

Waterford School District Board of Education Organizational Meeting

Dr. Mike Ristich
January, 16th, 2025

Inspired, Educated, and Empowered to Thrive

Here's our [2021-2026 Strategic Plan](#)



Mission

We provide exemplary educational experiences for each student to thrive

Strategic Goal Areas

- Academics/Programs
- Personnel/Leadership
- Operations
- Communications/Community Engagement
- Learning Environment/Culture

As the BOE, our
investments and
decisions are
driven by our vision,
mission, and goals.

Board Processes, Policies, and Procedures

It's a good time to revisit the
work of the WSD BOE

- 1) Our bylaws specify a new-member orientation.
- 2) It's Board of Education Appreciation Month.
- 3) It's our organizational meeting.
- 4) This is how we contribute to student success.

The Law

MCL 380.11a

Michigan Compiled Law

- **A general powers school district has all of the rights, powers, and duties expressly stated in this act;** may exercise a power implied or incident to a power expressly stated in this act; and, except as otherwise provided by law, may exercise a power incidental or appropriate to the performance of a function related to operation of a public school and the provision of public education services in the interests of public elementary and secondary education in the school district, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

Michigan Compiled Law: BoE Duties

- **Educate pupils**
- Providing for **the safety** and welfare of pupils while at school or a school sponsored activity or while en route to or from school or a school sponsored activity.
- Except as otherwise provided in this section, **acquiring, constructing, maintaining, repairing, renovating, disposing of, or conveying school property, facilities, equipment, technology, or furnishings**

Michigan Compiled Law: BoE Duties

- **Hiring, contracting for, scheduling, supervising, or terminating employees, independent contractors,** and others, including, but not limited to, another school district or an intermediate school district, to carry out school district powers. A school district may indemnify its employees.
- **Receiving, accounting for, investing, or expending public school money;** borrowing money and pledging public school funds for repayment; and qualifying for state school aid and other public or private money from local, regional, state, or federal sources.

Michigan Compiled Law: BoE Duties

- A general powers school district may **enter into agreements, contracts, or other cooperative arrangements with other entities, public or private**, including, but not limited to, another school district or an intermediate school district, or join organizations as part of performing the functions of the school district. An agreement, contract, or other cooperative arrangement that is entered into under this act is not required to comply with the provisions of the urban cooperation act of 1967, 1967 (Ex Sess) PA 7, MCL 124.501 to 124.512, as provided under section 503 of that act, MCL 124.503.

Michigan Compiled Law: BoE Duties

- A general powers school district is a body corporate and shall be governed by a school board. **An act of a school board is not valid unless approved, at a meeting of the school board, by a majority vote of the members lawfully serving on the board.**
- **The board of a general powers school district shall adopt bylaws.** These bylaws may establish or change board procedures, the number of board officers, titles and duties of board officers, and any other matter related to effective and efficient functioning of the board. Regular meetings of the board shall be held at least once each month, at the time and place fixed by the bylaws. Special meetings may be called and held in the manner and for the purposes specified in the bylaws. Board procedures, bylaws, and policies in effect on the effective date of this section shall continue in effect until changed by action of the board.

And more!

Here are our [Board Policies](#)! These spell out the parameters for Board action, administrator decision-making, and general teaching and learning within the district.

So, the BoE does it all? They can do whatever they want?

No.

More Law Stuff

In meeting their duties, BoEs must abide by the following (in the following order):

- Federal Law
- State Law/Open Meetings Act
- Local Law
- Board Policies
- Robert's Rules

“The Board of Education vests the primary responsibility for administration of this District in the Superintendent of Schools. The appointment of that officer is, therefore, one of the most important functions the Board can perform.” (po122)

BoE Policies

- The Board of Education believes that, in general, **it is the primary duty of the Board to establish policies and that of the Superintendent to administer such policies.** Policy should not be originated or changed without discussing it with the Board. The Superintendent should be given the latitude to determine the best method of implementing the policies of the Board.
- **The Superintendent, as the chief administrative officer of the School District, is the primary professional advisor to the Board.** S/He is responsible for the development, supervision, and operation of the school program and facilities. His/Her methods should be made known to the staff through the administrative guidelines of the District. **The Board shall retain oversight supervision of such administrative guidelines.** (po1210)

BoE Policies

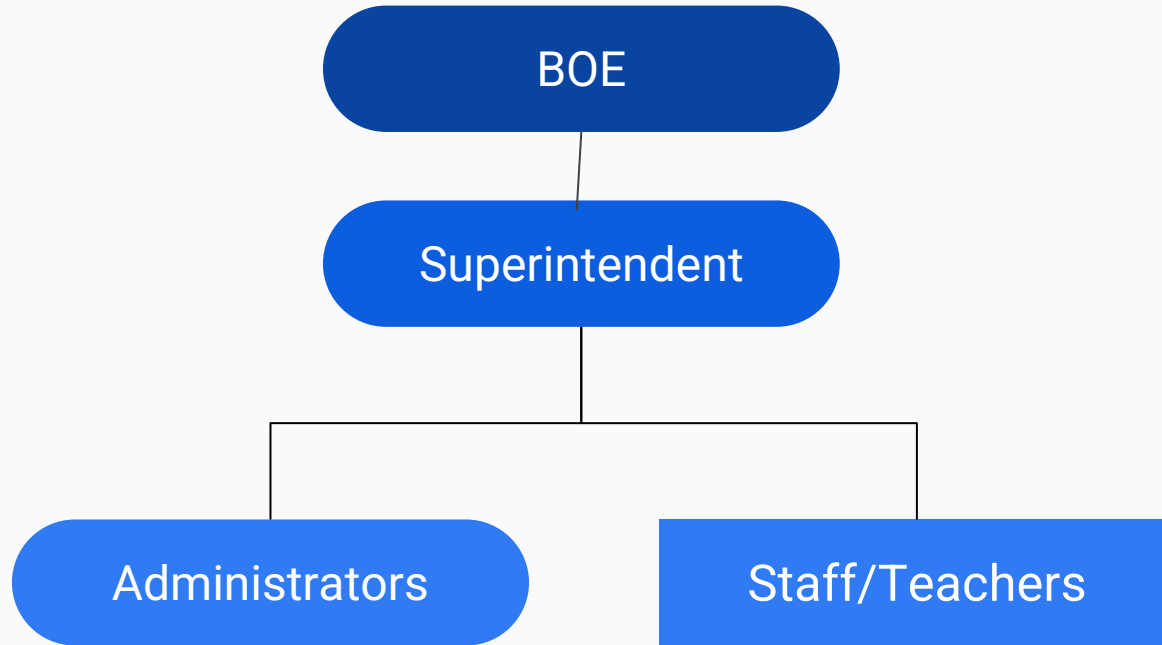
- The Superintendent and those administrators directed by the Superintendent shall attend all meetings, when feasible. **Administrative participation shall be by professional counsel, guidance, and recommendation - as distinct from deliberation, debate, and voting of Board members.**
- **In order to expedite negotiation procedures, the Superintendent is appointed as chief representative of the Board for the purpose of determining negotiation strategies and members of negotiation teams for collective bargaining with recognized unions and employee units.**
- **The Board is responsible for determining the success of the Superintendent in meeting the goals established by the Board through annual evaluations of the Superintendent's performance.** The Board, in formulating its position with regard to the performance of the Superintendent, shall rely, whenever possible, on the objective outcomes of its evaluations rather than on subjective opinions. (po1210)

In short, the BoE and Superintendent have distinct roles and responsibilities.

Roles

“A school board’s primary responsibility is to oversee the education of the students in its district. Individual board members work together in order to reach decisions that may have a lasting impact. These decisions are generally broad in scope and, ideally, the board will rarely have to delve into the district’s day-to-day operations. The reporting of building-level matters to the board will generally be left to the discretion of the superintendent” ([Gerring 30](#))

To clarify, when it comes to “running the district,” it’s not this:

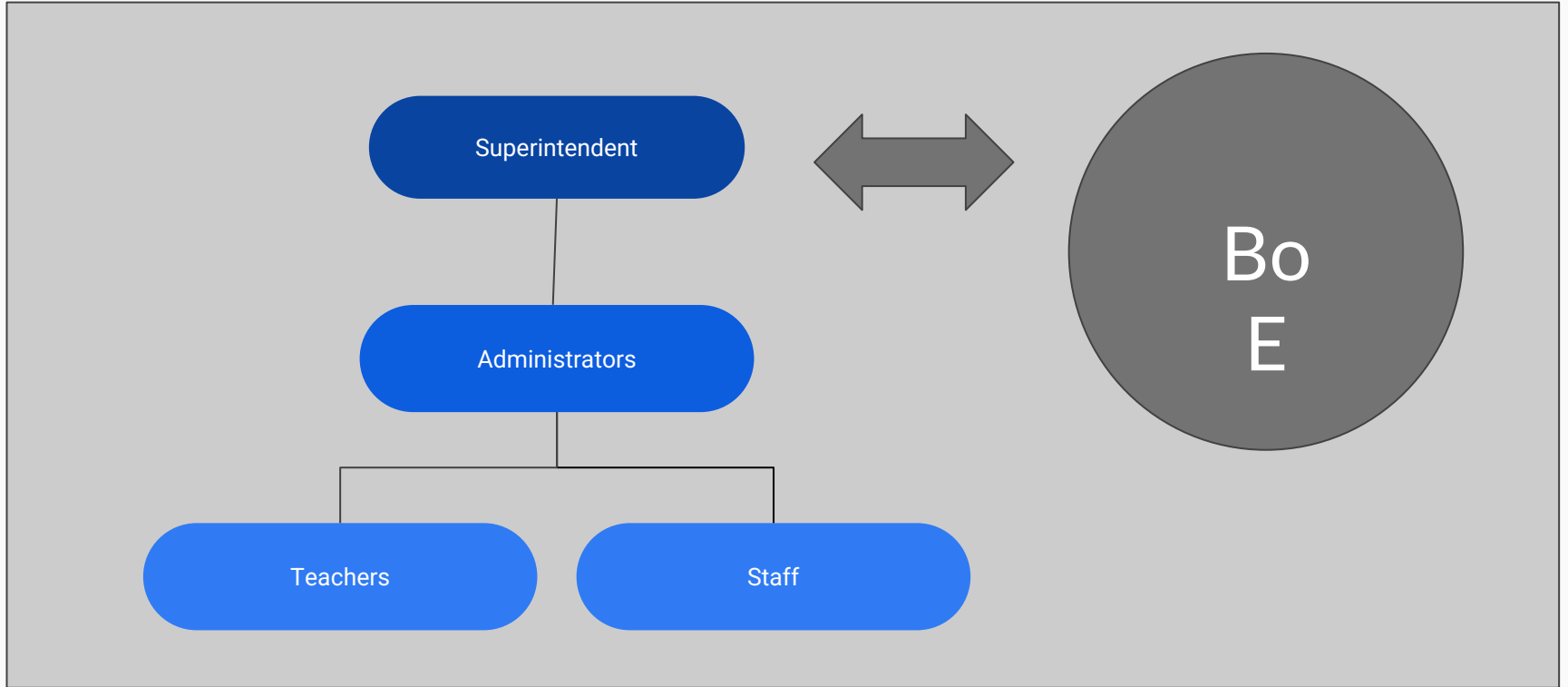


An Appeals Body

“Board members should view themselves outside of the district chain of command rather than at its apex. Once the top of the chain (the superintendent) has been reached without a satisfactory resolution, board policy usually dictates that the individual can then bring the matter to the board, but as more of an ‘appeal’ mechanism. Boards are encouraged to review the decision of the superintendent as to whether or not it followed existing policies and procedures in order to achieve an acceptable outcome, not substitute its own judgement for that of the superintendent.”

(Gerring 30)

It's more like this...



This arrangement,
however, means that
board trustees have
the ability to *increase
student achievement!*

Or, if trustees abuse
or circumvent the
process and
arrangement, *they
can harm student
achievement.*

*And cost the
district thousands
of dollars.*

How to be effective?

The Center for Public Education
and the National Association for
School Boards

“Based on the studies included in this report, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts hold a high, shared vision about the capabilities of both students and staff—they believe that more is possible and are motivated to improve results for students. They are policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and classroom instruction. They engage in goal-setting processes that can drive action in the district to improve. They align resources—including staff professional development—around those goals. They are data savvy—using data to both diagnose problems and to monitor and drive continuous improvement efforts. They communicate with and engage staff and community and work well together as a team and in collaborative leadership with their superintendents. And, they commit to their own learning, building the knowledge and skills it takes to govern during a period of educational reform.” (Devarics and O’Brien)

Eight Traits of Effective Boards (1-4)

- Effective school boards **commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision**
- Effective school boards **have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn**, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
- Effective school boards are accountability driven, **spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.**
- Effective school boards **have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure** to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

Eight Traits of Effective Boards (5-8)

- Effective boards are **data savvy**; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
- Effective school boards **align and sustain resources**, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
- Effective school boards **lead as a united team with the superintendent**, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Effective school boards **take part in team development and training**, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

A Quick Note About Process

What's the typical process?

1. The Superintendent and their team have discussions about some issue that needs Board approval (purchases, policy, etc.)
2. The Superintendent will sometimes ask the Board President to poll members of the Board to better understand all perspectives.
3. A refined proposal is brought forth as an information item at a Regular Meeting or for discussion at a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting. The Board and Administration inquire into and have conversations about the proposal.
4. The proposal is refined. Board President and/or Superintendent may ask individuals for more feedback
5. A final proposal is brought forth for action at a Regular Business Meeting.
6. Board votes.
7. Administration implements.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

Here are some important practices to note:

- 1) If a member asks for information related to a board resolution, policy, or strategic plan, that information will be shared with everyone to ensure equal access to information.
- 2) Be mindful of confidentiality. Breaking confidentiality violates the law and erodes trust.
- 3) Regarding social media, MASB advises that Board Members “amplify” district content without providing commentary (as it can muddy the waters).
- 4) Members should never provide directives to District employees other than the Superintendent.
- 5) The Board speaks through its minutes (no individual speaks for the Board).
- 6) Be mindful of the Superintendent’s time and focus (we have a strategic plan!).

The Agenda

- The Superintendent and Board President collaborate to develop the agendas. They guide our actions and serve as the official records of our work. (PO 166)
 - Introductory Items
 - Public Comment on Action Items
 - Consent Agenda
 - Information Items
 - New Business
 - Public Comment on Non-Action Items
 - Board Reports
 - Superintendent Report

A Robert's Rules Primer

- Ask to be recognized by the Board President.
- We address ideas, not people. Be respectful.
- The President works to recognize speakers in an alternating fashion.
- Don't interrupt.
- Ideally, member comments should be limited to two rounds.
- Previous decisions are not admissible when deliberating (take an issue on its own merits).
- The President is our spokesperson.

The results?

The process (and the eight traits of effective boards) means:

- There are plenty of opportunities to listen, ask questions, and gain answers.
- Board members and administration can collaborate and build trust.
- It allows the Board to stay focused on its mission and role and recognize the expertise of the District staff/leadership.
- There are no surprises, when it comes to voting.
- There are no soap-boxes/monologues because the process facilitates consensus.
- ***Student achievement remains the focus!***

We “represent our community” by creating the conditions for a thriving school district and behaving in ways that honor the work of our staff and students. That’s what the community wants.

Why does all of this matter?

“This first-ever testing of the relationship between the NSBA Key Work of School Boards and academic outcomes provides evidence supporting the use of these best practices by school boards in Wisconsin. Notably, none of the models showed a negative relationship between adherence to the Key Work concepts and achievement; meaning adhering to these practices will likely yield some academic gains for boards comprised of longer serving board members, and no negative academic consequences.”
(Ford and Ihrke 93)

“The evidence presented suggests public governing boards can improve their organization’s performance by focusing on strategic planning, openness and accountability with and between board members, partnership with the government executive, honesty, community input, board development, and member stability over time.” (Ford and Ihrke 93)

In short...

BoEs set the tone and create the conditions for gainful and rewarding work, robust and meaningful learning, and lasting community pride.

This is a team
committed to
decorum, respect,
and student
achievement.

This is about
problem-solving, not
partisanship.

“A leader is anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.”
(Brené Brown)

Please visit the WSD Board of Education website for information about our meetings, agendas, strategic plan, and tips for making your voice heard. Thank you!