

# Cincinnati Central School

## Board of Education Handbook



*Cincinnati Central – Striving to meet children’s needs, awaken their minds, and touch their hearts.*

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## **I. What do school board members do?**

The board of education is a uniquely American institution. It keeps the country's public schools flexible and responsive to the needs of their local communities. A member of a board of education in New York State takes on one of the most important responsibilities that can be assigned to any citizen: helping to plan the education of the community's youth.

### **➤ *As a school board member you hold positions as:***

- An individual school board member
- A member of the district governance team composed of school board members and the superintendent
- A member of a board made of other members

### **➤ *With your election as board member, you are entrusted by your community to act as:***

- **A Representative** - of the entire community
- **A Steward** - of the district's resources
- **A Leader** - of the district
- **An Advocate** - for public education

At your first board meeting you will take an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the constitution of the State of New York and to serve the children of New York State. To fulfill this public trust you will need to:

- Study issues at public board meetings
- Vote on issues affecting your district
- Support the decisions of the board majority
- Promote public education in your local community and beyond

➤ *Your major board responsibilities are:*

- **Set the District's Direction** - drawing upon the community, the board describes a shared vision, and establishes goals, standards and strategies to transform vision into reality.
- **Ensure Alignment** - of strategy, resources, policies, programs, and processes with district goals
- **Assess & Account for Progress** - using comprehensive data, thorough deliberation, and open communication
- **Continuously Improve** - the district - accentuating and reinforcing the positive, and correcting the negative and insuring that state and federal mandates are met.

**II. Qualifications to be a school board member**

➤ *A qualified candidate must be:*

- A U.S. citizen
- At least 18 years old
- Able to read and write
- A district resident for at least one year prior to the election
- Not employed by the board on which he or she serves

➤ *Furthermore a candidate should:*

- Be a person of good reputation for honest and trustworthy character
- Possess the ability to work well with others and be respectful of differences
- Not seek to promote a personal agenda or gain
- Strive for the betterment of students and the district in which they serve
- Be committed to attending the regularly scheduled meetings and additional meetings as necessary. The regularly scheduled meetings of the Cincinnati school board are the second and fourth Thursdays of each month.

### III. How does one become a school board member?

- Candidates must submit petitions signed by district community members to the district clerk by a predetermined date publicized by the district.
- Candidates campaign among eligible voters. Often when there are several candidates for open seats, a “meet the candidate” event will be hosted so that community members can meet and hear prospective candidates.
- Board members are elected during the annual budget vote on the third Tuesday in May.

### IV. Board Authority

Two of the most important duties of school board members are to set goals and establish policy for the school system, from which all board decisions should logically follow.

A board member is expected to make decisions on a wide range of problems: some are routine, such as approving minutes of the last meeting; others are more complex, such as closing a school; some are the result of many lesser decisions - leading, for example, to the adoption of a corporation budget.

A board member needs to be a skilled decision maker, but he or she must remember that decisions are to be made only by the board acting as a whole in an advertised public meeting. Individual opinions on matters being considered can and should be defended vigorously, but once a decision is reached, it should be accepted gracefully and implemented wholeheartedly. No individual school board member may unilaterally commit the whole board to a particular course of action. The following is from the Cincinnati Central School website regarding Board Authority  
**FAQ: Do individual members of the school board have the right to take an official action on the board's behalf?**

"Generally, no. A school board acting in its corporate capacity is required to transact its business in the same manner as the governing body of any corporation; that is, its acts are required to be authorized by resolutions or motions duly adopted or passed by a majority of the whole board. In addition, court decision invariably agrees that a transaction has no legal effect and is not considered an official action unless made at a properly constituted meeting of the board. Therefore, unless the board has taken official action to designate an individual member as the representative of the board for a particular purpose, an individual board member has no more authority than any other qualified voter of the district."

- Quorum: A quorum is such a number of members of any deliberative or corporate body as is necessary for the legal transaction of business, commonly a majority. At Cincinnati a minimum of 4 board members must be present to make a quorum.

## V. What is the Role of the School Board?

Excerpts of the following are taken from the NSBA Key Work of School Boards Guidebooks

- **VISION** – The board envisions the community education future and then formulates the goals, defines the outcomes and sets the course for its public schools. Vision is not about what we are, but what we want to be. Vision captures a critical dimension of dynamic systems. For school boards, it is about where we are going and what kind of school systems we are trying to create now and for the future. Closely related to vision is mission. At one level, the mission of an organization is what it is created to do. In effective organizations, the mission statement also captures and reflects the core values and beliefs that guide the organization and its members in pursuit of stated aims and goals. Our Mission statement for

Cincinnati Central School: *A community striving to meet all students' needs, awaken their minds and touch their hearts.*

- STANDARDS – Another major component of a systems approach is the establishment of standards for performance. In order to know whether we are performing in accordance with expectations, we need to establish specific and clearly delineated standards. Those standards need to be tied in realistic ways to the expectations of the community.
- ASSESSMENT – Promoting outstanding student performance based on clearly delineated standards is central to the key work of school boards. The next step is to determine how well students are doing in meeting those standards. School boards need information in order to make decisions, not only about how well they are doing, but also about what may be needed in order to ensure that system goals will be met.
- ACCOUNTABILITY – Increasingly local school districts are being held accountable for what happens to students and how well they perform on a variety of assessment measures. The Federal Government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires all states to meet ongoing improvement mandates for student achievement, assessments and accountability. Report cards are issued to monitor school improvements. Fiscal and professional accountability are major concerns for school boards as they are entrusted by their community to see that fiscal responsibility and management are impeccably accurate. More information on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb>

- REVIEW OF POLICIES – Upon election, every board member is given a large binder containing the policies that guide the governance of the district. The Cincinnati Central School District Policy Manual is divided in the following categories.
  1. By-Laws
  2. Internal Operations
  3. Community Relations
  4. Administration
  5. Non-Instructional/Business Operation
  6. Personnel
  7. Students
  8. Instruction

It is the responsibility of the Board to review these policies from time to time and to make revisions (or removals) to reflect changes in education, laws or the district. Usually a policy review committee consisting of selected or designated board members and the Superintendent of Schools will review the policy, make the changes and present the revised policy to the entire board for their approval at a regularly scheduled school board meeting.

- DEVELOPING AND PASSING THE ANNUAL SCHOOL BUDGET – One of the most important responsibilities that the school board has is developing and passing the annual school budget. In New York State school budgets are voted on the third Tuesday in May. School boards work with the Superintendent and School Business Administrator to develop the school budget. Many factors are considered in developing the school budget. Factors such as;
  - i. Employee contractual obligations
  - ii. Maintenance costs such as fuel, transportation, building maintenance.
  - iii. Health insurance costs

- iv. The educational goals of the school board
- v. The economic capabilities of the district
- vi. Percentage of state aid

- HIRING PERSONNEL – The Board of Education is responsible for hiring qualified school personnel. The process of reviewing resumes and conducting interviews of qualified candidates is done by the Superintendent and Administrators. Qualified candidates will be recommended to the Board by the Superintendent. The Board will then vote on personnel in a regularly scheduled school board meeting. If the position being filled is that of a Superintendent, then the Board will review resumes and conduct interviews and decide on the best qualified candidate for the district. At times, the Board may designate a third party (i.e. BOCES superintendent) to collect and review Superintendent resumes and make recommendations to the Board for consideration.
  
- GRANTING TENURE – The Board of Education has the task of granting (or denying) tenure to teachers employed for 3 years in a specific area of instruction (dependent upon experience) based on the recommendation of the Superintendent. In some cases, tenure may be granted in 2 years. Tenure, by definition, is **status granted to an employee, usually after a probationary period, indicating that the position or employment is permanent.** Annual and semi annual evaluations are done by the administrators of all tenure candidates throughout their two or three year probationary period. These evaluations are shared with the Board to help guide them in their decisions.

- RATIFICATION OF CONTRACTS – The Board of Education has the responsibility for ratification of contracts for instructional and non-instructional staff. Contract negotiations are held with representation from unions and the district through the office of the Superintendent of Schools. When all parties involved are satisfied with the proposed contract it is ratified by the respective union and approved by the Board at a regularly scheduled school board meeting. If an agreement can not be reached and contract agreements are at impasse then negotiations will be conducted by the administration through a negotiator. In addition, it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to approve capital projects, award contractor contracts, approve lease agreements, i.e.: computers, copiers, etc.
  
- DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN GOOD COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH:
  - i. Superintendent – It is vital to the success of the district and student achievement that the Board of Education and the Superintendent maintain a professional relationship based upon mutual respect and trust. This can be accomplished in part by clearly defined boundaries and understanding of each other’s roles. The responsibility of the Board is to focus on **Ends** – the vision, goals and policy. Basically the What? Why? How Well? And How Much? The Superintendent (as CEO) is responsible for focusing on **Means** – objectives, plans, actions, recommendations. Basically the How? When? Where? And By Whom? In general, the Superintendent works for the Board of Education and everyone else works for the Superintendent.
  - ii. Administrators
  - iii. Instructional and non-instructional (support) staff
  - iv. Community – As a school board member in a district such as Cincinnati, you will eventually be visited or called by a

community member with a school concern. You want to develop and maintain good relationships with the community you serve and it is natural to want to hear someone's concern. Some sound advice in such matters is to make sure you have guided the person through the proper chain of command. For example, an issue should first be discussed with the individual, then their supervisor and then the Superintendent. If still not satisfied with the result, the issue would then be brought before the Board. When in doubt, call the Superintendent or Board President to discuss the issue. Remember to make no judgments until you have researched the concern and make no promises on behalf of the board.

## **VI. Developing an Effective School Board**

The most effective school boards are those whose members are united behind the District's vision and mission and who work collaboratively in a mutually respectful environment to advance student achievement and school improvement. School boards are usually made up of five, seven or nine members. The Cincinnati Central School Board consists of seven members. It is not possible for seven individuals from different educational, cultural or ideological backgrounds to always agree on every topic and although the goals may be common the ideas to achieving them may (will) vary between members. It is important to remember that one can disagree respectfully and vote their conscience, however once a motion has been passed or rejected by the Board, all board members should publicly support the decision of the majority. Board unity should be a priority to ensure the most effective and productive board. Learn to recognize the specific contributions that each board member brings to the Board. When these are utilized and appreciated, the Board as a whole is healthier and more effective.

- Training/Workshops – Ongoing training is essential for school boards to remain current and informed in the execution of their duties. New Board member training is held over 4 nights in June by the Central New York School Boards Association (CNYSBA) to instruct new board members on the basic responsibilities and duties of a school board member. Through the office of the Superintendent emails from CNYSBA and NYSSBA's On Board magazine you will be informed of ongoing workshops and trainings designed to educate you in your role as a school board member.
  
- Committees – As a school board member you may be asked to sit on various committees with selected other board members to work on some component of board responsibility and report back to the full board. Some committees are:
  - i. Policy review committee
  - ii. Audit committee
  - iii. Special committees to address Board of Education goals
  
- Conferences – A well informed school board has the best chance of impacting a district for success. Conferences held across the state are helpful for Board members to keep a pulse on what is happening in public education. Locally, a legislative breakfast is usually held in February for local school boards to meet with their elected representatives in Albany to voice their concerns and advocate for their schools.
  
- Lobbying – Specific lobbying in Albany to advance the school district.

**VII. CNYSBA** – The Cincinnatus School Board is a member of the Central New York School Boards Association. The following is taken directly from the CNYSBA website.

➤ *Why we exist:*

...to serve the people responsible for public education, enabling them to perform effectively in their complex and challenging role.

...to speak with one voice to address issues of regional impact.

...to inform public school board members about contemporary issues affecting public education and the operation of public schools.

...to provide forums for school board members where they may learn from one another.

...to mobilize board members to effectively influence those outside the schools who also share responsibility for educating our children.

➤ *What we offer:*

**Board Training & Development**

- **The School for New Board Members**  
During four evenings in June, newly-elected school board members learn how to have an immediate impact on their boards. Over 400 new board members have received this training.
- **Board President Roundtables**  
Board Presidents from throughout central New York have the opportunity to sharpen their leadership skills, discuss issues of common concern, and share ideas through CNYSBA programs designed specifically for board presidents.

**Legislative Action**

- **Legislative Breakfasts**  
CNYSBA sponsors multiple legislative breakfasts in the Central New York region, enabling our members to share their concerns with the 16 NYS Senate and Assembly Members who collectively represent us.
- **Annual Lobby Day**  
Once a year, hold a local lobby day to focus high level Legislative attention on our region's common issues.
- **Statewide School Finance Consortium**  
Organized and led by CNYSBA, the Consortium now consists of over 260 school districts and is leading the fight statewide for a more equitable, predictable school aid formula.

## **Legislative Information**

- **Legislative Updates**

Provided to all board members and superintendents, these keep our members apprised of budget and political developments in Albany that affect state aid.

## **Networking**

- Perhaps more important than anything else, CNYSBA provides school board members the opportunity to learn from one another.

➤ ***Who we serve:***

Boards from school districts in four BOCES (Onondaga-Cortland-Madison, Cayuga-Onondaga, Oswego, and Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga) comprise our membership.

Our large regional area and our many school districts make us one of the largest school boards associations in New York State.

➤ ***How we operate:***

Five county school boards associations exist within CNYSBA: Oswego; Onondaga-Madison; Cayuga-Onondaga; Cortland-Madison; and the Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga School Boards Associations.

Each of these organizations selects three school board members to represent them on the Board of Directors of the CNYSBA. Directors serve three-year terms.

## **VIII. Helpful Websites:**

- Central New York School Boards Association <http://www.cnysba.org/>
- New York State School Boards Association <http://www.nyssba.org/>
- Rural Schools Association of New York <http://rsa.cornell.edu/>
- New York State Education Department <http://www.nysed.gov/>
- Senator Jim Seward [www.senatorjimseward.com/](http://www.senatorjimseward.com/)
- Assemblyman Gary Finch <http://www.garyfinch.com/>
- No Child Left Behind <http://www.ed.gov/nclb>
- New York State NCLB  
<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/deputy/nclb/nclbhome.htm>
- New York State Homepage [www.ny.gov](http://www.ny.gov)

**IX. Acronyms:**

- SED – State Education Department
- PTO – Parent Teacher Organization
- IEP – Individual Education Plan
- CSE – Committee on Special Education
- CPSE – Committee on Pre-School Special Education
- BOCES – Boards of Cooperative Educational Services
- NYSSBA – New York State School Boards Association
- AIS – Academic Intervention Service
- AE – Academic Enrichment