

Ames Community School District Board Member Handbook

This Board Handbook was drafted and approved by the Ames Community School Board during the Fall 2023. This handbook can be updated at the will of the board. It is recommended each new board reviews the contents annually while setting board goals.



The mission of the Ames Community School District, which aspires to be Iowa's premier school district, is to inspire and empower all students and staff to pursue and maximize their personal and educational potential, grounded in strong community and family partnerships and guided by high quality educators who commit to innovative instruction getting every student what they need to be successful.

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Being a Board Member

Welcome to becoming an Ames Community School District Board Member! On behalf of the community, thank you for dedicating your time and efforts to supporting and improving our school district as it strives to meet the needs of every student. Serving on a board can be a unique role, one that may be new to you. Likely, you've arrived at this point by being either engaged in our community in some way, or driven by a concern or perceived need in our district. Whatever path you have followed, we strongly encourage you to utilize this handbook throughout your tenure. As a board, we have strived to pull together information to help you get started in this role, and to support you as you navigate various challenges during your time on the board.

Board Member Orientation and On-boarding

The Superintendent, along with the President and Vice President, will provide you with various information to orient you to this position. You may meet with district staff, review policies and documents to start to familiarize yourself with this role.

Iowa Association of School Boards

As a member of our board, you are automatically a member of the Iowa Association of School Boards. This is an incredible resource for you as an individual board member, for our entire team, our superintendent and our leadership. Get to know their website and the support available to you. Typically each election year they offer a New Member Workshop. If you are able to make this work, it is very useful.

[IASB Website](#) - your school email address will provide you with access to these resources
[IASB Handbook](#) - highly encourage new members to review and current members to refer to
[IASB "Standards for Effective School Boards"](#) - based on practice and research, a common framework for excellence in school board governance

Board Meetings

Board meetings are where the board takes care of business and addresses any action items. It is important board members come prepared to discuss the materials provided in the meeting agenda and attachments. Some helpful information:

- Board policies in [210 series](#) provide guidance on board meetings. All are encouraged to review these early in their terms of service.
- Tips for Preparing for Your First Board Meeting - ([tips](#))
- Open Meetings Law - everything we do as a board is governed by the open meetings law. Become knowledgeable on this crucial aspect of board membership. ([IASB resources](#))
- Excellent Questions for Presenters for Board Members to Consider Asking - ([IASB resource](#))
- According to Board Policy 210.7 Rules of Order, meetings are governed by Robert's Rules of Order. Two helpful documents for board members to reference:
 - Iowa State Extension:
<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Simplified-Parliamentary-Procedure>.

- Roberts Rules for dummies:
https://www.amazon.com/Roberts-Rules-Dummies-Alan-Jennings-dp-1119824583/dp/1119824583/ref=dp_ob_title_bk
- [Board Planning Calendar](#) - The final item on each agenda is the board calendar. This provides the board with a roadmap of the work through the year.

District Overview

- [About the District](#)
- [Organizational Chart](#)
- [Strategic Plan Overview](#)
- Schools
 - [Ames High School](#)
 - [Ames Middle School](#)
 - [Sawyer Elementary](#)
 - [Mitchell Elementary](#)
 - [Meeker Elementary](#)
 - [Fellows Elementary](#)
 - [Edwards Elementary](#)
 - [Northwood Preschool](#)
- [Amazing Magazine](#)
- [Amazing Education Podcast](#)

School Finance

School finance in the State of Iowa is unique and can be confusing. IASB has several resources collected to support board member's learning and understanding of this crucial component of our responsibilities. During each IASB Conference, board members can participate in workshops around school finance. Each board member should dedicate time early and throughout their term, to better understand the nuances of school funding.

- Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS) has created a short video including general information on key terms and concepts explaining how public schools in Iowa are funded. <https://www.iowaschoolfinance.com/schoolfinancebasics>
- School Finance Basics - [IASB resources](#) This site is loaded with information to support your learning. Finance Glossary of Terms, Terminology, Iowa School Finance Formula, etc.
- School Finance Basics 101, 201 and 301 - excellent workshops provided by IASB during the pre-conference. Past presentations can be found on the IASB Financial Resources page.
- Each board member, except the Board President, will be responsible for auditing the bills paid each month. Board members will select two months to represent the rest of the board. A form to assist this process can be found here https://www.ia-sb.org/docs/default-source/toolbox/financial-tools/school-finance-basics/auditandallow02271623-d89a-481f-8832-3b1e9f245710.pdf?sfvrsn=4d945a33_3

- Seven general fund indicators, IASB provides information on our school district, based on these indicators. You can access this report here <https://www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/financial-tools/school-district-budget-development>

Acronyms/Glossary

- IASB has provided a cheat sheet with several terms used in education. [IASB resource](#)
- [Ames Acronym Cheat Sheet](#)

Board Authority and Responsibilities

Pursuant to Iowa Code 274.1, a school board operates as a corporate body. As such, individual members have no legal status or authority and cannot commit or bind the board by their actions. The powers and duties of the board must be exercised by the board as a whole, and the will of the board must be accepted by each board member. Board members should also abide by all board policies.

A school board is entrusted with public funds for the purpose of improving student outcomes, and the board of directors is responsible for overseeing these improvements. The Ames Community School District Board of Directors has four primary responsibilities:

1. Setting policy with the force and effect of law for the management and operation of the District;
2. Selecting the chief executive director, the superintendent, to operate and manage the district on the Board's behalf, and evaluating the superintendent's performance;
3. Evaluating the education program's performance, including approval of and review of funding; and
4. Serving as a neutral arbiter for hearings related to student suspension or expulsion proceedings and certain employment termination hearings and appeals.

As a corporate body, board business can only be conducted at regular or special meetings with a quorum present, and board members should make every attempt to attend all board meetings and to be prepared for the meetings by reviewing the agenda and supporting information in advance.

The school board also has the responsibility of electing a board president and appointing a board secretary/treasurer.

It is important for each board member to understand the board's legal authority. IASB provides information to provide clarity for all members.

<https://www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/policy-legal-corner/legal-authority-school-calendars>

Sources: IASB, Ames CSD Board Policy [200.3](#), Iowa Code 274.1, 279.

Board Ethics and Guiding Principles

To be effective as a governing body, board members must commit to abiding by the Code of Ethics as defined in Board Policy [204](#). Each board member:

- Will listen to and respect the opinion of others.
- Will be motivated only by an earnest desire to serve the District as a whole and the community's students in the best possible way.
- Will recognize that authority rests with the Board in legal session and not with individual members of the Board, except where authorized by law.
- Will abide by majority decisions of the Board.
- Will expect, in Board meetings, to focus time on providing the best possible learning for District students.
- Will remain open-minded and objectively listen to facts presented at the Board table prior to voting.
- Will recognize the Board's responsibility is governance and not management.
- Will abide by all policies adopted by the Board, including the chain of command and meeting procedures.
- Will recognize the Superintendent as Executive Officer of the Board and empower them to administer the educational program and student learning.
- Will provide oversight for the financial stability of the District, balanced with the need for an effective educational program.
- Will respect confidentiality, when required by law.
- Will be trustees of public education and do the best to protect it, conserve it, and advance it.
- Will abide by the oath of office, federal law, and state law.
- Will recognize the integrity of our predecessors and recognize the merit of their work.
- Will commit to our own learning and endeavor to keep informed on local, state, and national educational developments of significance.
- Will express honest and thoughtful opinions in Board meetings in an effort to have decisions made for the best interests of the children and education program.
- Will make no disparaging remarks in or out of the Board meeting about other members of the Board or their opinions.

Board-Superintendent Roles

Understanding the roles of a school board member and the superintendent and how the team functions together can be difficult. However, it is vital for the success of the board-superintendent team to clarify the responsibilities between the work of the board and the work of the superintendent.

At a high level, the board's role is to steer the ship and set the direction to guide the district. The superintendent, with the help of their staff, will then follow that direction—planning the best way to reach the goals or destination the board, collectively with the superintendent, has set for the district.

Board members tend to be ‘doers’ in their communities. Many have served in parent-teacher organizations, Boosters, Scouts, etc. ‘Doers’ are accustomed to taking action and enthusiastically helping with issues and opportunities. However, the work of school board members is that of governance and to oversee one employee: the superintendent.

Each board-superintendent team is unique, and it is important to spend time learning 1) board policy, 2) what the board’s responsibilities are, 3) what the superintendent’s responsibilities are, and 4) how the team can best function to support the district to reach its mission. Doing this can help avoid conflict, which can arise when roles and expectations are not clearly defined.

Role and Responsibility Area	Board	Superintendent
1. General	Functions at a governance level	Oversees the day-to-day operations
2. Policy	Adopts policies	Recommends, creates procedures that support policy, and implements
3. Meetings	Conducts	Serves as a resource
4. Student Learning	Establishes goals and criteria, approves, and monitors	Recommends, oversees, monitors, and reports staff efforts
5. Budget/Finance	Adopts and monitors	Prepares, administers, and monitors
6. Personnel	Establishes criteria, approves or rejects recommendation	Interviews, recommends, hires, directs, evaluates, promotes, trains
7. Community Engagement	Creates a positive image for and within the district	Creates a positive image for the district and directs communications
8. Facilities	Plans with long-term vision	Takes a long-term plan and puts it into action

An effective school board:

- Works together as a board-superintendent team, with board members understanding their role at a governance level. The board must recognize that their work at the board table is a model for everything that will happen within the district.
- Represents and advocates for public education, serving as a liaison between the district and the community.
- Reflects on their work carefully, and asks themselves often, “Do we have a board policy that covers this topic?”

- Demonstrates trust and respect for the superintendent and for their right to have differing opinions with each other.
- Commits time for informal and formal learning, both at and away from the board table, to strengthen governance understanding and skill.
- Establishes relationships with local legislators. Showcases positive impacts the district is making for students, their achievement, and the community as a whole.
- Expects board members to be prepared for meetings and send questions to the board president and/or superintendent before board meetings to avoid what can be seen by the community and felt by others as a ‘surprise’ at the board table.
- Maintains relentless commitment that ALL children can learn at high levels

Board-Superintendent Relationship

Research supports clear role recognition, open communication, and positive relationships as the key to effective board-superintendent teams who positively impact student learning. Below are characteristics of effective board-superintendent teams.

Establish Clear Roles & Responsibilities

The most effective school boards spend most of their time creating policies to improve student achievement within a shared district vision, leaving the policy implementation and day-to-day operations to the superintendent and their professional staff. Districts should consider establishing a policy that carefully outlines specific guidelines and responsibilities the superintendent and school board each share.

Build Strong Relationships

Positive superintendent and board relations are characterized by confidence, support, respect, and open communication. Best practices for building relationships include connecting early and building rapport with new board members, ensuring equal treatment of all board members, listening to each board member to understand their perspectives, seeking advice from board members when appropriate, engaging in professional learning together as a way of building trust, and recognizing and celebrating each other’s successes.

Implement a Governance Mindset

The board identifies the outcomes or the “ends” and the superintendent and staff manage the “means” — the way toward the outcomes. These four approaches can help.

1. Systems Thinking - understanding that one decision has implications for the entire district.
2. Strategic Focus – “Effective governance follows a strategic progression through the steps of defining and reaching agreement on the moral imperative, creating a unity of purpose, and adopting strategic goals. The operational focuses of the board and superintendent must be on achievement of the moral imperative of raising the bar and closing the gap for all students in the district.”
3. Deep Learning – to be effective decision-makers, the board needs to be well informed about the workings of the district; the superintendent needs to be purposeful and intentional about what information they provide to the board.

4. Public Manner – both board members and the superintendent model the civilized behavior they expect from the students in the district.

(information in the preceding section was adapted from Hanover Research’s “Effective Superintendent-School Board Collaborations,

<https://www.hanoverresearch.com/reports-and-briefs/effective-superintendent-school-board-collaboration/?org=k-12-education>)

How the School Board is Organized: Governance, Committees, and Policies

The Board has a relatively flat structure, with two key leadership positions and a number of committees.

Officers

Each newly elected board member’s first meeting is the Board’s annual business meeting, which is held in late November each year. At that meeting, board members vote to choose the Board’s two leadership positions, President and Vice-President. The President and Vice-President perform several roles:

- They work with the Superintendent and District staff to set the agenda for board meetings. A board member who wants to bring a topic to the Board’s agenda needs to do so through the President and Vice-President.
- They generally organize the work of the board, such as proposing committee assignments.
- They lead the board in self-assessments:
<https://www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/board-development/school-board-self-assessments>.
- In collaboration with the superintendent, they provide orientation and guidance to board members.
- They help to channel communication between Board members and District staff, as well as between Board members and members of the general public. Board members can and should have their own relationships with staff and the public, yet sometimes it helps to have communication centralized, as for instance when a member of the public emails the entire board via the email address acsdbboard@ames.k12.ia.us.
- They represent the Board in other key forums, such as teacher’s association negotiations.

In addition, the Board appoints a Secretary/Treasurer, who is typically the CFO.

Board Standing Committees

The board has seven standing committees, each of which usually has two to three assigned board members, as well as several staff, including the superintendent and other directors, as

assigned by the superintendent. Under no circumstances will a committee have more than three board members, in order to avoid having a quorum of board members discuss school board matters outside of a formal board meeting.

The frequency of committee meetings varies between biweekly and biannually. The Superintendent and staff are typically responsible for setting the agenda of committee meetings, although committee members may request an item be considered. The committees are the following:

- **Budget and Audit:** This committee typically meets at a minimum twice annually to review the draft audit ensuring recommendations are addressed and review implementation of the current year's budget; oversee the budget process; support development of the next fiscal year's general fund balanced budget proposal to provide to the Board for approval.
- **Equity:** This committee typically meets monthly to review data, programming, and planning related to equity concerns.
- **Facilities:** This committee typically meets monthly to review planning and programming related to facilities as well as use of PPEL funds.
- **Policy:** This committee typically meets biweekly to review, edit, and propose policy.
- **Teaching and Learning:** This committee typically meets monthly to review planning and programming related to curriculum and instruction.

More information about these [committees](#) may be found on the Ames CSD website.

Other Board Member Assignments and Ad-Hoc Committees

Board members will be assigned to a number of other initiatives and ad-hoc committees.

- **School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC, pronounced "sigh-ack"):** This committee includes three board members as well as students, parents, teachers, administrators, and representatives from the local community. It is required under state law and meets four times a year to review the district's policy and programming.
- **Mental Health:** This ad-hoc committee was convened to review and make recommendations for services and programming related to mental health.
- **Ames Education Foundation:** One or two school board members are assigned to meet with the board of the Ames Education Foundation to ensure Foundation resources are directed toward district goals.
- **City Conference Board:** One school board member must be assigned to this intergovernmental board, which meets biannually to review and approve the City assessor's budget.

- County Conference Board. One school board member must be assigned to this intergovernmental board, which meets biannually to review and approve the County assessor's budget and appoints an assessor every 6 years.
- Delegate to the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) Assembly: One school board member is assigned to the Assembly that meets annually at the IASB annual meeting to determine legislative priorities for IASB and vote on behalf of the District.
- Legislative Liaison: Represent the District to legislators using IASB information for State legislative advocacy. Typically assigned to the board member serving as the IASB Delegate.

Policies

The Board both passes and is governed by a comprehensive set of policies, which most commonly follow model policies written by the IASB. At every meeting, we consider and pass policy updates, in order to maintain a five-year cycle in which every policy receives a review. The full [Ames CSD Policy Manual](#) of up-to-date policies is available on the Ames CSD's website.

You may especially want to familiarize yourself with [Policy Series 200](#), which deals with the operation and governance of the School Board itself.

As the School Board is evaluating revisions to policy, we may at times consult legal counsel, as well as the policy experts at the Iowa Association of School Boards:

<https://www.ia-sb.org/toolbox/policy-legal-corner>.

Board Communication Protocol

As a locally elected member of the community, every board member will likely encounter a parent, student, staff member or other citizen interested in asking a question or airing a complaint. This can be one of the most challenging components of being a board member. Below are links to the Ames CSD Board policies regarding communication, along with guidance and strategies to consider when addressing concerns. Taking time to talk through these ideas and insights together at the board table can greatly benefit our board-superintendent team as well as our entire school community.

Policies on Communication

Policy is the voice of the board—it gives you guidance on how to appropriately and effectively help people who bring questions or concerns to you. Board members are strongly encouraged to follow the IASB strategies for addressing concerns found at the end of this section.

Ames CSD policies addressing board communication protocol:

[Policy 206.1 Board President](#)

[Policy 213.1 Public Complaints](#)

[Policy 307 Communication Channels](#)

[Policy 902.1 News Media Relations](#)

Communication with Staff

It is natural for board members to interact and communicate with staff members as a means of gathering information and knowledge of the workings of the district. Opportunities will be created for board members to engage in discussions with building leadership, district personnel, staff and teachers through official board work sessions. These provide board members the opportunity to gain a broader perspective of the district's efforts. If staff members want board members to solve managerial issues board members should consult the strategies below in addressing concerns.

News and Media Relations

Per board Policy [206.1](#) and [902.1](#), the Board President as the representative of the consensus of the Board, shall speak on behalf of the Board to the public. The Superintendent or designee is the spokesperson for the district. Members of the news media seeking information about the School District will direct their inquiries to the Director of Communications. The Director of Communications will collaborate with key District personnel, including the Superintendent, to accurately and objectively provide the facts and Board positions in response to inquiries from the news media about the School District.

Social Media

Care should be taken by board members engaging in discussions on social media. Board members do not speak on behalf of the board or the district. Any comments should be clearly identified as those of the individual board member. It is best to utilize the same steps of communication as found in the strategies listed below. If issues arise on social media, board members should alert the board president and superintendent so appropriate district personnel can address the communication.

Student Disciplinary and Personnel Issues

The board needs to exercise caution with personnel and student disciplinary issues. Per Ames CSD Board Policy [200.3](#), the board may serve as a neutral arbiter for hearings related to student suspension or expulsion proceedings and certain employment termination hearings. To preserve the Board's neutrality to hear and decide upon these matters, the Board should not investigate or become involved in student disciplinary matters or employment matters that may come before it. If a board member becomes involved in a personnel or disciplinary issue, they may need to recuse themselves from a hearing due to the possibility of being prejudiced. Due to student and staff privacy protections, as a board member you will not know the outcome of staff HR issues or student disciplinary actions, unless they reach the board level for final proceedings.

Superintendent Relationship/Communications

In an effort to establish a productive working relationship in the best interest of the district, it is imperative the board and superintendent keep each other informed of current issues.

- The board can expect to receive a weekly board update from the superintendent highlighting important activities, issues, work of the district. Additionally, the superintendent or their representative will notify the board when a significant event happens, including safety issues at schools(s), emergency responders called to schools, early out/late start/no school, etc. The board can also expect to receive a copy of all district wide communication sent to families and students.
- There should not be surprises at the board table from either the board members or superintendent. Board members should refrain from lobbying efforts with other board members outside of board meetings.
- The superintendent will publicly support the Ames Community School District Board of Education and its decision and the board will publicly support the superintendent and their decisions. Additionally, each board member is expected to publicly support decisions reached at the board table, even if the board member voted with the minority on the issue.

Follow Your Policy - Strategies to Consider When Addressing Concerns

Taken from IASB Board Member Handbook - for full information see ([IASB resource](#))

As a locally elected official, you play a key role in leading at the governance level. You desire to help, and that's why you serve. The best and most appropriate help you can provide someone with a question or concern is to guide them through the proper channels outlined in your policy. As a board member, it is important to avoid being drawn in to 'fix' concerns before individuals have first given staff or administration the opportunity to respond to the issues. Recognize that listening well and supporting the person and the process is the most beneficial help you can provide. Here are some suggestions and strategies to keep in mind when approached by someone with a complaint or question.

1. **Listen for understanding.** People want to be heard and the best thing you can do is to listen well. Show you care, but be careful not to demonstrate agreement through statements or body language. Refrain from trying to solve the person's problem—remember, your role is to guide the person to appropriate channels of help using your policy. This applies to parents, students, staff and the community. Listen to the concern and stay neutral. Thank the person.
2. **Start at the lowest level of concern.** Encourage the person with a complaint to address it as near to the original source as possible. Let the person know you have a board policy for handling concerns and that the policy is designed to help make sure issues get resolved. Talk about the benefits of the process and why the process exists.
3. **Follow the chain of communication.** If the concern is not resolved near the original source, suggest the person talk with the appropriate supervisor.
4. **Take opportunities to reinforce confidence in staff.** After hearing a concern and guiding a person back to the source closest to the issue, express confidence in the desire and ability of staff to address questions and concerns when given the opportunity to do so first.

5. **Ask for some time to think.** If you feel unsure on how to respond, or in rare occasions, if the situation appears to be escalating, ask the person to give you some time to consider the concern. Follow up with the superintendent and talk about ideas on how to respond. This gives the superintendent a 'heads-up' and also provides the superintendent or another administrator the option of helping by reaching out to the person with the concern.