appraising the budgeting process and budget document, adjusting them as necessary to
reflect any fluctuations in the needs and resources of the district.

- Throughout the year, consider various alternatives in the education plan and the budget so the two plans remain aligned.

One point about balancing the budget should be stressed. After translating their school’s education objectives into cost figures, most Arkansas boards find that the funds available from all sources—local, state, and federal—aren’t adequate for the district to fully realize its goals. As a result, boards should be prepared to respond by:

- weighing demands for services against financial limitations and determining which immediate student needs can be met in relation to the long-term goals.
- communicating the needs of education not only to local taxpayers, but to the Arkansas General Assembly and the U.S. Congress, through whatever channels are appropriate and effective. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of effective advocacy.

**Purchasing and Accounting**

The process of purchasing equipment and supplies for the district needs to be well coordinated to ensure that state laws are followed, as well as to promote efficiency and contain costs. Therefore, the district’s purchasing functions need to be centralized under a single person or department. In smaller school districts, the superintendent may act as the purchasing official, but in larger systems, a full-time purchasing agent is warranted.

A _purchasing official_ is defined in the law as a school district’s board of directors or the agent designated by the board and delegated the authority to enter into contracts and make purchases on behalf of the district. This official has at least two major responsibilities:

- furnishing supplies and equipment of the right quality and quantity when needed.
- obtaining them at the most economical cost to the district.

The purchasing official has the authority to manage the bidding process, to accept or reject all bids, and to negotiate directly with all of the parties who make bids.

School board policies on purchasing should reflect the following principles:

- Purchasing for the district should be managed by a single individual or department.
- Those who use the materials should have a voice in selecting them.
- From initial selection to the time supplies are used up or become obsolete, each step of administering the procurement and distribution process must be handled within a system of checks and balances to prevent waste, duplication, and misappropriation of funds or materials.
- The purchasing budget and procedures should be sufficiently flexible...
to allow for experimental programs, unusual expansions, changes in curricula, and emergencies.

- The district must provide the means for assuring the proper use, care, storage, and control of supplies.
- New or untried materials should be purchased in quantity only after a trial period demonstrates satisfaction.
- The education and welfare of children should be the foremost consideration of any purchase.
- The public has a right to expect the greatest return for every dollar spent.
- All records of the purchasing office should be open to public scrutiny.

By law, a school district intending to purchase commodities estimated to reach or exceed $20,000 must solicit competitive bids from prospective suppliers. A school district may choose to adopt a policy that sets a limit lower than $20,000 to trigger the bidding requirement, thus keeping a tighter reign on spending. Violating the bidding law is punishable as a Class C misdemeanor, which carries a hefty fine.

Commodities include all goods and services purchased or lease-purchased by a school district, with the exception of professional services and those from regulated utilities, such as an electric company. Used items, items needed because of an unavoidable emergency, and items only available from the federal government are specifically excluded from the definition of commodities, and thus, from the bidding requirement.

Some special rules apply to purchasing buses. School districts wanting to buy new buses may either purchase them directly, by bid, or ask the Office of State Purchasing to solicit bids from manufacturers on their behalf. Districts may buy used school buses, regardless of cost, without taking bids. The law specifies that a school bus becomes a used bus two years after the date the manufacturer’s Certificate of Origin was issued.

In addition to the state’s bidding requirements, school districts purchasing buses directly have 20 days after awarding the bid to send the following information to the Office of State Purchasing:

- the bid specifications.
- a list of invited bidders.
- copies of all correspondence between the district and the bidders.
- a complete bid tabulation.
- a copy of the bid award.

Stewardship of public funds demands that a complete system of accounting be installed and maintained by every school system. State law requires an annual audit of all school district accounts to ensure that all aspects of the financial records and practices are in keeping with the law. Such audits can
be conducted either by the Division of Local Audit of the Legislative Joint Auditing Committee, which is a free state service, or by a Certified Public Accountant, chosen and paid by the district.

A well organized audit system protects the board and all employees. It also assures the public that school funds and property are being properly administered. Auditors not only affirm sound practices, but they also uncover problems and can helpfully point out ways in which to improve a district’s accounting system.

District Facilities
Providing adequate physical facilities for public education has been the duty of school boards since the first school house was a log cabin. The board’s general responsibilities for facilities can be summarized as follows:

• ensuring that existing buildings and other facilities are used to the best advantage in accommodating the district’s education programs.
• evaluating the operation and maintenance program, as reported by the superintendent, to determine efficiency and adequacy, as well as to suggest improvements.
• following state law and guidelines for developing and implementing a program for improving and expanding facilities to align with the schools’ needs and the state’s standards.

In 2002, the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the facilities of the public school system in Arkansas were inadequate and unequal, and the court ordered the governor and the legislature to take corrective action. As a result, a task force was established to study the needs of all K-12 public school facilities in the state. Every school building was thoroughly assessed as to its condition, its suitability for supporting education programs, and its capacity for accommodating changes in student enrollment.

This process and the resulting report, the *Arkansas Statewide Education Facilities Assessment of 2004* (with an addendum in 2005), has been the basis for determining the approach and projecting the costs for rectifying the deficiencies found in school facilities throughout the state.

To oversee the facilities initiative, legislation established the Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation, commonly referred to as the Facilities Division. The division operates in conjunction with ADE but isn’t a part of it. The *Public School Academic Facility Manual* incorporates mandates and guidelines for school districts to follow as they comply with a number of requirements.

Principle among those requirements is developing a 6-year Academic Facilities Master Plan, which each district formulates for itself, based on local needs and state requirements. A district’s master plan serves as:
• a tool to guide each school district in anticipating facility needs and implementing them.
• a mechanism for the state to supervise school district activities in relation to its facilities.
• a process for continually updating local and state facility needs.
• a way for the state to determine and manage funds for the facilities program.

The master plan must be approved by each local school board to address its district’s facility needs. The board submits its plan to the Facilities Division according to certain guidelines that entail specific directions, forms, and timelines for school districts to follow as they build and submit their master plans. Subsequently, districts must keep their plans current by updating them every two years.

The law recognizes that long-term planning for facilities is most effective as a cooperative exercise. Therefore, school districts must involve their community in the process, combining specialized expertise with input from district employees and community representatives.

While school boards can’t precisely predict facility needs for the indefinite future, they can exercise reasonable foresight and planning with the help of the state’s facility assessments, the facilities manual and policy guidelines, and the state’s projected share of funding.

Accountability

Evaluating the effectiveness of a school district’s operations and education programs has come under a very bright spotlight in recent years. The demand for accountability means schools must demonstrate that they are meeting the goals for which they were established, while doing so as efficiently as possible. No school district can tolerate inadequate evaluation of its school programs in relation to the academic progress of its students. (Also see the discussion of accountability on pages 81-82)

As explained earlier in this chapter, through its planning processes and adopted policies, the board establishes broad goals toward which every division of the district must aim its efforts. The supporting objectives define the smaller, more specific steps that must be taken to reach the goals. Ongoing, systemic monitoring and evaluation reveal how well the district is meeting its objectives and advancing toward its goals.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Simply stated, monitoring shows the actions and resources that are underway, that is, what’s happening at a given time. Evaluation shows what has happened as a result of those actions and resources, measuring how closely the outcomes conform to the desired results.

The demand for accountability means schools must demonstrate that they are meeting the goals for which they were established, while doing so as efficiently as possible.
Armed with information and insight from monitoring and evaluation, the board can assess progress, including how consistently specific programs are being implemented, which of them are working, and which aren’t delivering the desired results.

Let’s look more closely at how monitoring and evaluation work together to reveal weaknesses and highlight strengths and successes in district programs and operations so the board can make well-informed decisions.

Monitoring is the process of “keeping tabs” on the organization’s operation, that is, remaining informed of what is currently happening in the school system, particularly in relation to the stated goals and objectives. Monitoring keeps all personnel constantly aware of how their actions are aligning with their agreed-upon responsibilities.

Typically, teachers monitor students, principals monitor teachers, and so on up the supervisory line. But in-house objectivity is difficult to maintain, and all need to know how their work is fitting into the bigger picture. As a result, at least some monitoring needs to be conducted by an individual or a group from outside the classroom, school, or department.

In a sense, such independent monitors take a “snapshot” of current conditions they find through various methods, including direct observation, interviews, questionnaires, and reviewing documents and data. Then the monitors compile and organize that information into a composite picture they share with those desiring the feedback, which should always include those who have been monitored.

Careful, consistent monitoring shows where problems are developing so that appropriate corrective action can be taken quickly. For example, if monitors see that books and supplies haven’t been delivered to classrooms on time or in sufficient quantity, intervention is needed immediately so that delays or shortages are never the norm. If time sheets reveal that buses frequently arrive after the tardy bell has sounded, the causes can be investigated and corrected. If observation shows that teachers aren’t following the agreed-upon teaching methods, redirection is in order. If absenteeism is rising at a certain school, monitoring the records will uncover the trend.

At the same time, vigilant monitoring also reveals what’s working well so that successes can be celebrated and emulated. For instance, if student discipline rates are very low at a certain school, studying the building’s discipline management system will show methods that can be copied or adapted elsewhere. Schools where volunteer participation is high can share how they’re attracting and retaining parent and public involvement. Schools with indicators of high student achievement have programs and approaches that can inspire other schools to map out similar strategies.
A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program should cover every facet of the district, identifying strengths and areas needing improvement by measuring specific aspects of:

- student enrollment and attendance.
- the curricula, instructional programs, and special programs.
- student services, such as health and counseling.
- student achievement.
- discipline rates and types of infractions and sanctions.
- the number of truancies and drop-outs, as well as the graduation rate.
- the number of employees, their placement, attendance, and performance.
- the quality, relevance, and results of the staff development program.
- staff and student morale.
- buildings, equipment, and materials.
- the transportation system.
- business and financial operations.
- parent and community involvement.
- public perception of school and district effectiveness.
- school board operations.

The appraisal of such a complex institution as a school district is a difficult, time-consuming task. It must be planned in advance and well executed, not only at the end of a program, a course, or a school term, but at intermediate points so that timely adjustments can be made. In most communities, the board must rely heavily on its staff to gather and interpret the needed data and then to translate that data into information to guide subsequent decisions and actions.

Information useful for evaluating progress is available in several ways. Some of the most common include those described below.

1. **Appraisal by outside sources.**
   If expertise in evaluation processes isn’t available within the district, seek the assistance of outside experts, which will help promote objectivity. Contact a local college, university, ADE, or independent professionals for help in designing and implementing evaluation programs. The board might commission a comprehensive study to assess all aspects of the school system or target a particular feature of the district.

2. **Analyzing student achievement data, including results of the state-mandated tests.**
   The types and frequency of standardized tests are highly debated, both at the state and national levels, so testing is bound to change. Much useful information can be obtained from tests, yet they have limitations and don’t yield a complete picture of a student’s abilities.
or achievements. Expert assistance is needed to interpret test results, because several factors must be considered. A testing program is essential in any school, but test results can be deceptive when used indiscriminately.

3. **Feedback from staff and students, which can be elicited through surveys, interviews, discussion groups, and open forums.**
   For example, the board can invite administrators and teachers to talk over the aims, programs, and challenges of their academic areas and then identify needs and suggest changes. Student representatives can complete a questionnaire about school climate or about the goals, successes, and needs of extracurricular organizations and activities.

4. **Information from citizens, including civic and business leaders, employers, parents, and former students.**
   People from the community can provide an enlightening view of the school system from an observer’s and consumer’s vantage point. Diverse perspectives can provide insights into the relationship between school programs, higher education, and the world of work, helping schools assess how they may need to change.

   For example, the district can survey its graduates to learn what path they’ve subsequently taken and how well their school experience prepared them for higher education or the workplace. Feedback from colleges can show how many of the district’s graduates take remedial courses each year. Employers can identify which employability skills are lacking in prospective hires.

**Reporting**

After all data are gathered through monitoring and evaluation processes, they must be organized, analyzed, and rendered into information that is readily understandable so it can be used for decision making.

ADE requires every school district to regularly submit a number of reports on a wide range of topics. ADE specifies the reports’ due date, content, and often the format, that is, the manner in which the information is organized and presented. Many of these reports are comprised largely of numerical data on a particular topic, such as the district budget, pupil enrollment, student attendance, or transportation, for example. They are routinely submitted to ADE according to a prescribed schedule, often quarterly or near the beginning or end of the school year.

Other district-generated reports are much more comprehensive and are widely distributed to staff, parents, and the community at large. Such reports must be suitable for the diverse audience they reach. Not only does the
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Decisive action must be taken to shore up weak spots, correct errors, or abandon ineffective approaches. At the same time, successes are to be celebrated, shared, and built upon.

School district’s professional staff need to understand them, but so does the school board and all who are invested in the welfare of the schools, such as parents. Technical terms and jargon must be translated into language and concepts that are accessible to all the school system’s constituents.

Likewise, the manner in which information is reported must contribute to understanding. Graphs, charts, diagrams, and illustrations can render a report more readable, interesting, and meaningful.

Accurate, substantive evaluations and reports present valuable information that holds significant meaning, because it reflects the strengths, accomplishments, deficiencies, and needs of the school district. The board and staff must carefully study and weigh all available information to arrive at conclusions and identify the next steps they need to take. Decisive action must be taken to shore up weak spots, correct errors, or abandon ineffective approaches. At the same time, successes are to be celebrated, shared, and built upon.

Only through comprehensive and continuing monitoring, evaluation, and reporting can the board ensure that its schools are finely tuned for success.
Developing and Adopting School Board Policy

In recent years, developing education policy has been commonly regarded as the most important function of local school boards. This chapter shows how, through their policymaking role, school boards make important decisions on the education matters the state has left to their discretion.

Terms found in this section, such as policy, are defined within the context of the discussion.

What is Policy?

Let’s consider the term *policy* and distinguish between a policy, a *procedure*, and a *regulation*, because these terms are often confused. Policies are variously defined as:

- broad guidelines established for effectively operating the school system.
- statements reflecting the principles that guide staff as they carry out their duties.
- principles that chart a course of action for the superintendent and define the limits within which he or she can exercise judgment.
- statements of principle intended to promote progress toward the school district’s goals.

Concisely stated, a policy is a general statement the school board makes to indicate a desired condition, direction, or belief. The policy may also explain the reasons behind it.

Procedures are the methods or steps for carrying out a policy in accordance with its letter and spirit. Procedures are *specific* rather than general, translating the basic policy into action by designating *how*, *by whom*, *where*, and *when* certain actions are to be carried out or limited.

Procedures may be contained within a policy or developed by administrators to put policy into practice. Because procedures are based on policies, they must be consistent with them. The board should be sure to examine and approve all procedures to ensure they accurately express the intention of the policies they’re based upon.

Regulations, which stem from state statute or federal law, are issued by ADE to guide, mandate, or limit school district operations. Regulations may identify procedures, but most often ADE describes procedures in the directives it issues to school districts. Local boards adopt policies that are consistent with the law and the related ADE mandates.
ADE has begun to issue its regulations under the heading of *rules* and to phase out the term *regulations*. While ADE prefers the “rules” terminology, many school districts continue to favor “regulations.” Both of these terms are acceptable, as they have the same purpose and weight.

**Why Have Policies?**

A well-prepared set of written policies is extremely valuable in clarifying school operations, deepening understanding, promoting good will, providing direction, and establishing control and efficiency. Moreover, in relation to district employees, state law mandates that every district develop personnel policies according to specific guidelines, as explained later in this chapter.

According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA), written policy statements help to:

- clarify roles and responsibilities, which promotes positive working relationships among the board, superintendent, and staff, as well as within the staff itself.
- foster more consistent decisions, thus improving understanding and morale.
- save the board time, money, and effort by settling questions that might otherwise repeatedly surface.
- improve public relations, because written policies are reassuring evidence of responsible board action and the reasons behind it.
- reduce pressures on the board and prevent criticism when decisions are based on established policy rather than expediency or pleas for favoritism.
- give the board a sense of direction based upon a solid policy foundation.
- promote continuity of action in the district, which is especially important when board members and administrators change.
- facilitate orderly review of the board’s practices. Comparing past board action with present situations, the board can modify or adopt policies to keep abreast of new conditions.
- ensure a better informed board and staff.
- speed the orientation of newcomers.

NSBA also points out that the process of developing policy is a part of healthy board operations, because it helps members sort out their differences long before angry citizens have “gathered at ringside.” As policies are considered, differing views surface for contemplation and reconciliation. Without ongoing policy development, some significant differences among members are likely to remain buried until the board encounters an issue that uncovers substantial disagreement. Then the board may find itself sharply divided and forced to thrash through matters in the public arena.
Developing Policy

Whether written or unwritten, consistent or inconsistent, policies are either implied or clearly defined by board action. That’s because virtually every action of the board tends to have some affect on policy, either confirming established policy, modifying or reversing it, or establishing new policy.

School board policy can be prompted in numerous ways, including:
- recommendations from the superintendent.
- positive or negative experiences in the school district.
- action taken by the board on an important problem or issue.
- study and long-range planning that involves the board, superintendent, teachers, student groups, and citizens’ committees.
- suggestions from a personnel policies committee.
- negotiations with employees’ representatives.
- recommendations from the ASBA Model Policy Service.

AASA and NSBA suggest that boards consider the following to help shape their policies:
- Identify problems to resolve, especially those that recur and demand a great deal of attention.
- Review past minutes to see what problems have surfaced, how earlier boards dealt with them, and what policies might be indicated by those actions.
- Study the policies of other boards as a source of ideas for policies that can be adapted to local needs.
- Check established practices and traditions as a basis for formalized statements of policy.
- Ask for suggestions from staff, students, and citizens, especially when policy areas affect any or all of those groups.
- Consult the studies and writings of others, such as those found in numerous articles on policy development in professional magazines.

Additionally, boards can use the ASBA Model Policy Service that is described later in the chapter.

Regardless of how the board approaches it, policymaking takes a great deal of time. The process requires patience and careful consideration from all those involved, as haste and snap judgments often prove to be counterproductive. People tend to support what they help create, so those who will be affected by policies should have input into crafting them. Moreover, diverse perspectives and collective wisdom tend to produce more effective policies that are better understood, accepted, and followed.
Policy Form and Content

What to include in policies is a decision each board must make based on the characteristics of the individual school district. Board policies will vary somewhat from district to district due to differences in size, student populations, and unique needs, problems, and resources.

All school districts need to establish policies addressing these major categories:

- organization of the school district.
- school board operations.
- general school administration.
- financial management.
- facilities.
- personnel.
- instructional philosophy and programs.
- students, including discipline, grading, attendance, and graduation requirements.
- internal and external communications.
- parent involvement and volunteer programs.
- relations with other education agencies and organizations.

As they determine the content of various policy areas, boards must remember that policies set forth fundamental principles of control, management, and operation. And, while policies can contain procedures, they should not include the details of management. Such details may be developed separately as administrative procedures or directives that are within the framework of board policies and subject to board approval.

Formatting and organizing policies into a manual will make them easy to catalog, access, and review. Below are some suggestions for creating a user-friendly policy manual, whether published on paper or electronically, that is, online or digitally on a computer disc.

- To make changes easy, keep policies in a loose-leaf notebook or maintain them electronically.
- In paper copies, use paper of sufficient weight to withstand repeated reference.
- Include a table of contents.
- Organize the manual according to a system that makes topics easy to locate and permits flexibility in changing the contents.
- Use indexing to separate and identify each section.
- Identify the topic of each page with a general heading and appropriate index number.
- Indicate the date the board adopted each policy and the date of any amendments.
- Limit topics to their own page or pages for ease in locating and changing items.
- Include a reference to any laws or ADE rules that prompt a policy.
Personnel Policies

Arkansas law requires each public school district in the state to have a set of written personnel policies for all of its employees. The legislature hasn’t officially defined personnel policy, but a workable definition is the guidelines to be followed by employees in carrying out their work. By law, personnel policies include the district’s salary schedule.

If a district doesn’t officially recognize a group, such as a union, that represents a majority of the teachers for the purpose of negotiating personnel policies (and most of them don’t), then that district must have a personnel policies committee, commonly referred to as the PPC.

The composition and function of this group are specified by law. The PPC elects a chair and a secretary and develops a calendar of meetings. Minutes of those meetings must be distributed to the school board and posted in every district building. This committee doesn’t have the power to veto a personnel policy, but it can communicate its position on proposed and existing policies to the board and also suggest changes in them.

Both the PPC and the school board can propose new or amended personnel policies. A policy originating with the board must be referred to the PPC, and the committee chair or designee can address the board about the committee’s views on the proposed policy. Once the PPC has discussed a proposed policy with the board, the board must either accept, reject, or refer the policy back to the committee by the next regular board meeting.

The law guarantees that employees who are classified (that is, not licensed educators) must also have written personnel policies. They are to have a classified or non-certified personnel policies committee, unless they are represented by a board-recognized group that negotiates for them. The law prescribes the composition and function of this committee, giving it the option of proposing policies to the board.

Personnel policies are considered terms of personnel contracts, so they’re binding on both the school district and the employees. Every year, the current personnel policies must be distributed to all new employees and also must be available at each building for employees to review.

School boards can change personnel policies during the year, but unless a majority of employees vote to be bound immediately by the altered policy, the change won’t take effect until the following fiscal year. This vote must be conducted by the personnel policies committees according to prescribed law. No personnel policy can be considered properly adopted unless the legal requirements have been followed.
Review and Evaluate Policies

The board needs to continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its policies in relation to the district’s progress toward its goals. Monitoring will reveal the extent to which policies are being followed, and evaluation will show how well policies are promoting achievement of the goals. Identifying the strong and weak points of the school system and the policies that are to support it will indicate where changes are needed and establish a basis for future action.

The superintendent and professional staff are responsible for helping their board evaluate policies in relation to the district’s programs and operations. Staff also must alert the board to changing circumstances, such as new issues, legislation, or court decisions that make existing policies obsolete. As programs or functions are added and old ones modified or deleted, corresponding changes in board policy may be warranted.

To be of any value, policies must be communicated, understood, and used. To be used, they must be consistent with current needs and aims. Thus it is imperative for each board, in cooperation with staff, to systematically review and update policy statements.

The ASBA Model Policy Service

The need for keeping board policies current and relative to developments in education is crucial, challenging, and time consuming. To meet that need, ASBA has developed a Model Policy Service and a Model Policy Manual.

ASBA’s Model Policy Manual contains samples of all the policies a district must have, as well as others that, while not required by law, we recommend for prudent operation of the district. ASBA has coordinated its staff’s special knowledge of school law, district operations, and policy writing into a generic manual that meets the basic needs of all districts. Yet the model policies allow for flexibility so a district can customize them according to local needs and preferences.

After the close of each legislative session, ASBA reviews all new laws pertaining to public education. Based on these laws, we formulate sample policies that specifically relate to the new laws. Then we review and revise the Model Policy Manual accordingly and distribute it to all subscribers. Any time that court rulings or changes in state and federal laws or ADE directives trigger the need for new or revised local policies, ASBA furnishes subscribers those updates.

ASBA offers its Model Policy Service at one reasonable price for each subscribing district, making it a wise investment of public dollars. The annual fee is contractually renewable, and the service is ongoing as long as the district subscribes to the program.
Developing Effective Working Relationships

As a school board carries out its various duties, it has contact with many different people, both as groups and individuals. A clear understanding of the relationship between the board and these people is essential to the effective operation of both the board and the district’s schools.

This chapter will help clarify the appropriate relationship between the board and the superintendent, staff, students, parents, and community.

Terms in this section include:
- **certified staff** - sometimes referred to as *non-classified* staff or *licensed* staff, these are school district employees who, by law, must hold certain Arkansas credentials as a condition of employment. For example, teachers, guidance counselors, and principals are certified staff.
- **deliberative dialogue** - an organized process for facilitating conversations within groups of people who share their perspectives and viewpoints with one another so they can more thoughtfully consider issues, problems, and options.
- **grievance** - a formal, written complaint from an employee regarding working conditions or treatment.
- **non-certified staff** - also called *classified* staff, these are school district employees who aren’t required to have Arkansas teaching credentials as a condition of employment. Bus drivers, janitors, and cafeteria workers are some members of classified staff.
- **school-community partnership** - a voluntary relationship between a school and a community group or business that meets the needs and uses the resources of both partners for their mutual benefit.
- **Study Circles** - a deliberative dialogue model that ASBA promotes throughout the state, training organizers and facilitators to convene groups of citizens to address various issues.

The Board and Superintendent Relationship

The board works more closely with the superintendent than with any other district employee. How effectively they work together will largely determine how well the schools’ overall planning, programs, and operation are carried out. Both the board and the superintendent must strive to maintain a wholesome understanding of the appropriate working relationship with each other. That understanding must translate into respecting their complementary but distinct roles and responsibilities.
Harmony between the board and superintendent rests on several prerequisites. Specifically, the board and the superintendent must:

- acknowledge their separate responsibilities and avoid encroaching on each other’s duties and activities.
- clearly understand that harmony between them is of utmost importance for the greater welfare of the school system and the better education of the children.
- openly acknowledge honest differences of opinion, constantly striving to conduct district business in ways that won’t emphasize these differences or lead to antagonism, injured pride, or jealousy.
- give credit where it’s due and, when necessary, admit errors.

Moreover, the relationship between the board and the superintendent should be marked by mutual respect, high standards of conduct, open communication, mutual trust, singleness of purpose, and a willingness to resolve differences.

The board must give the superintendent considerable freedom in managing the schools, within established policies, and hold him or her accountable for results. Boards that have confidence in their superintendent view his or her position, functions, and authority as follows, recognizing that the superintendent’s primary responsibilities are to:

1. Serve as the board’s chief executive officer and the district’s leader.
2. Carry out all board policies by:
   - preparing applicable procedures and directives.
   - taking action on matters not specifically covered by policies and reporting that action to the board.
   - ensuring that policies and procedures are understood and followed.
3. Recognize that all employees are responsible either directly or indirectly to the superintendent.
4. Retain final responsibility for the action of subordinates, even though the superintendent may delegate authority and assign responsibilities to other staff.
5. Attend all meetings of the board and its special committees, except when the board is considering matters pertaining to the superintendent’s re-employment.
6. Prepare and submit a preliminary budget to the board.
7. Authorize all purchases, which must be confirmed by the board according to the board’s policies and limits on major appropriations.
8. Recommend all candidates for employment. The board has the authority to reject specific candidates, but personnel ultimately should be hired upon the superintendent’s recommendation.
9. Recruit and retain effective staff.
10. Provide substantive leadership for the schools’ education programs and quality professional development for staff.
11. Keep the board informed on all matters vital to the school system.
12. Develop a system for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress toward the district’s goals.

13. Develop a program to maintain, improve, or expand facilities and to ensure the effectiveness of all maintenance personnel.

14. Regularly report to the board about the operation of the school system as the school year progresses and at year’s end with a summative report.

As far-reaching reform sweeps our nation’s schools in pursuit of academic achievement and accountability, a skilled superintendent is absolutely necessary for a highly successful education program at the local level. School boards that have hired a well-qualified, capable superintendent to administer their schools should make every effort to keep him or her on the job. A well-running, smoothly functioning school system can’t replace its chief administrator without experiencing at least a temporary dip in harmony and efficiency.

**Show Support**

One of the best ways for a board of education to hold on to a capable superintendent is to strongly back him or her. The American Association of School Administrators has identified certain rights of school administrators that most school board members will recognize as just and fair.

Administrators have the right to:

- the board’s support throughout their term of employment.
- protection from the fear of unreasonable termination.
- protection from people who would use them for personal gain or prestige.
- protection from factions.
- protection from excessive or unfair criticism.
- the board’s appreciation for a job well done.

Additionally, boards can increase the likelihood of keeping their capable superintendent by:

- demonstrating that their sole motivation is to develop the best possible school system for the community.
- showing appreciation by maintaining the superintendent’s salary at a level at least equal to that of comparable districts.
- protecting him or her from overwork by ensuring adequate administrative assistance and reasonable time for vacations and a full family life.
- dealing directly with the superintendent, routing all requests for information and documents through him or her.
Evaluate the Superintendent

Any corporate body such as a school board, which delegates portions of its authority to an executive, is responsible for evaluating results. Likewise, the school administrator is entitled to know the degree to which his or her work is satisfactory to the board.

To fulfill its obligations on all fronts, the school board is constantly judging the work of the superintendent both formally and informally. Any such evaluation must be based on factual information about how well the superintendent performs, rather than on any personal differences, malicious criticism, or unfounded rumors.

Below are some standards to aid boards in making fair, reasonable assessments of their superintendent’s fitness for the position. In a balanced review, consider all of the following aspects of style, competency, and effectiveness:

- reputation as a person and as a public worker among the community’s leaders.
- aggressiveness and skill in promoting a workable program for the school district’s continuous improvement.
- personal courage, exercised with appropriate tact, in facing opposition to the schools or programs.
- ability to avoid fanfare or self-publicity in public relations.
- respect for frugality and stewardship of the public dollar, along with proposing school budgets accordingly.
- solid understanding of the instructional program.
- up-to-date grasp of emerging issues and trends that affect the education system.
- skill in hiring and retaining high-quality staff, assigning them to positions for which they are best suited, and recognizing their accomplishments.
- ability to deal democratically and effectively with all personnel, maintaining their respect while encouraging and supporting them to whole-hearted effort.
- genuine interest and appreciation for children and an understanding of the challenges they face in growing up.
- skill and promptness in keeping the board and the public well informed about school matters through oral and written reports, effective media relations, and well executed demonstrations and exhibits about school activities.
- respect for traditional district procedures, but a willingness to improve approaches as necessary.
- capacity for maintaining the respect of education leaders in neighboring communities, as well as in districts of similar size and prominence throughout the region, state, or nation.
At the end of this handbook, Appendix D contains a sample form for evaluating a superintendent, and the Resources pages include websites that have information about evaluating a superintendent.

Changing Superintendents

Invariably, school board members and superintendents will disagree on certain matters. In the search for solutions to problems, viewpoints and opinions are bound to differ. While such differences may be challenging, they can also lead to new insight and ideas when issues are discussed freely and fully.

But a time may come when problems are more serious than just disagreement, such as when evaluation of the superintendent shows unsatisfactory performance, leading the board to seriously question his or her professional leadership abilities. At such a point, it’s time for forthright, heart-to-heart talks between the board and superintendent, in which the superintendent’s shortcomings should be pointed out in frank and honest–but civil–discussion. This sort of discussion should always take place in the privacy of executive session.

Then the superintendent should be given a period of time to correct the identified shortcomings, with board members doing all they can to assist. If, after exhausting all reasonable corrective action, the board still finds that the superintendent’s performance is unacceptable, replacing him or her is the only alternative.

Giving the superintendent the opportunity to resign will result in less disruption in the school system and community. But if he or she refuses to resign, non-renewal of contract or dismissal is the unpleasant but necessary option. Before the board takes either of these two steps, seeking legal counsel is imperative in order to protect the rights and interests of both parties.

The Board’s Relationship with Staff

Authorities on school district management generally agree that both certified and non-certified school staff should have little or no direct relationship with the school board. Not only must staff refrain from privately approaching board members, but by the same token, board members should not seek out individual employees.

For example, in the usual district organizational structure the principal is directly responsible to the superintendent (or perhaps an assistant superintendent), having only an indirect relationship with the school board. Similarly, each teacher is responsible to the building principal and, through him or her, to the superintendent, thus only indirectly to the board. Likewise,
a district’s non-certified employees report directly to their immediate supervisor, and only indirectly to the school board. In short, the board conducts virtually all its business with school employees indirectly through its chief executive officer, the superintendent.

This organizational line of authority doesn’t mean that teachers or other staff shouldn’t have any access to the board. Instead, access should be appropriately guided and limited by established policies and procedures.

If conditions arise requiring an employee’s direct access to the board (such as part of the grievance process, for example), then a request for the board’s consideration should be filed through the superintendent. Such an avenue should be a matter of policy that describes procedures for any dealings the board may have with staff members.

Healthy communication is vital between the school board and school employees— all employees, both certified and non-certified. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and its Arkansas affiliate chapter (ArkaNSPRA), as well as numerous other professional groups, stress that all personnel need to know the “what, why, and how” of school plans, programs, policies, and problems before, or at least as soon as, the general public.

Here are some suggestions for promoting effective communication:

• Distribute board meeting agendas to each school building in advance of regular meetings.
• Give every school employee a brief, one-page summary of action taken at each board meeting, preferably the following day.
• Develop a newsletter for staff that highlights events, activities, and personnel news within the system. Regularly distribute it to all school employees and invite them to contribute ideas and articles.

Other conditions also help to promote high levels of staff efficiency, morale, and satisfaction:

• adequate compensation, incentives, and recognition.
• opportunities for growth and professional advancement.
• reasonable job security.
• fair work assignments and work load.
• adequate fringe benefits, such as:
  • sick leave.
  • insurance for medical benefits.
  • assistants to help with such duties as keeping records and supervising classroom activities.
• respectful treatment in all aspects and phases of employment.
• fair and equitable promotion policies.
• carefully considering the requests and suggestions of the personnel policies committees.

Keep in mind that state law requires school districts to establish personnel policies committees when employees aren’t represented by a group that negotiates for them. These committees are discussed in Chapter 4.

The Board’s Relationship with Students and Parents

All organizations have several publics, that is, groups or categories of people who both observe and participate in the system. Students make up the single most important public of any school system. They, along with their parents, need and deserve effective communication from both school administrators and board members.

Traditionally, most school boards have dealt directly with students only on rare occasions or under unusual circumstances. Today, however, with lower age requirements for voting and for election to a school board, more students are taking an active interest in school district matters and becoming involved in its direction and decisions.

To promote communication and understanding, some boards invite a student to serve as an unofficial representative on the board. The student has no vote but can voice opinions and ask questions. Usually, students rotate from month to month so that several have the opportunity to sit in on board business during the school year.

Because schools exist to serve children, boards must become attuned to them, seeking opportunities to get acquainted, talk to them, and especially listen to them. Board members need to understand the many challenges students face, such as graduation requirements, appropriate behavior, health issues, marriage or pregnancy, peer pressure toward substance abuse, post-graduation options, and so on.

An effective way for board members to remain aware of conditions and climate in the schools is to regularly be in them. State law requires boards to visit classrooms frequently, at least once a year, while children are present. Such visits need to be arranged with the school principal in advance and announced beforehand. Then everyone can look forward to the planned visit as an opportunity for awareness and sharing, not a surprise inspection tour.

By staying attuned to students’ needs and aspirations, a board is better prepared to adopt policies that can prevent problems by addressing potentially troublesome areas. Such policies, carried out fairly and consistently, will improve the board’s relationship with students and their parents, while also supporting the system’s administrators.
Students must be fully informed, in writing, of the rules they’re required to follow. A handbook of those rules in age-appropriate language is an easy-to-use reference. All students must have adequate time to discuss and understand the rules under the guidance of a teacher, counselor, or other qualified staff member.

Parents and guardians also need to know what’s required of their children in all aspects of the school experience, including attendance, dress, and behavior standards, as well as the consequences of violations. Equipping both students and parents with clear, comprehensive information will minimize knowledge gaps, misunderstandings, and infractions.

School boards and educators have come to understand the essential role of parents’ meaningful involvement in their children’s education. Parents are their children’s first teachers, and they need to be valued and treated as important partners in students’ continuing education.

To that end, state law requires that each school help parents become knowledgeable and effective in supporting their children’s learning as they progress through the grades. In every public school, staff must work with students’ parents to craft a thoughtful, comprehensive parental involvement plan.

The law is specific about the areas that plan is to encompass. Based on the needs of students and their families, the plan must include the elements listed below.

- Genuinely welcome parents into the school and its classrooms.
- Identify activities throughout the school year to encourage parent involvement, including ways to recognize parents for participation in school life.
- Keep parents informed about the school’s calendar, curriculum, programs, assessment processes, and their children’s progress.
- Help parents understand the ways in which they can help their children learn.
- Promote two-way communication between school and home, including scheduled parent-teacher conferences.
- Support responsible parenting through such means as parent centers, parent kits, and relevant books and magazines for lending.
- Encourage parents to serve as a school volunteer in meaningful ways, either at the schoolhouse or in their home.
- Inform parents of secondary students how to be involved in decisions that will successfully lead students into postsecondary opportunities.

At every school, a certified staff member must be designated as a parent facilitator and is to receive a stipend for that service. The facilitator organizes training for staff and parents, helps create an atmosphere that is welcoming.
to parents, and ensures that parental participation is recognized as an asset to the school.

**The Board’s Relationship with the Community**

Board members must bear in mind that the schools don’t belong to them, but to the public—a**ll** of the people. Schools are operated on behalf of the public by the board as the people’s legally constituted representative. The public furnishes both the students and the financial support for the schools and determines, at election time, who its representatives will be.

As a result, a district’s board and staff can’t make progress with the school program any faster than the public will support. Fortunately, citizens are usually willing to sustain their schools in proportion to how well they understand and believe in education’s needs, challenges, and goals.

So, boards must continually ensure that the community has substantive, current information about the schools, about the quantity and quality of the services they offer, and about the ways in which they can be improved. In other words, regular and **meaningful** communication with the public is essential.

But communication is a two-way proposition. Informing the public is only half the job. The board also must seek input from the community, which is a challenging and continuous task. Listening to the public’s needs, concerns, and ideas equips the board with the knowledge and insight necessary for responsiveness.

Distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate communication between the board and the public is important. Effective communication depends not only on honoring laws, rules, and protocols, but also on practicing the principles that help people understand, appreciate, and respect one another.

Remember that **a single board member has no power, as authority resides within the body of the board and only when it’s meeting in a legally convened session**. The board must act as a whole, with all members equally informed and prepared to act objectively and impartially on business properly brought before them. So a citizen phoning a board member with confidential information or pressing for a favor is improper, and board members must not invite or allow such approaches.

A board is wise to adopt a policy that specifies how a single citizen or delegations can present themselves at a board meeting, setting out guidelines and time limits. An open microphone at a board meeting too easily tempts spontaneous outbursts of improper remarks or behavior. Better to organize a moderated public forum on an announced topic to encourage learning and discussion.
orderly proceedings and rational discussion. Another effective approach to constructive communication is deliberative dialogue, discussed next.

**Deliberative Dialogue and Study Circles**

School boards have several options for ways in which to properly and productively exchange information, views, and ideas with citizens. A deliberative dialogue model is one of the most effective approaches to successful communication between the board and community. Through this discussion process, people share their perspectives, listen to others, and build understanding.

Let’s examine the meaning of the term, *deliberative dialogue*, which is an organized, facilitated communication process for groups of people. *Dialogue* is give-and-take discussion that brings together many voices, stories, perspectives, and experiences to increase understanding about self and others. *Deliberation* is a thoughtful approach to decision-making in which people consider relevant information from multiple points of view.

Sharing in groups through deliberative dialogue, participants gain mutual respect and a sense of genuine connection with one another. As a result, their perspectives are enlarged, so they think more critically about options and possibilities.

The deliberative dialogue process can be focused on gathering information, exploring issues and options, resolving conflicts, improving relations, promoting collaboration, or solving complicated problems. Whatever the goal, the process can help boards and communities work together and learn from each other in a non-threatening, organized, and honest environment.

ASBA advocates the *Study Circles* deliberative dialogue model. For several years, we have promoted Study Circles initiatives to broaden public engagement in education, helping school communities throughout Arkansas find common ground, build trust, and solve problems. Through Study Circles, school district leaders identify community issues and priorities that need to be factored into decision making. The process also helps strengthen community awareness and support for the local public schools.

During the Study Circles process, multiple groups of 8 to 12 people regularly meet in “circles” over a period of time to address or “study” an important identified issue in a democratic, collaborative way. The groups are facilitated by local citizens who have been trained by ASBA staff in Study Circles methodology.

With the support and guidance of the facilitators, the study circles become a safe setting for dialogue that yields insight and understanding. As a result of their sharing, all who participate—parents, community members, students,
teachers, administrators, and school board members—gain ownership of the issues. That is, they discover a connection between personal experiences and school policies that deepens interest, concern, and commitment.

Boards aiming to foster support and input from the community will be wise to consider deliberative dialogue. ASBA staff can work with board members to design a program tailored to local needs.

**Community Involvement Programs**

Someone once observed that educating children is a job too vast and too important to leave to educators alone. For many years, schools throughout the state and nation have known that they need all the help they can get, which is usually more than they can pay for. They also recognize that the schools belong to the community, which has the right and the responsibility to support its school system through more than tax dollars alone.

As a result, school districts have embraced the concept of community involvement in education through organized, managed volunteer programs. Whether their focus is on parent involvement, school volunteers, school-community partnerships, or broad-based coalitions, these programs not only reap extra help for students and teachers, but strengthen the bond between schools and communities.

Arkansas leaders and legislators recognize parent and volunteer programs as legitimate, valuable partners in the education process. Many state laws promote, protect, and even require such involvement.

When the value of volunteer services to Arkansas schools is translated into dollars, the annual sum is in the millions. The worth of the resulting communication, understanding, confidence, and commitment is priceless. Studies show that school districts with high levels of community involvement are much more likely to pass millage issues.

School districts have devised programs from the simple to the highly sophisticated to capitalize on volunteer know-how and resources. Programs with names like Volunteers in Public Schools and Partners in Education have proliferated as a highly effective way to mobilize and manage volunteer help.

Such programs not only welcome parents, but also invite other citizens and all manner of community organizations to enter into productive relationships with the schools. The volunteer program can include everyone: parents and other family members, professionals and non-professionals, business and military personnel, retirees, and even other students, usually in peer- or cross-age tutoring programs or service learning classes.

*School-community partnerships* are a special type of volunteer program that pair schools with organized groups of people from the community. This...
type of partnership is generally defined as a voluntary relationship between a group and a school that meets the needs and uses the resources of both partners for their mutual benefit.

The community partner might be a business, civic or social group, government agency, college, military base, retirement facility, hospital, or faith-based organization. The other partner is usually a school, but it could also be an individual classroom, a grade level, department, project, or program. The partnership is based on the identified needs and resources of the schools and their partners to promote balance and reciprocity in the relationship, thus strengthening it.

Community partners may agree to furnish a wide variety of services, such as mentoring, resource speakers, field trips, and job shadowing experiences. They might offer materials and equipment or finance a special event. They could lend their expertise for financial management, planning, training, technology, research, construction projects, or any number of specialties.

In return, the schools commit to share their own talents and resources with their partners. For example, students might decorate a business lobby with their art, perform songs or a play on special occasions for a partner group, or write encouraging letters to the elderly or to military personnel abroad. Teachers might agree to conduct a computer literacy course for a group of retirees. A school might invite its partners to use the auditorium, library, or athletic facilities.

The possibilities are practically endless for ways in which partners can share with each other.

Volunteer managers know that volunteers work for free, but they don’t work for nothing. School districts that most successfully integrate volunteer services into meaningful support for education have learned to value their volunteers as non-paid staff and treat them accordingly. While the welfare of children is the heart of a volunteer program, its backbone is careful, coordinated management of the volunteers’ recruitment, placement, orientation, training, supervision, appraisal, and recognition.

Like any job in the education system, specialized knowledge and management skill are required to create and sustain healthy school volunteer and partnership programs. Fortunately, Arkansas pioneered this field many years ago. Leaders in the profession developed a Certified Volunteer Management program that trains and qualifies volunteer managers through the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium, a coalition of several state colleges and universities.

For more information on the CVM program, contact ASBA or the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.
School Board Meetings

Because school board members, individually and collectively, have authority only during their official meetings, this chapter examines the various types of board meetings and suggests ways in which the board can most effectively conduct its business.

Terms in the chapter include:

adjourned board meeting - a continuation of either a regular or special meeting that the board had previously adjourned to a later time or day.

agenda meeting - a board session, sometimes called a planning meeting, during which the agenda of an upcoming regular board meeting is agreed upon.

closed hearing - a session of the board that is closed to the public and convened upon the request of a student’s parent or guardian when the board is considering that student’s suspension or expulsion.

executive session - a private meeting of the board that can be held only for purposes specified by law and from which the general public and press are excluded. The board cannot vote during executive session.

parliamentary procedure - the patterns and rules that guide a group in an orderly, efficient manner of conducting a meeting and transacting business.

quorum - defined in a board’s bylaws as the number or proportion of members that must be present in order to conduct business. Commonly, a majority of members constitutes a quorum.

regular board meeting - regularly scheduled board meetings held at least monthly during the school year, but they may also be held when school is not in session.

special board meeting - an irregularly held meeting, sometimes referred to as a called meeting, convened by the proper procedures to decide a specific item of business.

The Board Meeting

The school board meeting is the means by which board members carry out their role and responsibility for public education in their district. Individual board members have the authority of their office only during legally held meetings, so the board can’t act in any place or in any way other than in such a meeting.

For example, a board might try to take action by phoning absent members for their agreement on a particular issue. Or an absent board member might want to vote by proxy, that is, by delegating his or her vote to another board member. Such actions are not only improper, they are illegal. The only way
Individual board members have the authority of their office only during legally held meetings, so the board can’t act in any place or in any way other than in such a meeting.

in which an individual board member can exercise his or her authority is by his or her voice and vote during a board meeting.

Because the board has significance and authority only at its meetings, the great importance of those sessions warrants close examination, which follows.

Types of Meetings

The law names only two types of school board meetings, regular and special. State law requires every school board to hold regular monthly meetings during the school term.

Regular meetings, as the name implies, are held according to some prearranged schedule. Even though boards must meet every month of the school year, they can meet more often if they want or need to. Most Arkansas boards meet throughout the year, including the summer months when most schools aren’t in session. Each board must decide for itself how often to convene to adequately handle its business and keep abreast of developments.

The board also can be called into session by its president, secretary, any three members of the board, or when requested by a written petition signed by 50 electors in the district. Such special meetings are often referred to as called meetings since they’re held irregularly and when called by the proper board officials. Usually such meetings are convened to decide a specific item of business, which can be stated in the meeting notice.

Special meetings should be called rarely and only for unusual situations, not for routine or minor matters that can be handled in the regular meeting. Just as with regular sessions, FOI requires that all the county’s newspapers, radio, and television stations be informed of a special meeting if those media have requested to be notified. Minimum notification time is two hours before the meeting.

Legally, any business can be transacted at a special meeting. The board should follow the agreed-upon agenda that prompted the call for the meeting, but if all members are present and agree to conduct additional business, they may do so. Even though this practice is legal, surprises aren’t conducive to positive school-community relations, so business not previously announced should be considered only when absolutely necessary. ASBA recommends that all districts have a written policy about changing a board agenda.

Two other terms often used in referring to board meetings are adjourned meetings and executive session. These aren’t actually additional types of meetings, but are forms of the two just discussed, as explained below.
An adjourned meeting is a continuation of either a regular or special meeting that the board was unable to complete and, therefore, voted to adjourn to a later time or day. The adjourned meeting picks up where the original left off and is subject to the same requirements and limitations as the original meeting.

Obviously, boards should strive to prepare for and conduct meetings so that business can be completed within a reasonable amount of time, making adjourned meetings infrequent. Yet sometimes an extraordinary matter requires more attention than the board can give it during a meeting’s usual time span. Then adjourning to a later time may ensure that everyone involved has fresher attention and sounder judgment.

Executive sessions are private, closed meetings of the board that can occur in conjunction with a regular or special board meeting. The general public and press are excluded from executive sessions. The superintendent isn’t automatically included in them, although the board may ask him or her to join them for all or part of the time.

Arkansas law permits executive sessions only for specific purposes: discussing the employment, appointment, promotion, demotion, discipline, or resignation of specific employees. The board may also conduct a hearing in executive session to consider a student’s suspension or expulsion. Before convening in executive session, the board must announce which of these reasons have prompted it, but without revealing the names of those who are the subject of the session. A board can’t meet in executive session to generally discuss personnel, personnel policies, or student matters.

Minutes aren’t taken during executive session, nor are the details of the discussion made public. Moreover, the board cannot vote while in executive session. After the private session, the board must reconvene in open session to take any vote or action on the closed-session matter in full view of everyone present, including any visitors or media representatives.

The board must never misuse executive sessions by voting during them or by exploring subjects other than those allowed by law. Abusing a private session is a sure way to destroy citizens’ confidence in the board.

**Meeting Records**

Keeping accurate records of each school board meeting is essential. Board minutes are important legal documents that contain a variety of valuable information that might someday appear in court as evidence. The minutes are the only legal record of what transpired at each meeting. As far as the board’s responsibility and authority go, its minutes have the force of law.
Although a member of the board may take minutes, ASBA recommends that recording the minutes and preparing them in final form is a task better assumed by someone else, perhaps a member of the superintendent’s staff. During meetings, the entire board needs to focus on the business at hand without one of them being distracted by taking minutes during the proceedings.

Even though the law requires one board member to serve as the group’s secretary, his or her duties don’t have to include taking minutes. At the minimum, the signature (or its facsimile) of the board’s secretary must appear on all employment contracts. Other duties may vary according to the district’s custom.

Minutes should be written clearly and accurately promptly following a meeting, based upon notes or a taped recording, and then duplicated for distribution. The minutes must be filed in a permanent district record, with copies furnished to all board members as soon as possible, certainly before time to send out the agenda for the next meeting.

If, after a meeting, the board regrets certain action that it has taken, that action can’t be “undone” by simply rewriting the minutes to change the decision. Instead, at its next meeting, the board must vote to rescind the previous action. Minutes are the history of what actually happened, and the board can alter them only under specific conditions. The board’s formal correction or addition to the minutes during an open meeting can correct a factual error or inadvertent omission.

In addition to the minutes, the board’s permanent record must include a copy of all district budgets.

Accurate minutes of each board meeting preserve the institutional memory of the school district and are a legal record that could very well wind up in a court of law one day. Thus, the minutes should be sufficiently detailed to clearly document all proceedings. Even so, minutes aren’t a transcript of who said what, but a record of the action taken.

Minutes should note:

- the type of meeting (regular, special, agenda, or adjourned).
- the name of the school district and city, as well as the date, time, and place of the meeting.
- names of the board members and whether each was present or absent.
- the name of the presiding officer.
- a notation that the minutes of the preceding meeting were approved as circulated, as read, or as corrected.
- every action of the board during the meeting.
• statements summarizing discussions of significant matters that may be useful background information at future meetings.
• the time the meeting adjourned.

The minutes should reflect the meaning of every board action as precisely as possible. Motions should be worded and recorded very carefully before put to a vote.

To promote clarity, write the minutes in paragraphs, one for each subject, and record:
• the name of who made each motion, but the seconder’s name is optional.
• the wording of each motion, including any amendments.
• the disposition of each motion, that is, whether it passed or failed.
• the disposition of matters that were considered but upon which no action was taken.

The completed minutes should be sent to the board so they can be carefully reviewed by all members before the next meeting. Advance distribution of the minutes alleviates the need to devote board meeting time to reading them, because they can be approved as circulated, or corrected if necessary and then approved.

Because school board records are public documents and subject to FOI (even in draft form), the minutes should be available to the public through districtwide distribution methods. Some districts routinely send the minutes to each school or to the press for publication. Circulating a one-page summary of board actions to school personnel is a time-saving and cost-efficient way to pass on current information, as is posting the summary or the complete minutes on the district’s website. Under FOI, all districts must make a meeting’s minutes available to interested citizens upon request.

Voting

Even though the law covers numerous aspects of school board functions, statutes refer very little to voting, although the provision “by a majority vote” is found in some of them.

But the law is very specific about certain aspects of voting: All board members must vote, including the president. However, in a conflict of interest, the law requires any involved board member to abstain from voting by leaving the meeting until the vote is over. If that member nevertheless remains at the session but abstains from voting, the abstention counts as a “no” vote.
ASBA recommends that, in potential conflicts of interest in any matter, the involved board member should avoid any hint of impropriety by leaving the room until both discussion and voting have concluded.

With these exceptions, the law leaves decisions about voting and recording votes to local board policy. For example, the law doesn’t require individual votes to be reflected in the minutes, but some boards choose to do so.

Most boards call for a voice vote or a show of hands, but if written ballots are used, each board member should sign his or her ballot. The ballots are passed to the board president or secretary, who announces the result of the poll.

Voting by secret ballot is unlawful under FOI. The law requires public business to be conducted openly so that citizens can be aware of how officials are performing. After the meeting, the ballots should be collected and kept as a permanent part of the minutes.

The following section on parliamentary procedure suggests several resources that discuss various voting methods.

**Parliamentary Procedure**

Conducting board meetings according to a form of parliamentary procedure is optional. But following parliamentary form helps meetings proceed efficiently, minimizes misunderstandings, and promotes orderly record keeping. As a result, many boards adopt, by policy or resolution, some accepted form of parliamentary procedure to follow during their sessions. ASBA highly recommends that all boards follow a parliamentary form.

Among the most commonly used references are *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (10th Edition)*; *Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*; *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance* by O. Garfield Jones; and *Riddick’s Rules of Procedure*. They are comprehensive guides to conducting meetings and contain a wealth of information, including definitions of terms, suggestions for keeping minutes, models of agenda, and methods for voting. (See the Resources section of this handbook for the website of a professional parliamentarian.)

Whether formal parliamentary procedure or simplified rules followed by general consent, every board needs to agree on a systematic and orderly process for conducting its business.

**Order of Business and Agenda**

To help promote smooth, efficient meetings, board bylaws should include an order of business for the board to follow during its meetings. The bylaws
also should establish a process for the board to use in developing its meeting agenda.

The order of business determines the sequence in which the board will take up various topics. The agenda establishes the content of the meeting, that is, which matters the board will consider. Preparing an agenda before each meeting helps the board stay focused on the current subjects that require their attention.

Here’s a sample order of business:
1. Call to order.
2. Roll call and recognition of a quorum.
3. Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting are read (or reviewed as circulated), approved, and signed, preferably by the board’s president or secretary. All corrections or additions to the minutes are made before the motion to approve the minutes.
4. Communications, both to and from the board.
5. Listening to delegations, if permitted by board policy.
6. Reports from the superintendent or other administrators, such as presentation of the latest financial statement, bills for approval, and various other information.
7. Unfinished business from the previous meeting.

As the schedule of matters the board will address, the agenda can be a simple list of topics, or it can be expanded to include supporting data to help explain and clarify the subjects to be discussed. This more detailed form, which can include charts, graphs, statistics, and factual summaries, is preferred by most boards and recommended by most authorities. The board, not the superintendent, determines the level of detail that will best meet the need for adequate information.

The superintendent is usually responsible for preparing the agenda in consultation with the board president. The board should establish a procedure for guiding its members or other individuals or groups in placing items on the agenda. The board also can adopt a policy specifying how to deal with hearing delegations that weren’t anticipated on the prepared agenda.

Some boards precede their regular meetings with agenda (or planning) meetings to establish what to include on the agenda of the upcoming session. The board may want to adopt a policy that sets time limits for presenting and considering each potential agenda item.

In determining the sequence of items for discussion at the regular board meeting, the agenda should follow the board’s established order of business.
Board members should receive the agenda and any supplemental data well before the meeting, usually three to five days. Advance information gives members time to think about the upcoming items before making decisions at the session. Many boards routinely furnish the agenda to the media, each school building, and all district departments. Copies should also be made available for visitors at the meeting.

An agenda can be confining or flexible. Some boards refuse to act on matters that aren’t on the agenda, because members haven’t had time to consider the subject sufficiently for a prudent decision. Other boards are more flexible and will discuss topics that don’t appear on the agenda. Each board must decide which procedure to follow in light of local situations.

**Public Meetings**

As noted earlier, school board meetings must be open to the public, except for executive sessions. A closed hearing is also legal, upon parental request, when the board is considering a student’s suspension or expulsion. The parents or legal guardian can be present at this session, which is sometimes referred to as a hearing conducted in executive session. Even then, the board must take any vote during a meeting that is open to the public, *never* in executive or closed session.

The requirement for the board to vote in public may seem rather stringent, but the thinking behind it is sound: An informed community is usually an involved and supportive community. Any suggestion of secret action on the part of the board creates suspicion and distrust, a sure way to undermine citizens’ confidence. A school board that operates openly and in good faith with the community is building credibility and trust, which are always basic to productive relationships. The board should encourage the public and the media to attend board meetings and to offer constructive suggestions.

From time to time, delegations of citizens may appear at the board meeting to make a request, register a complaint, offer a recommendation, or present a petition. Below are some suggestions offered as guidelines for dealing with delegations.

1. Require all petitions and requests for an audience before the board to be directed to the superintendent, preferably several days before the meeting so the agenda can include them. Then the superintendent will have time to gather needed information and alert the board to matters it may have to address. The necessary lapse of time also helps to avoid impulsive encounters.

2. Treat every request or petition with courtesy, even when you don’t agree with it.
3. Have a defined procedure for hearing delegations, including:
   • the time when delegations may be heard during the meeting. Scheduling them early in the proceedings prevents them from having to wait for the board to conduct its other business.
   • how long any one speaker or delegation may keep the floor. Common limitations are five minutes per speaker or 20 minutes per delegation, although each board will need to consider its own local situation in deciding time limits.
   • what subjects delegations may bring before the board.

4. Never grant speakers a place on the agenda to address the board about personnel issues. The board is obligated to remain impartial in all personnel matters, for it may eventually need to consider a disciplinary action or dismissal. Board members must preserve their objectivity by insisting that all personnel matters be brought before the board through the proper channel, which is the superintendent. Citizens with concerns about employees should be invited to share their comments with the superintendent in private.

5. Insist upon having complete information before taking action. Boards should seldom act on the requests of delegations or petitioners at the meeting in which they’re heard, particularly when basic policy or controversial issues are involved. The board can’t allow itself to be stampeded by any single–and possibly non-representative–point of view.

6. Direct the superintendent or a staff member to study the issues and present the board with the facts needed to intelligently review them. Tell the delegation when to expect an answer from the board or superintendent.

7. Direct specific questions to representatives of the delegation if needed to clarify the topic, but avoid debating or arguing the merits of the complaint or proposal.

8. Remember that citizens have a right to bring matters to the attention of the board, but they aren’t entitled to participate in the deliberations as the board makes its decision. Citizens can take part in the discussion only when invited by the board.

9. Don’t allow individual guests or delegations to disrupt the board’s business or to seek publicity through a demonstration. A clear set of bylaws and procedures for conducting meetings will help avoid disruptions, as will the board’s commitment to support the presiding officer in firmly following the rules. Nevertheless, the board must be prepared to take such action as needed (including police aid in extreme cases) to ensure the proper conduct of business.
Orientation, Training, and Recognition of Board Members

When new members join a board, they face unfamiliar roles and many challenging responsibilities, including learning how to perform their duties comfortably and well. This chapter explores orientation and training, which are the essential foundation for effective boardmanship. It also explains the ASBA recognition programs that encourage and honor the growth and achievement of board members, both individually and collectively.

This chapter will introduce the concepts of:
- **boardmanship** - the skills board members need in order to work together effectively and ensure competent governance of a local school district.
- **inservice training** - instruction that is conducted by qualified trainers and offered during a person’s employment or period of elected or voluntary service. Within a school district, inservice training for personnel is often termed *staff development* or *professional development*.
- **orientation** - the process that prepares people for involvement in a new situation, providing the background and overview needed for them to understand new roles, surroundings, or procedures.
- **training** - short-term, sequential instruction for building skills or proficiency in a certain area.

Helping New Board Members

Most newcomers to the board are eager to learn, and “on-the-job learning” often accurately describes their initiation into service. Because board members have access to few, if any, formal training programs before they actually take office and begin to serve, most of them learn their job through experience.

But experience alone can be a very slow and even painful teacher. Most beginners find themselves confronted with unfamiliar people, facts, and conditions, so they need help in getting their bearings. Thus, an orientation and training program led by knowledgeable instructors is so important that it can’t be left to chance.

Orientation

Orientation and training are processes that are linked and complementary, but they aren’t synonymous. Orientation is a procedure that helps put people at ease by introducing them to a new role, different surroundings, unfamiliar people, or unaccustomed procedures. Through orientation, people begin to acquire the sense of comfort and connectedness that comes with familiarity.
Training, on the other hand, is focused instruction to acquire specific skills or proficiency in a certain area.

A well planned local orientation program will significantly shorten the time new board members need to function fully and effectively in board business. The superintendent and seasoned board members must take the initiative to design and carry out a comprehensive orientation to the school district and the board.

Orientation for all new members should include at least the following elements:

- **introductions** to the other board members, the school system’s administrative personnel, and members of the teaching staff.
- **a guided tour of school facilities**, or in larger systems, a tour of representative schools.
- **an overview of the instructional program** through discussions with school personnel.
- **review of documents**, such as the policy manual, school board minutes, budgets, various reports, school surveys, state school laws, student and parent handbooks, and any other pertinent documents, data, and records.
- **adequate time for a wide-ranging conversation with the superintendent** for an exchange of information and ideas.

**Training**

The concept of boardmanship refers to the understandings and abilities that enable board members to competently fulfill their role and consistently contribute to the effective work of the board and the school district. Board members must work to acquire boardmanship skills through a continuing, high-quality training regimen.

Training is an instructional process that leads to learners’ skill or proficiency in certain areas. Whether focused on an individual or a group, training is specific, practical, short-term, and conducted in a sequence of steps, building on the basics and progressing to the more complex. **Inservice** training means that the instruction takes place during, rather than before, a person’s period of service or employment.

(Today, the term **professional development** is increasingly the preferred designation for inservice training for school personnel. However, many districts use **staff development** to indicate that inservice includes training programs for employees at all levels of the organization.)

Training for boards is so important that Arkansas law mandates it. Every year, all school board members must earn at least six hours of instruction in various topics. These topics are to include not only the state’s school laws and school operations, but also the authority and responsibilities of
board members, such as legal requirements, role differentiation, financial management, and improving student achievement.

New legislation, which became effective January 1, 2006, requires all newly elected board members to participate in nine hours of training by the end of the year following the year in which they were elected.

If any member of a school board fails to complete annual training as required by law, the consequences are serious: The school district can be placed on probationary status for violating the Standards of Accreditation, and the State Board of Education can enact further stiff sanctions.

When we consider all that training can accomplish, we can understand why it’s so important to effective boardmanship. Training can serve multiple purposes, even simultaneously, by:

- **promoting awareness and familiarization** with roles, programs, places, and concepts. To illustrate, training can provide: an introduction to a particular reading program and its philosophy, goals, procedures, costs, and managers; familiarization with the layout and operation of a department, such as the school district’s transportation or maintenance division; understanding of a concept, such as an innovative charter school, its purpose, potential benefits, and limitations.

- **introducing new skills or strengthening old ones**, such as using parliamentary procedure to promote smooth, orderly meetings.

- **altering attitudes and outlooks** by fostering understanding, building confidence, and imbuing a sense of mission and motivation.

- **building group cohesiveness and engendering a sense of belonging.** Positive group interaction and shared growth experiences go far to kindle or reinforce commitment to schools’ success.

- **promoting positive public relations.** Participating in quality board training shows you’re serious about doing your best in the job you were elected to fulfill.

- **bestowing a reward.** Top-notch training can be a dividend that honors people’s worth by helping them climb the ladder of proficiency.

As the state’s leading expert in all aspects of board training, ASBA presents a New School Board Member Workshop every fall after the state’s annual school elections, which are held in September. The one-day session is designed for novice school district leaders and covers a great deal of information in several areas.

Every fall the association also holds a meeting for members in each of 14 regions in the state. The ASBA staff who lead the regional meetings share their perspectives on current events and issues in education. A discussion session allows everyone to ask questions, express concerns, and exchange ideas.
Early every December, the annual ASBA Conference offers numerous training sessions for the state’s school board members. Other events, such as a seminar on school laws, are scheduled at various times. Each spring, ASBA jointly sponsors a conference with the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators. ASBA also encourages board members to attend seminars and conferences sponsored by the National School Boards Association and NSBA’s Southern Region Conference.

Another learning opportunity is the ASBA Board Academy, a professional development event for school boards and their superintendents that spans a long weekend. The ASBA Academy is modeled on approaches developed by the Arkansas Leadership Academy and is coupled with the Key Work of School Boards (see Chapter 9) to focus on building leadership and collaboration skills.

Led by expert trainers, the ASBA Board Academy is an intensive, energizing experience for participants. Each board and its superintendent work together as a team to learn and practice team-building and boardmanship skills. By the Academy’s end, each team not only has a plan for putting its skills and insights to work, but also a revitalized sense of commitment and optimism.

Learn more about the Board Academy by contacting ASBA.

**Boardmanship Awards**

To encourage and reward school board members for pursuing their inservice training, ASBA sponsors a Boardmanship Awards Program. The program honors not only individual members for their continuing education, but also recognizes entire boards whose members have all attained various training levels. Awards are achieved through two distinct but interrelated programs.

The first is an awards program for individuals to certify that participants have completed progressive levels of inservice training. The program also recognizes other efforts to enhance personal boardmanship skills, as well as to promote the local board and ASBA.

Specifically, the ASBA awards for individual board members:

- recognize service to school governance.
- certify participation in mandatory (required by state law) and voluntary trainings.
- commend board members for:
  - participating in local civic activities.
  - leading training activities for ASBA and affiliate organizations.
  - serving on committees of state, regional, national, and governmental associations.
  - assuming leadership roles through such activities as testifying before legislative panels.
These awards emphasize training and participation that exceed the state mandate for board training. The awards, which are based on a prescribed point system related to specific criteria, have four levels:

1. **Honor Board Member**, achieved by accumulating 15 hours in such authorized activities as training sessions, serving as a panelist, or testifying on behalf of ASBA before legislative committees.

2. **Outstanding Board Member**, which reflects accumulation of 25 hours in authorized activities.

3. **Master Board Member**, signifying an accrual of 50 authorized hours.

4. **Pinnacle Award**, representing 200 accumulated hours.

Recognition items include lapel pins, certificates, or plaques. Recipients are announced through ASBA news releases to local media. Further, these awards tie into the next aspect of the recognition program.

The second prong of ASBA’s program to encourage and honor boardmanship is a school board recognition program. It singles out Arkansas school boards that achieve education excellence and ethical service to students through a shared vision, team effort, and unified commitment to ensure the best possible climate and program for education opportunities in their communities.

These awards go to entire school boards, rather than individual members, at three levels:

1. **Honor Board**, a designation earned when the majority of a board’s directors have achieved the individual Honor Board Member status.

2. **Outstanding Board**, indicating that all members have met the minimum criteria for the individual Outstanding Board Member award, plus other hours that rank the board among the top ten percent of Arkansas boards for participating in training and meeting other criteria.

3. **Master Board**, which is the highest recognition for a board that has met the maximum objective criteria and is among the top five percent of such boards in the state. Additional subjective criteria and documentation are necessary, and a committee determines the award recipients.

The Master Board receives a plaque commemorating the award, and the name of the board is added to a permanent plaque displayed in the
ASBA office. After winning this award, the same school district’s board isn’t eligible to be considered for it again for at least five years.

ASBA tracks board member’s participation in ASBA-sanctioned events, recording the hours earned and notifying boards when they achieve any of the three recognition levels.

**Outstanding Service Award**

Each year, ASBA presents an award to an individual for exemplary service to public education. The honoree can be a board member, administrator, school attorney, principal, teacher, other district employee, or community member who merits special recognition for distinguished service to the public schools.

This award is the Dr. Daniel L. Pilkinton Award for Outstanding Service to Public Education, honoring Dr. Dan Pilkinton for his lifetime of service. He was the first executive secretary of the school boards association and served a second time in that position. He was a deputy director and interim acting director of the Arkansas Department of Education, and he returned to serve ASBA in his retirement.

The coveted “Dr. Dan” award is presented during a special awards ceremony at the annual ASBA Conference.
Legislation and the Art of Advocacy

Understanding the Arkansas legislative process and how to appropriately influence it through effective advocacy are the subjects of this chapter.

Some of the terms in this section are explained within the text, and others are defined here:

**advocacy** - also known as lobbying, it is the process of trying to influence the thinking and action of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause, bill, or action.

**appropriation bill** - a legislative motion that authorizes the government to spend money that the bill designates for a particular purpose.

**biennial session** - the regular meetings of the Arkansas legislature that are held every other year.

**conference committee** - a group of representatives from both the House and Senate who are charged with reconciling disagreements on similar bills that have originated in both houses.

**engrossed bill** - a bill that has been amended by adding, deleting, or otherwise changing the bill’s original or previous language.

**initiated act** - a method of legislating that requires a vote of the people instead of a vote of the legislature for a proposed measure to become law.

Advocacy

The United States Congress has been called the world’s greatest “law factory.” The surprise, however, is that the Arkansas legislature produces new laws at a greater rate than Congress.

Each time the state’s legislature convenes, the lawmaking process begins to grind as special interest groups shovel proposed new laws into the machinery. If evidence is needed for that, a review of the 2005 legislative session reveals that 3,176 bills were introduced and 2,325 of them were enacted into law, a record number.

The tremendous volume of legislation and its far-reaching effects make advocacy essential—not only advocating for something, but as often as not, against something. Chances are that for every group seeking creation of a new law, at least that number are working against it. So the skill of effective persuasion is of ever growing importance to school board members.

By making personal contacts with elected officials and by keeping them informed, citizens can help influence the process and the resulting laws that will affect them back home. School board members must be vigilant and
vigorously with local input into legislation. Otherwise they may ultimately have to navigate significant obstacles to fulfilling their commitment to ensure the best possible education for their communities.

Effective Advocacy

Because each local school district must operate according to what happens at the statehouse, school board members must learn how to become grassroots advocates. Effective advocacy depends on both knowledge of the facts and on skill in building positive relationships. Below are some practical tips for becoming an effective advocate.

1. **Know your legislator.**
   If you haven’t met newly elected legislators, the first step is to get to know them. Introduce yourself to each one either in person or through a letter requesting an appointment for a chat. You and the legislator benefit from personal contact, because together you’re building a relationship that will facilitate future interaction. The legislator will feel freer to call you for your perspective on proposed legislation, and you’ll feel more comfortable in offering candid feedback.

2. **Know the legislation.**
   A legislator’s time is extremely limited, so before you approach a lawmaker, know the issue and have the facts to support your position. Get right to the core of the issue and present your information clearly and concisely. Offer to answer any questions or to find the answers you don’t have.

3. **Know the basic legislative process.**
   Understanding the steps that transform a bill into a law (outlined later in this chapter) is critical to effective lobbying. Your input can be valuable at several action points in the process:
   - when bills are originated.
   - during committee consideration.
   - during consideration in a session of the Senate or House.
   - during the deliberations of a conference committee.
   - during the governor’s consideration.
   While your input about the local effect of legislation can be helpful at any time, concentrate your advocacy at the stage the bill has reached in its progression toward final adoption.

4. **Know how to be firm, but friendly.**
   Never try to force a legislator to commit to a specific vote. Overbearing tactics can backfire and permanently damage your credibility and access. However, once your legislator is aware of the issue and your position on it, you can begin asking for a commitment. Throughout the process, extending courtesy and respect to your legislator is essential.
5. **Attack the issue, not the person.**
   When you and a legislator disagree, never threaten, present unfounded allegations, publicly express indignation, or engage in any type of rude behavior. You don’t have to avoid comment when you disagree on an issue, but be clear that you oppose the issue, not the people involved with it.

6. **Remember that you don’t want to:**
   - be repetitious, either in your statements or with materials duplicated from other persons.
   - send a form letter to your legislator.
   - be evasive.
   - be antagonistic.
   - assume your legislator has read material you sent previously.
   - distort information.
   - overdo efforts to persuade.

7. **Remember that you do want to:**
   - get to know your legislator.
   - localize your concern, that is, provide concise information about how a proposed bill will affect the legislator’s district.
   - have all pertinent cost figures available.
   - present any relevant past experience.
   - use demonstration materials, such as charts, to make your points clearer.
   - maintain ongoing communication with your legislator.
   - invite your legislator to some of your school functions.
   - always say thank you.

Learning to become effective and comfortable with advocacy is a continuous growth process, the result of increasing experience, knowledge, and personal contacts.

Some of the most successful advocacy is at the grassroots level, as most legislators are always willing to listen to knowledgeable and reasonable constituents. Like all of us, lawmakers want to hear familiar voices and see friendly faces, so they usually find communication easier with individuals from their home area, especially those with whom they have a working relationship.

**Composition of the Arkansas Legislature**
Arkansas has a **bicameral** legislature, meaning that it is composed of two legislative **bodies** or **houses**: the Senate and the House of Representatives.
The Arkansas Senate has 35 members, constitutionally required to be at least 25 years old, a state resident for two years, and a resident of the senatorial district for one year. All senators serve four-year terms, and none can serve more than two four-year terms. The Lieutenant Governor serves as President of the Senate and presides over Senate meetings during legislative sessions.

The Arkansas House of Representatives has 100 members. Each legislative district has between one and three elected representatives, depending on the district’s population. A member of the House must be at least 21 years old, a state resident for two years, and a resident in the district for one year. No representative can serve more than three two-year terms. The Speaker of the House, elected by the membership every two years, presides over House meetings.

The state constitution specifies that the Arkansas General Assembly is to meet at the seat of government (the state capitol) every two years, beginning the second Monday in January. The regular biennial session is not to last more than 60 days, unless a two-thirds vote of the legislature extends the session.

How a Bill Becomes an Arkansas Law

Any member of the House or Senate may introduce a bill by filing 10 copies of it with the Calendar Clerk, who assigns it a number. The bill is introduced by its sponsoring legislator and given a first reading by the Reading Clerk, who usually reads only the title. If the body (the members of either the Senate or House, depending on where the bill is introduced) so votes, the bill must be read in full, but a complete reading is rare at this point.

Then follows the second reading, when only the title is usually read. The bill can be amended only during its second reading. Amendments must be submitted in writing. An amendment to add, delete, or change the wording in a bill must follow the same course as an original bill. If the bill is amended, it is engrossed to include the amendment.

Then the bill is assigned to the appropriate committee for consideration. For example, bills having to do primarily with school matters would be considered by the Education Committee of each house. Bills may be taken up in one of four ways: in chronological order; as a special order of business; in a public hearing; or as a privileged matter.

After the bill follows its course through the committee, it is recommended to the full body with one of four designations: Do Pass, Do Pass As Amended, Do Not Pass, or Without Recommendation. The bill’s sponsor then places it on the body’s calendar for consideration on the floor, that is, when the body is meeting.
Upon the bill’s third reading, the Reading Clerk usually reads all of it. Debate on the bill follows, and if a member wants to amend it, the bill must return to a second reading. Ultimately, the bill faces a vote.

Most bills are adopted by a simple majority vote. Most appropriations bills and bills to increase taxes, however, require a three-fourths vote of the House and the Senate. Initiated acts may only be amended or repealed by a two-thirds vote of both houses. If a bill passes in one house, it is sent to the other body for consideration. Here, it undergoes the same sequence of events, beginning with a first reading.

When both houses fail to agree on similar bills, the differences are reconciled by a conference committee representing both the House and the Senate. When the committee agrees upon a compromise, it must be presented to both houses for their approval. If the second house amends the bill, it must return to the house in which it originated to be voted upon as amended.

After approval by both houses, the bill is referred to the Committee on Enrolled Bills. There it’s certified for correctness, signed by the presiding officer of each house, and then sent to the governor. Within five days the governor must sign, veto, or refer the bill back to its house of origin along with his objections. The bill can be adopted over the governor’s veto by a simple majority vote of the House and the Senate. If the governor doesn’t sign or return the bill with five days, it becomes law.

Bills presented to the governor during the final five days of the session must be signed or vetoed within 20 days of the General Assembly’s adjournment or the bills become law without his signature. Once they become law, all acts are assigned a number and filed with the Secretary of State.

**Outline of Steps from Bill to Law**

Below is a quick-reference outline of the steps through which a bill progresses on its way to becoming law.

1. **Bill is introduced**: Any member of the House or Senate may introduce a bill by filing 10 copies of it with the Calendar Clerk, who numbers the bill.

2. **First reading**: The Reading Clerk reads the title only, unless the body (the House or the Senate) votes to require reading the bill in full. Customarily, the rules are suspended and the bill moves on for its second reading.

3. **Second reading**: Again, only the title is read.
4. **Amendments**: Changes to a bill, such as additions, deletions, or new language, are in order only during the bill’s second reading. Amendments must be in writing and must take the same course as the bill. If amended, the bill is engrossed to include the amendment.

5. **Referral to committee**: The bill is referred to the appropriate committee according to the bill’s topic.

6. **Committee consideration**: The committee may hold public hearings if interested citizens or groups request it. A two-third’s vote of the House membership is necessary to remove a bill from a committee that has had it for less than 10 days. A majority vote is required to remove a bill from committee after 10 days. Senate rules require committees to report on all bills within 10 days. Committee recommendations are usually either Do Pass, Do Pass As Amended, Do Not Pass, or Without Recommendation.

7. **Third reading**: The Reading Clerk usually reads the bill in full.

8. **Debate**: The bill may be discussed. If a member wishes to amend it, the bill must be returned to a second reading for that purpose.

9. **Vote on the bill**: Most bills are adopted by a simple majority vote of the House and Senate. Most appropriation bills and bills to increase taxes require a three-fourths vote of House and Senate. Initiated acts may be amended or repealed by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

10. **Bill fails or bill passes**.

11. **Passed bill moves**: The bill goes to the other house and follows the same procedure as outlined above.

12. **Second house amends**: If the second house amends the bill, it must return to the house in which it originated to be voted upon as amended.

13. **Conference committee**: If the two houses can’t agree on similar bills, the differences are reconciled by a conference committee, representing both House and Senate. Compromises agreed upon by this committee are subject to approval by both houses.

14. **Committee on Enrolled Bills**: When passed by both houses, the bill is referred to the Committee on Enrolled Bills and is certified for correctness, signed by the presiding officer of each house, and sent to the governor.
15. **Governor’s action**: The governor must sign, veto, or refer the bill back to its house of origin with his objections within five days. The bill may be passed over the governor’s veto by a simple majority vote of House and Senate. If the governor doesn’t sign or return the bill within five days, it becomes a law. Bills presented to the governor in the last five days of the session must be signed or vetoed within 20 days of the General Assembly’s adjournment or the bills become law without the governor’s signature.

16. **Acts are numbered**: All acts are given a number and filed with the Secretary of State.

**Legislative Update**

During each session of the General Assembly, ASBA updates school boards on proposed and pending legislation through a written *Legislative Update*. The Update is sent to all of the state’s school board members and superintendents either by mail or e-mail and is also posted on the association’s Internet homepage. A link on the page will take readers to the Arkansas legislative database, where bills are posted in their entirety. Special legislative alerts also may appear on the ASBA website.

At the conclusion of each legislative session, ASBA reviews all newly enacted laws pertaining to public education. ASBA specialists then formulate sample school board policies that specifically relate to the new laws. The policies are bound into a Model Policy Manual and made available to Arkansas school boards through ASBA’s Model Policy Service. (Refer to Chapter 4 for more information about the Model Policy Service.)

**Federal Relations Network**

School board members from each congressional district serve as Arkansas’ representatives on the Federal Relations Network, part of the national legislative network created through the National School Boards Association. NSBA keeps the network informed on the status of federal legislation and asks constituents to communicate with Arkansas senators and congressmen in Washington about the legislation and pertinent issues.
The Key Work of School Boards

In this chapter, we’ll discuss the concept of systems thinking, as applied to school leadership by the National School Boards Association, along with a framework that guides the key work of school leaders toward student achievement.

This chapter presents a number of terms, including these:

- **alignment** - parts or elements that are closely and reasonably related, connected, or in cooperation with one another, such as tests being aligned with what students have been taught.
- **assessments** - tests or other tools that measure students’ skills and knowledge and indicate the extent to which students are meeting the standards that have been set for them.
- **climate** - the atmosphere that is created by the combination of behaviors, attitudes, and surroundings.
- **criterion-referenced test** - a standardized exam to assess a student’s knowledge and progress related to a specific set of standards and measured only in relation to those standards.
- **culture** - the prevailing pattern of behavior, relationships, and expectations that characterize an organization.
- **norm-referenced test** - a standardized exam that is used to measure and compare a student’s knowledge against a national sample of students at the same grade level.
- **standard** - a degree or level of requirement or achievement, based on something that is valued and against which progress is measured. In schools, standards tell what knowledge and skills students need and how well they must perform to meet the standard.
- **system** - a group of interrelated and interdependent elements that form a complex whole.
- **vision** - looking beyond the present toward a desired future.

A Framework for Action

School boards face both overwhelming challenges and exciting opportunities within the education reform that swirls around us. The need for fresh ideas, new directions, and strong community connections has thrust school boards into a demanding leadership position as never before. Today, school boards are expected to create the conditions in which students can meet rigorous standards of knowledge and performance.

To help school boards in their work, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) has developed a framework called the Key Work of School Boards, published in a guidebook of the same name. Key Work views the overriding mission of school boards as student achievement, in conjunction with community engagement to promote it. Based on the conviction that
“excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom,” Key Work introduces the concept of systems thinking as a philosophical and action framework for school leadership.

The Standards for Arkansas School Boards (see Appendix F) encompass the Key Work elements, and this chapter summarizes highlights of the Key Work Guide. Yet ASBA urges readers to study the entire Key Work of School Boards Guidebook, which is available through the NSBA website, www.nsba.org. The book is rich in description, explanation, examples, and tools to guide school boards in their work. Each chapter concludes with excellent self-assessments with which boards can gauge their progress in relation to each key area.

**Systems Thinking**

Viewing an organization, such as a school district, in terms of its entire health and wholeness is at the heart of systems thinking. A system can be defined as a group of interrelated and interdependent elements that form a complex whole. What happens in one part of the system affects the other parts of the system.

A school system is certainly complex, made up of many divisions that each have a different but interrelated focus and function. Yet they all must fit together harmoniously, working toward the common goal of promoting student success.

Because of their connectivity, what happens in one department, one school, or even one classroom can affect the entire system. For example, if the transportation system fails, students aren’t in school for their lessons. Conversely, on the positive side, a dynamic reading program in the primary grades sends proficient readers up the grade progression.

No part of the school system can act in isolation. Just like the human body, the health of one organ or one limb affects the health of the entire body, for good or for ill. So, as school boards think, plan, and act, they must keep their attention directed at how their work influences the school system as a whole.

The Key Work of School Boards is a framework for decision making and action that is based on systems thinking. The framework targets eight essential areas, which comprise principles, methods, and tools for understanding and creating more effective school systems:

- vision
- standards
- assessment
- accountability
- alignment
- climate
- collaborative relationships
- continuous improvement

The remainder of this chapter reviews each of these areas.
Keep in mind that these eight areas aren’t necessarily sequential actions on a list, meaning that one must be in place before the next can be considered. Nor can any single element be “checked off” as completed and free to drift out of mind. Rather, the areas are always linked, constantly interweaving with one another and changing over time as conditions change and new data are gathered. Thus, a system becomes what is termed a learning organization, meaning that it is constantly adjusting according to what it learns from both internal and external information.

Not only is none of the Key Work elements independent from the others, but creating and sustaining them must be done in connection with the entire school community. The school board points the way, but laying out the roadmap and sustaining the journey is a shared responsibility.

Vision

Vision isn’t just about seeing what is around us, but looking beyond the present to what we want to see in the future. Vision springs from where we are now and where we want to be. It focuses on the future so that leaders can take action to shape a preferred future, rather than accepting one that just happens.

Powerful, motivating visions develop through a great deal of dialog and deliberation among all stakeholders in the school community. None of us is as smart as all of us, the old saying goes, recognizing the power in collective wisdom and wishes. For a school district, “all of us” means not only school personnel, but students, parents, and the broad community, including business, government, faith-based institutions, and higher education.

When everyone is drawn into the vision-building process, the resulting sense of ownership binds them together and invests them in bringing the vision to life. As a matter of fact, community engagement is essential to all aspects of systems thinking, because the school system is part of the community and both responsive and responsible to it.

Creating the vision is a process that can be facilitated in several ways. One effective method is deliberative dialog, discussed earlier in Chapter 5, which brings stakeholders together in organized, facilitated discussion groups. No matter which means are used, participants must identify and reach consensus on their core values and beliefs as the foundation upon which they build a shared vision that will inspire and mobilize everyone to move toward it.

Whatever the particulars of the vision, its central thrust must be student achievement. A school district’s entire reason for being is to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge to succeed in a world that is growing ever more complex and challenging.
Standards

A standard is a degree or level of requirement or achievement, based on something that is valued and against which progress is measured. Expressed another way, standards are the measure of comparison for quantitative or qualitative value.

To illustrate, an education standard tells what knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire and how well students must perform in order to meet the standard. Some educators distinguish between these two aspects of standards with different terms: Content standards describe what students need to know and be able to do; performance standards describe how well students need to demonstrate various skills and knowledge to be considered proficient.

Based on its standards for student achievement, the district formulates its goals and objectives to in relation to them, so that all work is focused toward achievement. To promote them as the target toward which the entire school community aims, standards must be:

- stated in simple terms.
- reasonable.
- challenging to the student.
- understood by all.
- consistent with state and national standards.

In the systems approach, one of the board’s most important leadership tasks is establishing standards of performance that have the characteristics listed above. Beyond relating to state and national standards, local standards also must reflect what the school community wants for its students, not only academically, but socially and personally, so that graduates are well rounded and ready for higher education or the workplace.

Key Work points out that benchmarking is a helpful way to identify which standards are needed. (The term, benchmark, stems from the practice of craftsmen who fix a mark on their workbench as a point from which, or toward which, to measure.) Benchmarking involves searching for exemplary practices and programs that can serve as models or inspiration for appropriate standards.

For example, if a district needs to establish reading readiness standards, it can learn from a school district that already has them and is reaping excellent results. Benchmarking saves time and resources, giving leaders a springboard for action. The wheel won’t have to be reinvented, only adapted to local conditions.

With standards in place, the superintendent and staff develop the curricula and instructional strategies that will enable students to achieve the goals.
the work of the school district must be constructed and managed toward the standards, so that no anchor drags the boat.

Assessment
Directly tied to the standards is assessing how well students are performing in relation to them. All the work of the school district must be targeted toward achieving the standards, using multiple monitoring and evaluation methods to assure that progress is being made.

According to Key Work, school boards must measure student achievement by promoting the basic components of a sound assessment program, described below. Also, see the discussion of monitoring and evaluation in Chapter 3.

1. **Use multiple assessments to determine student progress.**
   A single test can’t be a complete indicator of a student’s knowledge and skill. Tests vary in their focus and degree of difficulty. For example, some assess basic skills but slight the higher-order thinking skills needed for solving complex problems. School boards must carefully consider a balanced assessment program that factors in various indicators of student achievement for a complete picture of progress.

2. **Align assessment with the academic standards.**
   Based on standards, educators develop curriculum, adopt supportive programs, and teach accordingly. Tests and other appraisals then measure what students have learned in relation to those factors. Standardized tests, or any other type of assessment, must measure students’ performance in relation to the local learning goals they’re expected to meet. Teaching *this* but measuring *that* is a disconnect that delivers no meaningful information.

3. **Conduct assessment regularly.**
   The intervals between testing must be frequent and consistent. Otherwise, they won’t reveal information that is sufficiently current and longitudinal (long term) to indicate where adjustments may need to be made in programs and approaches to teaching the children. Taking the pulse of progress requires constantly keeping a finger on it so changes in both the short and long term become apparent.

4. **Ensure that the local district’s assessment programs complement state assessment programs and that classroom assessments complement those of the district.**
   All assessment efforts must fit together to give a complete, up-to-date picture of achievement in relation to all the standards that are to guide teaching and learning. In both content and format, teacher-made
tests should prepare students for any district assessments, as well as the so-called “high stakes” state-mandated tests.

5. **Ensure that school board members understand the basic types of tests.**

   Student achievement is largely measured by tests that fall into three categories. One type is the criterion-referenced test (CRT), which is the state-mandated Benchmark Exam in Arkansas. The advantage of a CRT is that it is directly matched with local criteria, which in Arkansas are the state standards and curriculum frameworks.

   The second category is norm-referenced tests (such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which is required of Arkansas students) that are developed by a national testing company. The NRT results compare students to each other, based on a nationwide sample. The test’s norm is the score at the middle of all sample scores. The norm is called the 50th percentile, meaning that half the students are always below the norm and half above it.

   This type of test is valuable in that it is an external—and perhaps more objective—means of comparing the performance of students, schools, and districts. But the test compares student performance to that of other students across the nation, rather than specific local standards. Thus, test questions may not directly correlate with those standards. As a result, the test less accurately measures students’ grasp of the local curriculum.

   Thirdly, other measures of student achievement are called performance tests. Such assessments include various demonstrations of students’ skills and achievements, such as portfolios that are a collection of student work, over a period of time, in relation to standards and curricula.

6. **Recognize that assessment is necessary but not sufficient for quality assurance.**

   Simply “keeping score” with tests doesn’t furnish enough information to know whether all aspects of the school system are operating according to plan. Tests are directed at measuring students’ knowledge and skills, but tests are only part of a systemic appraisal program.

   If students aren’t showing progress on the tests they take, then why not? Determining the extent to which the district is “doing the right things and doing things right” requires vigilant monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on all aspects of the efforts to meet the goals and objectives.
Accountability

Key Work defines accountability as taking your fair share of responsibility for outcomes. Being accountable means that we answer for our actions as well as the results of our actions, taking credit, but also accepting blame.

The Key Work Guidebook describes the process of accountability as a joint endeavor, and it identifies seven characteristics of that shared process:

1. **Focus the accountability process on students’ results.**
   The job of schools is to teach children what they need to learn, and educators apply all sorts of resources to that end. But the measure of effectiveness isn’t in terms of, say, the number of classroom computers or the variety of reading programs or the time students spend in a certain class. Rather, effectiveness is gauged by the difference these and all other efforts make on student achievement. Accountability looks at all the variables and asks, “So what?”

2. **Answer the question, “How well are we doing?” with a comprehensive data collection process.**
   Current, reliable data of all sorts must be collected and disaggregated, that is, separated according to race, sex, or other factors that could reveal disparate results among groups of students. Every aspect of district operations must be scrutinized for how well it operates in relation to the goals. Then all data are carefully analyzed, organized, and reported to reveal overall progress, as well as specific strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

3. **Measure individual student’s results against expectations set by district standards.**
   The yardstick for determining student achievement must be the required standards toward which teaching and learning have been directed.

4. **Publicly report all school and district data in a straightforward format that is easy to understand.**
   The challenge of reporting data is to translate them into readily understandable language in a format that everyone can find informative and useful.

   For example, teachers and parents need to know how students are performing in relation to their peers in the school, district, state, and nation. But teachers and parents don’t operate from the same base or use the same vocabulary. So, reports must be written to inform everyone who reads them. When teachers, moms, dads, and entire communities understand what reports are showing, they’re better prepared to work together on students’ behalf.
5. **Analyze student data with respect to growth and improvement, not just end results.**
Children start at various points on the learning continuum and make progress at differing rates. Even if students haven’t yet fully met the standards, their strides toward them are significant, pointing out gains that are the building blocks of success. Careful analysis of the data can indicate where and what kind of additional help will promote continued growth.

6. **Include students’ results as part of staff evaluations.**
Linking student achievement with staff evaluations is a debated subject, yet undeniably, accountability includes assessing the effect teachers have on their students. As the classroom leader and manager, the teacher is a major player in students’ learning. Key Work points out that patterns of students’ failure or success can often be attributed to individual teachers. Factoring such patterns into evaluations identifies teachers who need help to improve their teaching methods and highlights those whose successful strategies can be shared.

7. **Make decisions that are driven by students’ results.**
Decisions must be based on reliable, comprehensive data that are analyzed to reveal patterns, trends, strengths, gaps, and most importantly, next steps. District leaders must decide what’s working and what isn’t, which programs need to be shored up or abandoned, where resources are being wasted, and where more must be applied.

Boards must remember that the current state of student achievement is a reflection of their previous decisions and actions. Improving the picture demands different decisions and actions, choices and follow-through based not on expediency or politics, but on facts, feedback, and a consistent focus on student success.

**Alignment**
In systems thinking, a school district can be likened to a machine of multiple parts. Its overall function depends on many interrelated and interdependent components (schools, programs, services, and so on) that must be closely connected with one another. When one part is weak, broken, or disconnected from the others, the system malfunctions. When all parts are finely tuned and well balanced, the mechanism hums with productivity. *All aspects of a school system must interconnect logically and smoothly to harmoniously achieve the intended results: student achievement.*

In the school system, not only must standards, curricula, teaching, and testing be aligned toward student success, but so must all other efforts. As they face choices and make decisions, school leaders must constantly ask,
“How does this option (program, expenditure, facility, and so on) move us toward—or detract us from—our goal of student achievement?”

School leaders must examine every function of the district for its relationship to the goals. Are all resources (staff, textbooks, materials, equipment, technology, facilities, funds) targeted toward the right results and coordinated for effectiveness? Is professional development significantly improving teachers’ insight, skills, and adaptability? Are volunteer services supporting teachers and students in substantive ways? Are parents adequately informed and equipped to support their children’s learning?

A district on the move toward its priorities will constantly remain focused on them, aligning and then realigning as necessary to ensure that everyone and everything points to the goal of student achievement.

Climate

People’s behavior, a classroom’s look; the stringency of the rules and the fairness of enforcement; the attitude of others and the sense of security and safety: all the sunshine and shadow of people, places, and actions combine to create an environmental “feel” or atmosphere known as climate.

Climate has an enormous effect on learning, helping or hindering students on their pathway of growth. Adults will do well to remember their own experiences of childhood and school, which were at least occasionally characterized by negative feelings. Remember the times of uncertainty, fearfulness, embarrassment, and despondency? The route to maturity is difficult, and children are more likely to thrive in a nurturing environment that recognizes their needs, accepts their uniqueness, affirms their value, and capitalizes on their abilities.

Much can be done to promote a positive learning environment that respects the divergent needs of students by all who work on their behalf. Key Work notes several areas that contribute to a healthy school climate:

1. **Ensure a safe environment for work and learning.**
   While climate is more than safety, security is at its foundation. In recent decades, our society has been shocked by violent acts in our schools. District and campus leaders must take every precaution to ensure that schools are a safe haven, developing policies and consistently enforcing procedures that protect without creating an unfriendly fortress.

2. **Examine the available data that reflect climate.**
   Data can reveal much about the climate of a school. Attendance records, frequency and types of disciplinary infractions and sanctions,
drop-out rates, and incidents of vandalism can indicate the nature of the learning environment and suggest needed changes.

3. **Examine the capacity to conduct special programs.**
   Equity involves adequately meeting the needs of individuals. In a caring, nurturing climate, one size doesn’t fit all. The diversity of the student population requires programs, services, and modifications tailored to serve the needs of all children, whether they’re gifted, learning to speak English, disabled, living in poverty, or have other special needs.

4. **Survey parents, students, and staff to determine satisfaction and seek suggestions.**
   In all of us, feelings tend to be facts and perceptions are our reality. The view from another’s vantage point may be very different from our own. Too often, school leaders neglect to ask students, school staff, and parents to share their perspectives of school life. Those who spend the most time in the schools are in a unique position to offer enlightening insights and suggestions that can enhance the learning climate.

5. **Build a positive culture within the organization.**
   Climate is a manifestation of the school system’s culture, that is, the prevailing pattern of behavior, attitudes, and relationships that characterize the organization. School district personnel have enormous influence on climate, and those in the most prominent and powerful roles have the greatest potential influence.

   The hierarchy typical of most large organizations can create distances or detachment that may inhibit meaningful two-way communication among the system’s divisions. When communication is sparse or not reciprocal between levels of the organization, the information flow slows and may be incomplete or inaccurate. Misunderstandings and feelings of isolation may result and strain staff morale, an important aspect of climate.

   The school board plays a leading role in shaping the district’s culture. The board can build trust, strengthen respect, and boost morale by modeling teamwork and by fostering staff empowerment. Such empowerment results from hiring competent staff, delegating appropriately, ensuring strong professional development, and leaving management of the schools to staff.

6. **Communicate with the media.**
   Another indicator of climate is public perception and the level of confidence in the schools. The parents of students have direct knowledge of the schools, but the vast majority of citizens don’t have
children in school. As a result, their source of information is the local media.

School districts are wise to cultivate an open relationship with the media, keeping them well informed so their written or broadcast reports are complete and factual. School systems that have a comfortable, respectful relationship with the media can usually depend on fair reports that are balanced between the good as well as the not-so-good news.

7. **Make schools appealing places.**
   A pot-holed school parking lot is marked Staff Only. Trash litters the campus and flower beds are weed choked. A curt sign on the schoolhouse door warns visitors to report directly to the office. A secretary preoccupied with paperwork ignores the student entering the office, and a ringing phone goes unanswered.

   How appealing is such a scene? A school’s climate is manifest in any number of ways, intentionally or not, and all of them need to be inviting.

   A place to park, well tended grounds, friendly signs of invitation to check in at the office, ready smiles, and attentive staff convey the message, “We’re glad you’re here.” Not only do parents, volunteers, and visitors notice the welcome mats, but so do students and staff. Schools that genuinely value all their partners in education create a climate of welcome and warmth for all who enter their doors and stay to work behind them.

   The appeal of a school goes well beyond its material trappings or an initial welcome. A building’s attractiveness is the sum of all its parts, most particularly the people who inhabit it day in and day out. Genuine care is communicated by patterns of behavior that accept and support every person as important, worthwhile, and capable. All of us–especially children–want to be part of inviting places, people, and situations.

**Collaboration**

Strong, purposeful working relationships with the entire community are essential for the health of every school system. The needs and complexities of modern education are so great that no school system can hope to adequately meet them without the well-managed participation of citizens.

A coalition that unites a broad spectrum of citizens–parents, business and faith leaders, politicians, college students, military personnel, and more–as...
partners is a win-win investment for all, because everyone has a stake in students’ successful entry into society and the workforce.

Collaborating with citizens mobilizes the wealth of their experiences, perspectives, ideas, and resources to enhance the scope of education and the quality of the schools. A community engaged with its schools cares enough to enroll its children in them, serve on its board of directors and advisory committees, donate to its foundation, and vote for its millages.

But effective collaborations aren’t a matter of happenstance. Partners must be valued as legitimate cohorts and their involvement planned, managed, evaluated, and recognized in meaningful ways to further student achievement. Refer to Chapter 5 for a discussion of community engagement in its many forms, including deliberative dialog, parent involvement, school volunteer programs, and school-community partnerships.

Continuous Improvement

Improvement isn’t a one-time event, but an ongoing awareness and way of thinking about what people do, perpetually seeking to do even better. Continuous improvement is part of the systems-thinking concept, because nothing in a system is ever completely or permanently static. Change is the very definition of life and, because they are made up of people, organizations must change in order to stay alive.

The learning organization, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, is one that continuously examines itself and seeks growth toward the future it envisions. It learns from its experiences, studies the ideas of others, researches cutting-edge models, rethinks the tried-and-true, courts innovation, invites input, and is ever curious about what if?

What does it take for continuous improvement? Key Work has some ideas:

1. **Model continuous improvement as a board** by consciously seeking ever better ways of doing the board’s business.

2. **Adopt a customer focus**, meaning that you must understand what you do and for whom you do it. One view of an organization is that everyone in it is a customer and has customers, because everyone in the system is interdependent on the others, serving and being served by one another.

3. **Make decisions based on data**, not on political pressure, personal preferences, or blind tradition, but moving from preconceptions to critical reflection on comprehensive data.
4. **Require all new and existing programs to build in data requirements**, so the board is clear that it will demand hard data for deciding the worth and longevity of a program.

5. **Foster open communication and invite feedback**, because free-flowing information is the lifeblood of continuous improvement.

6. **Celebrate evidence of improvement and reward those responsible for it**, because what gets recognized and rewarded is what gets done even better the next time.

7. **Promote continuous improvement as an integral part of every policy and decision**, always asking, “How can we do this even better?”

School systems have no room for complacency. The demands and opportunities of education require continuous improvement not merely as a process, but as an attitude and outlook to be cultivated and reinforced. Continuous improvement creates school systems that are constantly adapting and growing, learning right along with their students.
ASBA is governed by a board of directors, which is composed of a president, a president-elect, a vice president, a secretary-treasurer, a past president, and directors representing each of 14 regions in the state. Officers are elected by the association’s Delegate Assembly at the annual conference. The 14 directors, who serve staggered three-year terms, are elected by school board members in their regions at the annual Fall Regional Meetings. As illustrated in the map above, the following groups of counties make up the regions:

**Region 1**—Benton, Carroll, Madison, Washington
**Region 2**—Baxter, Boone, Fulton, Izard, Marion, Newton, Searcy
**Region 3**—Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Randolph, Sharp
**Region 4**—Crawford, Franklin, Johnson, Logan, Polk, Scott, Sebastian
**Region 5**—Conway, Perry, Pope, Yell
**Region 6**—Cleburne, Independence, Stone, Van Buren, White
**Region 7**—Crittenden, Cross, Jackson, Mississippi, Poinsett, Woodruff
**Region 8**—Faulkner, Lonoke, Prairie, Pulaski, Saline
**Region 9**—Arkansas, Lee, Monroe, Phillips, St. Francis
**Region 10**—Clark, Garland, Hot Spring, Montgomery, Pike
**Region 11**—Cleveland, Dallas, Grant, Jefferson, Lincoln
**Region 12**—Hempstead, Howard, Lafayette, Little River, Miller, Nevada, Sevier
**Region 13**—Calhoun, Columbia, Ouachita, Union
**Region 14**—Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Desha, Drew
Glossary

Below are a number of terms often used within the education arena. Not all of them are discussed in this handbook, but school board members are likely to encounter many of them at some time during their service.

**ABC Program: Arkansas Better Chance Program** A state-funded program for early care and education that serves educationally deprived children ages birth through five, excluding kindergarten programs. Priority is given to districts where 75% of students score below proficient in literacy and math on the Benchmark Exams or in schools on school improvement status. Any willing provider may apply for funding but must meet certain state standards.

**academic content standards** The written documents that outline what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level. The state testing system is based on (aligned with) these content standards.

**academic distress** A classification assigned to any Arkansas public school district in which 75% or more of its students perform at the “below basic” performance level on the state’s criterion-referenced tests, the Benchmark Exams.

**accountability** Being held responsible for one’s commitments and actions.

**ACSIP: Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan** A plan of action developed by a local school team, based on testing and other data, to address areas in which students are not scoring well on state tests. The team includes teachers, parents, and community members. The plan identifies the professional development, technology, materials, and resources needed to implement it. This plan determines how federal funds will be used at the school.

**ACTAAP: Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program** ACTAAP is a comprehensive blueprint for education in Arkansas that focuses on high academic standards, professional development, student assessment, and accountability for schools. ACTAAP includes the Smart Start Initiative (for grades K-4), Smart Step Initiative (grades 5-8), and education for grades 9-12. ACTAAP represents the result of extensive planning and discussion among Arkansas educators, policymakers, and school patrons.

**ADE: Arkansas Department of Education**, which is the administrative agency that carries out the state’s education laws and the policies of the State Board of Education.

**adjourned board meeting** A continuation of either a regular or special meeting that the school board had previously adjourned to a later time or day.

**advocacy** The process of trying to influence the thinking and action of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause, bill, or action. Advocacy also may be referred to as lobbying.

**agenda meeting** A board session, sometimes called a planning meeting, during which the agenda of an upcoming regular board meeting is agreed upon.
**AIP: Academic Improvement Plan** Developed for each student who fails to meet the satisfactory pass levels on any portion of the state’s criterion-referenced tests and for students in grades K-2 on the state-mandated norm-referenced tests for those grades. This plan is to have a detailed description of supplemental or intervention and remedial instruction used to help students in the areas where they are not achieving. The AIP is developed by teachers, school personnel, and the student’s parents. It describes the parent’s roles and responsibilities, as well as the consequences for failure to participate in the plan. Students who don’t participate in their remediation program are retained at their grade level.

**alignment** Parts or elements that are closely and reasonably related, connected, or in cooperation with one another, such as tests being aligned with the curricula students have been taught.

**alternative education** Schools or classrooms that are designed to serve students who aren’t succeeding in the traditional school or classroom environment. Students who are failing academically or have learning disabilities or behavioral problems may need a different setting. Alternative schools or classrooms may have more flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, counseling support, and modified curricula.

**annexation** Joining a school district or parts of a district with a receiving district.

**AP: Advanced Placement** A designation of the College Board for college-preparatory courses that high school students can take to earn college credit. Students must master a generally higher level of coursework and score satisfactorily on an accompanying test to receive college credit.

**appropriation bill** A legislative motion that authorizes the government to spend money that the bill designates for a particular purpose.

**Arkansas Benchmark Exams** A type of criterion-referenced test that Arkansas schools administer to students in grades 3 through 8.

**Arkansas Better Chance for School Success Program** A state-funded early care and education program that serves children who are three or four years old and from families whose gross income doesn’t exceed 200% of the federal poverty level.

**assessments** Tests or other tools that measure students’ skills and knowledge and indicate the extent to which students are meeting standards. Examples of assessments are multiple-choice or written-response tests, portfolios, and demonstrations. Student assessments are the primary indicator of how well schools and school districts are meeting their responsibility to help all students meet state standards of academic achievement.

**AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress** The minimum level of academic performance school districts must achieve each year in reading and math (and eventually science) on the state-mandated criterion-reference test (Benchmark Exam). Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), each state sets the AYP gains every school must meet to reach 100% proficiency by 2014. Parents are notified if their child’s school is not meeting AYP requirements.

**benchmark** In education, a detailed measure of what students should know and be able to do at particular ages, grades, or developmental levels.
**benchmarking** A means to help identify which standards may be needed by searching for exemplary practices and programs that can serve as models or inspiration for appropriate standards.

**biennial session** The regular meetings of the Arkansas legislature that are held every other year.

**BMI: Body Mass Index** A method used to gauge whether or not an individual is overweight. BMI is calculated by dividing a person’s weight (in kilograms) by his or her height (in meters, squared). Schools are required to measure each student’s BMI as part of an annual health report to parents.

**boardmanship** A term to describe the skills school board members need in order to work together effectively and ensure competent governance of a local school district.

**certified staff** School district personnel who, by law, must hold certain Arkansas credentials as a condition of employment. This level of personnel, sometimes referred to as *non-classified* or *licensed* staff, includes teachers, counselors, principals, and others.

**charter school** Independent public schools, designed by educators, parents, community leaders, education entrepreneurs, or others, that operate outside the traditional system of public schools. Freed from certain constraints, these schools may creatively meet their students’ needs and promote academic achievement.

**climate** The atmosphere in a school or other place that is created by the combination of behaviors, attitudes, and surroundings.

**closed hearing** A session of the school board that is closed to the public and convened upon the request of a student’s parent or guardian when the board is considering that student’s suspension or expulsion.

**compensatory damages** An award, usually of money, intended to make up for harm or losses.

**concurrent credit** Courses or study that satisfy both high school and college credit hours.

**conference committee** In the Arkansas legislature, a group of representatives from both the House and Senate who are charged with reconciling disagreements on similar bills that have originated in both houses.

**consolidation** Joining two or more school districts or parts of districts to create a single new school district.

**content standards** The information, ideas, and facts students are expected to know and be able to demonstrate at each grade level.

**core curriculum** The basic course of study recommended for all students.

**CRT: criterion-referenced test** An instrument to assess students’ knowledge related to a specific set of standards and measured only in relation to those standards. In Arkansas, the state’s Benchmark Exam is a criterion-referenced test, based on the academic standards in the Arkansas
Curriculum Frameworks. Test results are compared only to those of other Arkansas students, rather than a national sample of students, as with a norm-referenced test.

culture  The prevailing pattern of behavior, relationships, and expectations that characterize an organization.

curriculum  The subject matter, skills, and processes that are taught so students will achieve identified standards of knowledge and skill. Curriculum is singular and curricula is plural.

curriculum frameworks  Lists of what students should learn, by grade level, that guide curriculum development and instruction.

CVM: Certified Volunteer Manager  A designation awarded by the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium (APAC, representing several Arkansas colleges and universities) to those who successfully complete APAC’s curriculum for managing volunteer programs in either the public or private sector.

deliberative dialogue  An organized process for facilitating conversations within groups of people who share their perspectives and viewpoints with one another so they can more thoughtfully consider issues, problems, and options. Study Circles in one model of deliberative dialogue.

desegregation  The process of eliminating the traces of segregation (separation of races) to compensate for past discriminatory acts and to ensure that racial barriers no longer restrict any citizens from equitable access to their constitutional rights.

disaggregated data  Information that has been sorted according to certain criteria or subdivisions. For example, test results can be sorted by groups of students who have similar characteristics, such as economic disadvantage, race or ethnicity, disabilities, or limited English proficiency. Teachers and parents can then determine how each group is performing.

drop-out rate  The proportion and time at which students leave school before graduating for reasons that may include failing grades, suspension or expulsion, lack of interest, economic hardship, pregnancy, marriage, peer conflict, incarceration, lack of attendance, and use of alcohol or drugs.

due process  An orderly procedure that protects a person’s legal rights. Due process gives an individual a meaningful hearing and opportunity to defend himself or herself before the person or body that has the authority to limit or withdraw that individual’s rights.

early intervention  Focused, individualized instruction developed from continuing assessment while a child is the early stages of learning, generally pre-school or kindergarten through the first grade.

education philosophy  A blend of basic beliefs and principles that gives meaning and direction to the overall education program.

end-of-course exam  A test taken at the end of a course to measure whether a student has the knowledge and skills necessary for proficiency in that course.
**engrossed bill** A legislative bill that has been amended by adding, deleting, or otherwise changing the bill’s original or previous language.

**equity** The right to treatment without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, sex, handicap, sexual orientation, lifestyle, or age. Within the education arena, equity means that children are to be treated fairly by receiving services according to their individual needs and strengths.

**ESL: English as a Second Language** Several programs or approaches used to teach English to those who don’t speak English as their first language.

**essential elements of early reading** The five basic aspects of reading proficiency, which are:
- comprehension - understanding and remembering what is read.
- decoding and word recognition - recognizing words accurately, fluently, and independently.
- fluency - the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with expression.
- phonemic awareness - the ability to hear and manipulate the sound structure of language.
- vocabulary - words that must be known in order to communicate effectively.

**evaluation** The process of measuring the actual result of certain actions and resources, such as programs and materials, in relation to the desired results.

**Even Start** A grant-funded literacy program to improve the education opportunities of low income families by combining early childhood education, adult literacy, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

**executive session** A private meeting of a school board or other governing body that can be held only for purposes specified by law and from which the general public and press are excluded. The board cannot vote during executive session.

**ex officio** Literally meaning “by virtue of one’s office,” the term refers to the practice that allows a member of an official group, such as a school board, to designate someone to fill a certain role at the group’s request.

**fiduciary** The concept of stewardship, referring to a person or persons having duties, on behalf of others, that require good faith, trust, and special confidence. Fiduciary duty is to act for someone else’s benefit while subordinating one’s personal interests. The term is often used in conjunction with managing money or property for another, using a very high standard of care. For example, a school board acts as the community’s trustee of public funds for the schools and therefore has a fiduciary responsibility for using those funds for the benefit of the community.

**FOI or FOIA: Freedom of Information Act** This law requires that public business be performed in an open and public manner. The law applies to any agency, including a school district, that is supported by public funds or spends them.

**Free- or Reduced-Lunch Program** See National School Lunch Program.

**GED: General Education Development Test** A nationally recognized measure of high school-level knowledge and skills. Those passing the test earn the GED credential.
goals  Broad statements of overarching aims that flow from an education philosophy and toward which an individual, group, or organization directs its efforts.

good faith  The duty to act in a fair and equitable manner, without coercion, intimidation, or threats of coercion or intimidation.

grievance  a formal, written complaint from an employee regarding working conditions or treatment.

Head Start  A federally sponsored, comprehensive child development program that serves children from birth to age five, pregnant women, and their families. This child-focused program has the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

HIPPPY: Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters  A parent involvement, school-readiness program that helps parents prepare their three- and four-year-old children for success in school and beyond.

home school  A school conducted primarily by parents or legal guardians for their own children.

HQT: Highly Qualified Teacher  A teacher who demonstrates that he or she is proficient in subjects he or she is teaching, has a college degree, and is licensed by the state. No Child Left Behind requires all core academic courses to be taught by a Highly Qualified Teacher.

IB: International Baccalaureate  The designation of a school or a program within a school that conforms to the high-quality standards and challenging curriculum of the International Baccalaureate Organization, founded in 1968 in Switzerland and presently serving 122 countries. IB curriculum, which is blended from that of many different countries rather than any one nation, focuses on international mindedness. For example, all IB students learn a second language and are taught critical-thinking skills. The high school diplomas of students who successfully complete the program carry the IB seal of achievement.

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act  A federal law that requires states to provide all eligible children who have disabilities with a free, appropriate public education from infancy through age 21 years, consistent with a state’s legal provisions for making education available.

IEP: Individualized Education Plan  A written instructional plan for students with disabilities who are designated as special education students under federal law (IDEA).

inclusion  Also known as mainstreaming, the practice of placing students who have disabilities in regular classrooms.

initiated act  A method of legislating that requires a vote of the people instead of a vote of the legislature for a proposed measure to become law.

inservice training  Instruction that is conducted by qualified trainers and offered during a person’s employment or period of elected or voluntary service. Training for school personnel is often termed professional development or staff development.
IRI: Intensive Reading Improvement Plan  An intervention program for any K-2 student who has substantial reading difficulties.

lawsuit  A legal action between persons or organizations in a court of law where one party seeks justice from the other as determined by a judge or jury.

LEA: Local Education Agency  A board of education or other governmental authority within a state that maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, school district, or other political subdivision of a state.

LEP: Limited English Proficient  A student who does not speak English as his or her native language and is in the process of learning English.

liability  Legal responsibility for the consequences of an action or situation.

longitudinal tracking  A system that uses test scores to keep up with the progress of the same student from year to year and from grade to grade, regardless of whether the student moves from one school to another or one district to another.

mainstreaming  See inclusion.

mandatory statutes  Laws that school boards or other governing agencies or officials are required to carry out.

modeling  Teaching by showing the student how to do a task with the expectation that the student will copy the action.

monitoring  The intentional process of remaining aware of actions and resources as they are currently being applied toward goals and objectives.

multiple choice  A test question that asks students to select the correct answer from a list of options.

NAEP: National Assessment of Education Progress  Often referred to as the Nation’s Report Card, NAEP is a standards-based test that is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education as a means for measuring student achievement such that student performance in one state can be compared with that of another. NAEP exams are given to a representative sample of the student population in grades 4, 8, and 12 in every state.

National School Lunch Program  Formerly known as the federal Free- or Reduced-Lunch Program, meals that are provided free or at a low cost to children who are determined eligible according to federal guidelines based on family income.

NCLB: No Child Left Behind  A federal law requiring states to give tests in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 every year. According to the NCLB website, the law is built on four principles: accountability for results; more choices for parents; greater local control and flexibility; and an emphasis on doing what works, based on scientific research.
**non-certified staff** Also called *classified* staff, these are school district employees who aren’t required to have Arkansas teaching credentials as a condition of employment. Bus drivers, janitors, and cafeteria workers are some members of classified staff.

**NRT: norm-referenced test** A standardized examination, based upon a student’s broad-based exposure to a variety of topics, that is used to measure and compare student performance and progress against a national sample of students at the same grade level. The NRT used in Arkansas is the Iowa Basic Skills Test, which replaced the Stanford Achievement Test that had been used in the state for many years.

**NSBA: National School Boards Association** The national organization that is a federation of state school boards associations. NSBA’s mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education through school board leadership, providing resources and services that support the work of local school board members throughout the nation.

**objectives** The specific steps taken to achieve a certain goal. Objectives identify necessary actions, the people and resources for carrying them out, and the schedule for starting and completing the actions.

**open response** A test question that asks students to develop their own written answer, rather than selecting one from a list of potential answers.

**orientation** The process that prepares people for involvement in a new situation, providing the background and overview needed for them to understand new roles, surroundings, and procedures.

**parent and community involvement** Refers to several different ways in which parents and community members or organizations take part in all aspects and levels of the education process on behalf of children. Participation is both formal (such as parent-teacher associations, school-business partnerships, parent-teacher conferences, school volunteer programs, and so on) and informal (reading to children in the home, parental supervision of homework, supporting millage elections, and the like).

**parent-school compact** A written agreement of shared responsibility that defines the goals and expectations of schools and parents as partners in improving student achievement.

**parliamentary procedure** The patterns and rules that guide a group in an orderly, efficient manner of conducting a meeting and transacting business.

**partnership program** A mutually supportive arrangement between parents, businesses, or community organizations and a school or school district, often in the form of a written contract, in which the partners commit themselves to specific goals and activities intended to benefit students.

**pass rate** A level of performance on student assessments that is determined by the standard-setting process, which establishes the level below which students are required to have an Academic Improvement Plan and must participate in remediation.
performance standards  The skills and knowledge that a student is supposed to be able to demonstrate by the end of a particular grade or course of study.

permissive statutes  Laws on which school boards or other governing authorities may choose to take certain action or not, depending upon local needs and goals.

personnel policies  Guidelines to be followed by employees in carrying out their work.

policy  A general statement a school board or other governing authority adopts to indicate a desired condition, direction, or belief.

portfolio assessments  A purposeful, systematic collection of selected work and self-assessments developed over time that have been gathered to demonstrate and evaluate a student’s progress and achievement.

poverty rate  The economic level of a school’s student enrollment, which is generally determined by the percentage of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-cost meals.

PPC: Personnel Policies Committee  State law requires that certified (or licensed) employees and non-certified employees each be represented by a personnel policies committee in those districts in which these employee groups aren’t represented by an officially recognized group, such as a union. The PPCs focus on personnel policies and can communicate to the school board their positions on proposed and existing personnel policies and suggest changes in them. PPCs have no veto power.

procedure  In relation to education policy, procedures are the methods or steps for carrying out a policy in accordance with its letter and spirit. Procedures are specific and designate how, by whom, where, and when certain actions are to be carried out or limited.

professional development  Ongoing, systemic learning activities designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators to achieve specific objectives toward the goal of increasing student achievement. Also know as staff development or inservice training.

prohibitive statutes  Laws that specifically forbid a certain course of action.

proprietary functions  In a school district, they include such activities as hosting athletic contests, leasing or renting school-owned facilities to some group, or engaging in any similar revenue-yielding activity.

public engagement or public involvement  The sustained, active interest and participation of parents, community members, and other taxpayers in supporting and improving schools.

punitive damages  An award intended to punish rather than to compensate for damages, such as with a monetary award.

quorum  Defined in the bylaws of a board or other governing body as the number or proportion of members that must be present in order to conduct business. Commonly, a majority of members constitutes a quorum.
**Reading First**  A part of the No Child Left Behind initiative that is dedicated to ensuring that all children learn to read on grade level by the third grade. Reading First provides money to states and school districts to support high-quality reading programs based on scientific research.

**refrigerator curriculum**  Easy-to-read, downloadable documents on the ADE website that are suitable for hanging on a refrigerator door and show what students will be taught and expected to learn at each grade level. They contain curriculum samples for parents to use in helping their children learn.

**regular board meeting**  A scheduled board meeting that is held at least monthly during the school year, but also may be held when school is not in session.

**regulations**  Mandates issued by ADE to guide, mandate, or limit school district operations. Regulations stem from state statutes or federal law and may identify procedures for carrying out the regulation. ADE issues some if its regulations under the heading of *rules*.

**remediation**  The process of providing extra instruction to help a student improve in a particular subject area identified in the student’s academic improvement plan (AIP).

**resources**  Sources of supply or support, such as people, materials, equipment, or money.

**retention**  Keeping a student in the same grade or subject to repeat it in order to master the curriculum. Retention can also refer to keeping personnel employed within the organization, rather than losing them to other employers or activities outside the organization.

**rigor**  The degree of difficulty or challenge within a subject, course, or activity. In schools, the goal of a rigorous curriculum is to help students develop the capacity to understand content that may be sophisticated, vague, complex, or otherwise challenging.

**rigorous**  Allowing no deviation from a high standard.

**school board**  The local legislative unit of school district governance, charged with operating the district according to the mandates of laws and regulations.

**school-community partnership**  A voluntary relationship between a school and a community group, business, or other organization that meets the needs and uses the resources of both partners for their mutual benefit.

**school district**  A defined geographic and governmental area, overseen by a locally elected school board and managed by a superintendent, in which the public schools serve students who either live within the area’s borders or enroll through a legal transfer from a different school district.

**school in need of improvement**  This is the term No Child Left Behind uses to refer to schools that receive Title I funds and have not met state reading and math goals (AYP) for at least two consecutive years. A school labeled as needing improvement receives extra assistance. Students in the school may be eligible for free tutoring or may transfer to another public school in their district, within certain guidelines.
**School Report Card**  The Annual School Performance Report Card, commonly referred to as the Report Card, is produced annually by ADE. The Report Card doesn’t grade or rank Arkansas schools, but displays a variety of statistical data about schools and school districts.

**school volunteer program**  The organized and managed voluntary participation of people in the schools. Volunteers, such as parents, retirees, business persons, and other students, serve under the direction of a school district employee or authorized volunteer to perform all manner of services directed at helping improve student achievement.

**school-wide programs**  Comprehensive school improvement programs accessible to all students, particularly those who are low achievers and at risk of failure. The programs are funded by a school’s Title I programs, which are based on an enrollment of at least 40% low income.

**scope and sequence**  Pertaining to curricula, scope refers to what and how much is covered in the content of certain subject areas or courses. Sequence is the order in which content or courses are presented to students, so that learning builds from the basic to the more complex.

**self insurance**  A system in which an organization, such as a school district, sets aside an amount of its funds to cover any type of losses that would ordinarily be protected by an insurance program.

**service learning**  Supervised classes or programs in which students learn through various service activities or projects. Service learning might involve helping other students (perhaps by tutoring) or serving other individuals or community groups in various ways.

**SES: Supplemental Education Services**  A term used in No Child Left Behind to refer to extra help low-income children may be eligible to receive, such as tutoring. The assistance is paid for by the school, free to the student, and usually takes place after school or during the summer.

**slander**  A false and malicious spoken statement.

**special board meeting**  An irregularly held board meeting, sometimes referred to as a *called* meeting, convened by the proper procedures to decide a specific item of business.

**staff development**  See *professional development*.

**standard**  A degree or level of requirement or achievement, based on something that is valued and against which progress is measured. Standards measure quantitative or qualitative value. In education, *content standards* describe what students need to know and be able to do. *Performance standards* describe how well students need to demonstrate various skills and knowledge to be considered proficient.

**standards-based test**  An assessment that tells how a student’s performance compares to some standard of knowledge or skill. A criterion-referenced test (CRT) is a standards-based test.

**State Board of Education**  The regulatory body for public elementary and secondary education throughout Arkansas. The board has nine members who are appointed by the governor for six-year terms.
**statutes**  Laws created by state or federal legislation.

**Study Circles**  A deliberative dialogue model in which trained organizers and facilitators convene groups of citizens to address various issues through constructive conversation.

**system**  A group of interrelated and interdependent elements that form a complex whole, such as a *school system*.

**thematic units**  Portions of study built around a particular theme or topic that draws from two or more subject areas.

**Title I**  The largest federal aid program for elementary and secondary schools. Funding is based on the number of low-income students enrolled in a school. Title I money pays for extra education services for children who are behind or at risk of falling behind in school.

**tort liability**  Legal responsibility for harm brought to someone.

**training**  Short-term sequential instruction for building skills or proficiency in a certain area.

**USR: Uniform Readiness Screening**  A state-mandated, developmentally appropriate assessment used to determine if a student has substantial difficulty reading.

**value added**  Among some educators, the term refers to the increase in learning that occurs over the time a student participates in a course or program. For example, the difference between a student’s proficiency at the beginning of a certain program to the end of it can be considered the *value-added* result. In the business world, value added usually refers to a benefit or advantage that is beyond the customary worth or cost of a particular product or service, but the price tag stays the same.

**vision**  A statement that looks beyond the present toward a desired future.
Resources

The Internet is a readily accessible source of information on education and related topics. Listed below are several sites that are storehouses of data, ideas, models, suggestions, and inspiration.

**American Association of School Administrators**
A source of publications and online features about various issues, including evaluating superintendents.
www.aasa.org

**Arkansans for Education Reform Foundation**
Parents and business leaders have joined to promote student achievement and accountability through this foundation.
www.educatearkansas.com

**Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families**
Information about all manner of issues that affect children and families.
www.aradvocates.org

**Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators**
A variety of information, including an overview of the most recent Arkansas legislative session.
www.aaea.k12.ar.us

**Arkansas Business and Education Alliance**
This nonprofit promotes business involvement in schools to support academic achievement by sponsoring the Arkansas Scholars program that encourages students to prepare for their future.
www.arkbea.org

**Arkansas Department of Education**
Covers all aspects of ADE’s organization and operations.
www.arkansased.org

**Arkansas Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation**
Comprehensive information on public school facilities, master plans, and transportation.
www.arkansasfacilities.com

**Arkansas Education Association**
A membership organization for school employees, the AEA site has a variety of information.
www.aeaonline.org

**Arkansas General Assembly**
Access to information about the Arkansas Legislature’s activities and legislation.
www.arkleg.state.ar.us

**Arkansas Leadership Academy**
Explains the mission and training programs of the ALA.
www.arkleadership.org
Arkansas Out of School Network
A coalition of partners who work to promote quality summer and before- and after-school programs.
www.AOSN.org

Arkansas PTA Association
A variety of information on Arkansas’ parent-teacher association, including upcoming events.
www.arkansaspta.org

Arkansas School Boards Association
The site has current information on hot topics, upcoming events, and much more, including this handbook.
www.arsba.org

ARKids First
The website explains the state’s health insurance program for children.
www.arkidsfirst.com

ASPIRA Association
A nonprofit organization devoted solely to the education and leadership development of Latino youth.
www.aspira.org

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Incorporating diversity and the community in education is a priority of this nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.
www.ascd.org

Center for Effective Parenting
A source for all manner of information on parenting.
www.parenting-ed.org

Coalition of Essential Schools
A national network focused on restructuring schools to improve student achievement.
www.essentialschools.org

Communities in Schools
This community-building organization works for children’s benefit in partnership with public schools.
www.cisnet.org

Communities Just for the Kids
A website, rich in the achievement data of Arkansas schools, that enables similar schools to contact each other to explore education best practices.
www.just4kids.org

Do Something
A lively site that supports young people who are working to make a positive difference in their communities.
www.dosomething.org

Illinois Association of School Boards
The site includes a Superintendent Evaluation Guide.
www.iasb.com
International Baccalaureate Organization
Complete information on the challenging IB program.
www.ibo.org

Learning Disabilities Association of Arkansas
A nonprofit organization devoted to finding solutions to the spectrum of learning problems.
www.ldaarkansas.org

National Alliance of Black School Educators
Dedicated to improving the education accomplishments of African-American youth.
www.nabse.org

National Center for Education Statistics
Information on the National Assessment of Education Progress and the Nation’s Report Card.
www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
The coalition advocates for involving parents and families in their children’s education.
www.ncpie.org

National Community Education Association
A resource for partnering with schools to promote education for the entire community.
www.ncea.com

National Dropout Prevention Center
Resources on the importance of education for at-risk youth and strategies for staying in school.
www.dropoutprevention.org

National Institute for Early Education Research
A resource for many aspects of early childhood education.
www.nieer.org

National Rural Education Association
The organization focuses on maintaining the vitality of rural education.
www.nrea.org

National School Boards Association
The site has all manner of information on NSBA, current education issues, and related links.
www.nsba.org

National School Public Relations Association
A wealth of ideas and resources for fostering positive public relations fills this site.
www.NSPRA.org

National Staff Development Council
Standards and resources for the professional development of school staff.
www.nsce.org

North Carolina State Board of Education
The site lists the NC Standards for Superintendent Evaluation and other information.
www.dpi.state.nc.us/evalpsemployees/supstand.htm
MENTOR National Mentoring Partnership
The organization advocates for quality mentoring partnerships on behalf of children.
www.mentor.org

Oregon School Boards Association
The website has a superintendency application form and explains the association’s Superintendent Evaluation Workbook.
www.osba.org

Parents as Teachers National Center
Resources to help parents and early childhood professionals promote children’s successful education.
www.PATNC.org

Parliamentary Procedure
Jim Slaughter is a professional parliamentarian who has trained for ASBA and whose website has valuable information on parliamentary methods.
www.jimslaughter.com

Public Agenda
A nonpartisan, nonprofit public opinion research and citizen education organization, its site has links to a wide variety of information.
www.publicagenda.org

Quality Education for Minorities Network
A nonprofit dedicated to improving education for minorities.
http://qemnetwork.qem.org

Southern Regional Education Board
A compact of states, including Arkansas, devoted to improving all aspects of education.
www.sreb.org

Southwest Education Development Laboratory
A nonprofit education research and development organization that serves the region in which Arkansas is located.
www.sedl.org

University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy
A wide-ranging site that is a resource for education research, publications, and data.
www.uark.edu/ua/oep

U.S. Department of Education
Access to all sorts of topics and data about education.
www.ed.gov
Appendix A
Sample Application Form for Superintendent

PERSONAL DATA
Name ____________________________________________
Present position ______________________________________
Office address _______________________________________
Home address ________________________________________
Office Phone ___________________ Home Phone __________
E-mail ________________________ Fax ___________________

COLLEGE EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of College</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dates Attended</th>
<th>Degree Received</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

Undergraduate teaching major _______________ Undergraduate teaching minor(s) __________
Masters degree major _______________ Masters degree minor _______________
Doctoral degree major _______________ Doctoral degree minor _______________
Dissertation title _______________________________________________________________
Please submit a complete (not necessarily official) transcript of all college work.

EXPERIENCE

1. Professional: List all professional positions held in chronological order with the most recent position first.
   Position | School and District | City and State | Dates
   ---------|---------------------|----------------|-------
   ---------|---------------------|----------------|-------
   ---------|---------------------|----------------|-------

2. Related Work Experience: List below any other experiences, including military, that prepared you for a leadership position.
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
ORGANIZATIONS
1. List all professional organizations in which you are an active member.

2. List civil and community organizations in which you are an active member.

3. List honors received and offices held.

4. List any other data, activities, or experiences pertinent to this application.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PRESENT POSITION
Student population
Present annual salary
Car furnished or allowance
Length of present contract
Total years in the education profession
Other data
Annual travel allowance
Other fringe benefits
Date contract expires

REFERENCES List the names of five people whom we may contact about your personal and professional qualifications.

Name
Position
Address
Phone

ACHIEVEMENTS and PHILOSOPHY As an addendum, please attach a written summary of (1) what you consider your most important contributions in the field of education and (2) your education philosophy.

SUPPORTIVE MATERIALS If you desire, you may attach supplementary materials, such as annual reports, brochures, and instructional program materials.

Signature
Date
Appendix B
Screening Assessment of Superintendent Candidate

This sample form for screening candidates may be reproduced or modified to suit the particular needs of your school district.

Candidate’s Name ____________________________ Date ___________________

INSTRUCTIONS Listed below are the qualities and qualifications that the Board of Education has agreed are desirable in the superintendent to be selected. Rate the candidate on each item by circling the appropriate number on the corresponding scale; then mark the OVERALL ASSESSMENT. Complete the form individually and anonymously without conferring with other members of the screening committee. Give the form to the person designated to receive it.

ASSESSMENT SCALE  1 - Very Poor  2 - Poor  3 - Average  4 - Good  5 - Very Good
Leave unrated those items for which you believe information is insufficient.

I. Personal Qualities
   Scale
   Personal characteristics  1  2  3  4  5
   Leadership potential  1  2  3  4  5
   Strength of references  1  2  3  4  5

II. Professional Qualifications
   Level of training  1  2  3  4  5
   Eligibility for appropriate certificate  1  2  3  4  5
   Desired administrative strengths  1  2  3  4  5

III. Experience
   As a teacher  1  2  3  4  5
   As an administrator  1  2  3  4  5
   Quality of experience  1  2  3  4  5
   Professional recognition  1  2  3  4  5
   Experience in working with diverse groups  1  2  3  4  5
   Record of leadership accomplishment  1  2  3  4  5

OVERALL ASSESSMENT  1  2  3  4  5
Appendix C
Reference Form

(Name of candidate) has applied for the position of superintendent with the (name of school district) and listed you as a reference. Both the candidate and the school district will appreciate your assistance. Please return the completed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Thank you very much.

Indicate your relationship to the candidate:
(  ) Employee (  ) Co-worker (  ) Supervisor (  ) Friend (  ) Other: _______________________

How long have you known this person? ________________________________________________

Based on your individual knowledge, please rate this candidate on each of the following qualities by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.

1. PERSONALITY Ability to make a pleasing impression; generally friendly and likeable.

2. INTEGRITY and DEPENDABILITY Recognizes and readily accepts responsibility.

3. INDUSTRY and APPLICATION Tackles the job with energy.

4. INITIATIVE Ability to formulate plans and ensure that they are carried out effectively.

5. INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY Mental agility and logical thinking.

6. ABILITY TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS Communicates effectively with organized, clear expression.

7. LEADERSHIP Forcefulness; ability to win confidence and stimulate activity.

8. CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPMENT Potential for building ever-increasing skills.

9. PERSONAL APPEARANCE Dress and grooming are appropriate.

10. PROFESSIONAL PROMISE Likelihood for growth in achievement and responsibility.

On the back of this form, please write any comments that explain your ratings or further illustrate your assessment of the candidate’s background, strengths, weaknesses, and so on.

Name __________________________ Title __________________________ Institution __________________________

Date __________________________ Signature __________________________
Appendix D
Evaluation of the Superintendent

This sample form is the type of assessment the school board can customize to fit local needs and circumstances. Such a form gives you, the elected officials of your school district, a guide by which to evaluate the system’s chief executive officer. Your feedback will help the superintendent become more aware of his or her designated responsibilities, your perceptions of his or her work, and ways to improve performance.

Performance Scale:
1 - Performs exceptionally well. 2 - Performs adequately. 3 - Needs improvement.

A. RELATIONS WITH THE BOARD

1. _____ Keeps the board well informed of the school system’s progress, issues, and needs.
2. _____ Offers professional advice to the board on items requiring board action, with sound recommendations based on sufficient data, analysis, and study of options.
3. _____ Develops procedures to achieve the intent of board policy.
4. _____ Seeks and accepts constructive criticism of his or her work.
5. _____ Supports the board’s policies and actions with the public and staff.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. __________________________

b. __________________________

c. __________________________

B. BUSINESS AND FINANCE

1. _____ Keeps current on the district’s physical needs, including facilities, maintenance, equipment, supplies, etc.
2. _____ Supervises operations, insisting on competent, efficient performance.
3. _____ Ensures that the budget is correlated with the district’s goals and education plan.
4. _____ Evaluates financial needs and explores sources of new income, including grants and other resources.
5. _____ Determines that funds are spent wisely, with adequate controls, accounting, and auditing.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. __________________________

b. __________________________

c. __________________________
C. STAFF AND PERSONNEL RELATIONSHIPS

1. _____ Develops and executes sound personnel procedures.
2. _____ Promotes positive staff morale and loyalty to the organization.
3. _____ Spends quality time in the schools getting to know staff, students, and parents.
4. _____ Treats all personnel fairly, without favoritism or discrimination, while insisting on high performance.
5. _____ Delegates authority and responsibility to staff members commensurate with their position.
6. _____ Recruits and assigns the best available personnel.
7. _____ Encourages appropriate staff and groups to participate in planning and in instituting procedures to carry out board policy.
8. _____ Evaluates staff performance, commending good work and offering constructive suggestions for improvement.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. ______________________________________________________________

b. ______________________________________________________________

c. ______________________________________________________________

D. EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

1. _____ Understands and keeps current with all aspects of the instructional program.
2. _____ Ensures sound, comprehensive approaches to meeting the education needs of all students.
3. _____ Cultivates knowledge of the emerging social, economic, political, and legal issues that affect education and the operation and welfare of the district.
4. _____ Participates with the staff, board, and community to develop strong curriculum.
5. _____ Promotes democratic procedures in the teaching and learning process, capitalizing on the knowledge, talents, and creativity of teachers, specialists, principals, and central staff.
6. _____ Organizes a planned program of curriculum evaluation and improvement.
7. _____ Delegates authority and supports the people with whom s/he works.
8. _____ Insists on a strong professional development program for all staff and ensures that it is tightly correlated with the district’s goals and education plan.
9. _____ Evidences interest in professional organizations for school boards, administrators, and teachers.
10. _____ Actively promotes the meaningful participation of parents and community volunteers in the district.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. ______________________________________________________________

b. ______________________________________________________________

c. ______________________________________________________________
E. COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

1. ____ Gains the community’s respect and support for effectively leading and managing the school system.
2. ____ Solicits and gives attention to problems and opinions of all groups and individuals.
3. ____ Develops friendly and cooperative relationships with news media.
4. ____ Participates actively in community life and affairs.
5. ____ Achieves status as a community leader in public education.
6. ____ Works effectively with public and private groups.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. ____________________________________________________

b. ____________________________________________________

c. ____________________________________________________

F. PERSONAL QUALITIES

1. ____ Defends principles and convictions in the face of pressure and partisan influence.
2. ____ Maintains high standards of ethics, honesty, and integrity in all personal and professional matters.
3. ____ Earns respect and standing among professional colleagues.
4. ____ Devotes adequate time and energy to the job.
5. ____ Exercises sound judgment in arriving at decisions.
6. ____ Maintains friendly but professional decorum in all in relationships with the board, staff, students, and community.

Suggestions for improvement:

a. ____________________________________________________

b. ____________________________________________________

c. ____________________________________________________

I have reviewed this evaluation, conferred with the evaluator, and received a signed copy for my personal use.

☐ No comment ☐ Comment attached Date of conference __________________________

Superintendent’s signature: ____________________________________________________

Board President’s signature: ____________________________________________________
Appendix E

School Board Member’s Code of Ethics

As a member of the board, I will promote the best interests of the school district as a whole, and to that end I will adhere to the following education and ethical standards:

1. Bring about desired changes through legal and ethical procedures, upholding and enforcing all laws, State Board of Education rules, and court orders pertaining to schools.

2. Make decisions in terms of the education welfare of all children in the district, regardless of ability, race, creed, sex, or social standing.

3. Recognize that decisions must be made by the board as a whole, make no personal promise and take no private action that may compromise the board.

4. Focus board action on policymaking, goal setting, planning, and evaluation. Insist on regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.

5. Support and protect school personnel in the proper performance of their duties.

6. Vote to appoint the best qualified personnel in the proper performance of their duties.

7. Hold confidential all matters pertaining to schools that, if disclosed, may needlessly injure individuals or the schools. Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.

8. Attend all regularly scheduled board meetings insofar as possible and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings.

9. Delegate authority for the administration of the district to the superintendent.

10. Endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings. Render all decisions based on the available facts and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special groups.

11. Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members and seek systematic communications between the board and students, staff, and all elements of the community.

12. Communicate to board members and the superintendent, at appropriate times, expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs.

13. Inform myself about current education issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school boards associations.

14. Refrain from using my board position for personal or partisan gain.

15. Make certain the board remains responsive to the community.

16. Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the education welfare of all the students attending the public schools.
Appendix F

Standards for Arkansas School Boards

I. Vision/Philosophy
   A. The board creates a clear vision for the district that focuses on students, excellence in education, and academic achievement.
   B. The board adopts this vision that is created through collaborative processes that involve the staff, parents, community, and students.
   C. The board effectively communicates this vision to the staff, parents, community, and students.
   D. The board adopts long- and short-term goals to accomplish the vision of the district.
   E. The board believes that accountability for achieving the goals of the district rests with the School Board, the superintendent, the staff, the parents, the community, the students, and the state.

II. Organization
   A. The board adopts and follows a “Code of Ethics.”
   B. The board adopts policies that clearly define the roles and duties of its members.
   C. The board adopts policies delineating the procedures for electing its officers and defining their roles and duties.

III. Board Operations
   A. The board governs through approved policies and maintains a current policy manual which is reviewed regularly.
   B. The board conducts professional meetings in accordance with the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act by establishing and publishing the agenda prior to the meeting and by following the agenda during the meeting.
   C. The board conducts public forums periodically to receive input from citizens.
   D. The board acts with fiscal responsibility.

IV. Board Development
   A. The board receives annual training as recommended and/or conducted by the Arkansas School Boards Association and is familiar with the *Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members*.
   B. New board members receive additional timely training regarding their responsibilities.
   C. The board conducts annual self-assessments and avails itself of professional development opportunities based on the needs of its members.
   D. The board keeps abreast of state and federal laws that impact education.
   E. The board stays informed about current education issues.
   F. The board attends regional and state Arkansas School Boards Association meetings and remains informed of National School Boards Association meetings and issues.
   G. The board, at least annually, convenes for an extended work session to review goals, evaluate the progress of the district, and develop long-range plans.
   H. The board is familiar with Key Work of School Boards and implements those concepts.
V. Personnel Operations
A. The board maintains a high standard of ethics in all personnel matters.
B. The board remains neutral in all personnel matters until the superintendent brings a recommendation to them.
C. The board adopts personnel policies with input from district personnel.
D. The board empowers the administration to recruit and recommend highly qualified applicants to the board.
E. The board expects the administration to maintain a highly qualified staff by offering timely and adequate opportunities for professional development.
F. The board hires the superintendent and is responsible for conducting a search to replace an exiting superintendent.
G. The board evaluates the superintendent annually and determines the continued employment of the superintendent.

VI. Board/Staff/Community Relations
A. The board maintains a positive, supportive, and professional attitude toward all staff.
B. The board and the superintendent work together as a leadership team.
C. The board recognizes, protects, and encourages the chain of command at all times.
D. The board and superintendent recognize that communication is a two-way process.
E. The board and the superintendent work together to provide and follow a process that encourages and seeks input from the staff and community when appropriate on significant issues by:
   1. providing leadership in the establishment of open dialogue through community discussion groups, school councils, and other means.
   2. collaborating with local, state, and national agencies.
   3. working with the media to provide information.
   4. visiting schools.
   5. including informative presentations from staff and students at school board meetings.
F. The board models respect for the superintendent, staff, parents, community, and students.
G. The board supports and adopts the use of Study Circles, or a similar process, as a method of communicating with staff, parents, community, and students.
Appendix G
How Do You Measure Up?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Vision and Philosophy</th>
<th>Fully-Achieved</th>
<th>Mostly-Achieved</th>
<th>Partially-Achieved</th>
<th>Pending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. We have a clear vision for the district that focuses on students, excellence in education, and academic achievement.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. We create our vision in collaboration with staff, parents, students, and the community.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. We effectively communicate the vision to staff, parents, students, and the community.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. We have long- and short-term goals for accomplishing the district’s vision.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. We believe that accountability for achieving the goals rests with the board, superintendent, staff, parents, students, community, and state.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Organization

| A. We have a Code of Ethics and we follow it. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| B. We adopt policies that clearly define the roles and duties of our board members. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| C. We adopt policies delineating the procedures for electing our officers and defining their roles and duties. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

III. Board Operations

| A. We govern through approved policies and maintain a current policy manual that we regularly review. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| B. We conduct professional meetings in accordance with the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act by setting and publishing the agenda before the meeting and by following it during the meeting. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| C. We periodically conduct public forums to invite citizens’ input. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| D. We act with fiscal responsibility. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

IV. Board Development

| A. We receive the annual training recommended or conducted by ASBA and are familiar with the *Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members*. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| B. Our new board members receive an orientation and meet state training requirements with timely training about their responsibilities. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| C. We conduct annual self-assessments and meet state training requirements by seeking professional development based on our board’s needs. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| D. We stay abreast of state and federal laws that affect education. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| E. We stay informed about current education issues. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| F. We attend regional and state ASBA meetings and remain informed of the National School Boards Association meetings and issues. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
G. We convene as least annually for an extended work session to review goals, evaluate the district’s progress, and develop long-range plans.

H. We are familiar with Key Work of School Boards and implement its concepts.

V. Personnel Operations
   A. We maintain a high standard of ethics in all personnel matters.
   B. We remain neutral in all personnel matters until the superintendent brings us a recommendation.
   C. We adopt personnel policies with input from district personnel.
   D. We empower the administration to recruit and recommend highly qualified applicants to us.
   E. We expect the administration to maintain a highly qualified staff by offering timely and adequate professional development.
   F. We hire the superintendent and are responsible for a search to replace an exiting superintendent.
   G. We evaluate the superintendent annually and determine his or her continued employment.

VI. Board, Staff, and Community Relations
   A. We maintain a positive, supportive, and professional attitude toward all staff.
   B. We and the superintendent work together as a leadership team.
   C. We recognize, protect, and encourage the chain of command at all times.
   D. We and the superintendent recognize that communication is a two-way process.
   E. We work together with the superintendent to follow a process that encourages and seeks input from the staff and community, when appropriate, on significant issues by:
      1. establishing open dialogue through community discussion groups, school councils, and other means.
      2. collaborating with local, state, and national agencies.
      3. working with the media to provide information.
      4. visiting schools.
      5. including informative presentations from staff and students at board meetings.
   F. We model respect for the superintendent, staff, parents, students, and the community.
   G. We support and use Study Circles, or a similar process, as a method for communicating with staff, parents, students, and the community.