

# Stillwater Board of Education Handbook



**STILLWATER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
Championing Academic and Personal Growth for Every Student  
Striving for Excellence  
Shaping the Future

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## **SECTION 1 – SCHOOL BOARD POLICY INFORMATION**

School board policy information (See BA-BPCAB of Stillwater Board of Education) is found at: <http://policy.stillwaterschools.com/>).

## **SECTION 2 – BOARD MEMBER HANDBOOK/ORIENTATION**

### **2.1 WELCOME**

The board president and/or a board member should make sure that all new board members receive an in-person overview of their new responsibilities.

As a board, we have learned that board members are most successful when they are:

- Transparent-honest, upfront, trustworthy;
- Accountable-deliberate, inclusive, thoughtful, measured;
- Communicative-collaborative, engaged, positive, respectful;
- Teamwork-prepared, informed, strategic.

### **2.2 STAFF INTRODUCTIONS**

The board president and/or superintendent will coordinate the introduction of new board members to district leaders, including the cabinet and principals at each site. We recommend that new board members also meet with each principal and administrators.

### **2.3 LOGISTICS**

Each board member receives a district email address for board-use only. The email may easily be forwarded to a different email if preferred. The district will take a photo of the board member for public use and will gather personal contact information for district use.

## **3 – SCHOOL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **3.1 DIRECT**

The school board is the policy-making body of our district. It is responsible for providing an education program for students living within the district boundaries. To accomplish its role, the board:

- Employs and evaluates the superintendent;
- Determines the long-range direction and vision of the district as detailed in the strategic plan;
- Establishes policies that direct instructional and support programs;
- Adopts the annual budget;
- Calls elections on bond and other funding proposals;
- Ensures that board policies and priorities are implemented;
- Communicates and engages with the community;
- Advocates for education with local and state leaders;
- Recognizes staff and community contributions;

- Approves large contracts and agreements, including those with employee groups.

### 3.2 LISTEN

The school board hears public comments in the following ways:

- School board business meetings occur monthly and include a time for public participation, when members of the public can address the board. A board member or district representative will follow up soon after the meeting or continue an existing conversation. Due to Open Meeting Laws, board members are not allowed to comment or respond to that individual during the meeting;
- District listening sessions are typically more informal question and answer sessions; Board members regularly attend these meetings;
- Board members may attend PTO meetings and other district events to hear community interests;
- Advisory committees provide input on board-requested topics;
- Board members are available by phone or email if a community member needs to communicate outside of a public meeting.

### 3.3 HELP

As a board of elected volunteers, we are committed to providing Stillwater students with a world-class education. We understand that community members may have questions about our public-school system. We encourage people to look for clarification as close to the source as possible. Chain of command is the following: teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent, school board.

### 3.4 WORK TOGETHER

The board and superintendent work together closely and have different roles and responsibilities.

- The board sets policies; the superintendent interprets and implements the policies;
- The superintendent recommends the capital and operating budgets, and the board adopts the final budgets;
- Using the board-allocated funds, the superintendent recommends individuals for employment and assigns personnel and provides for their professional development;
- The board approves contracts and the superintendent monitors the provision of goods and services required under contracts.
- Once the board approves an agenda item, all board members and staff shall support and move forward on implementation of the approved item.

## **4 – SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS**

### 4.1 AGENDA PLANNING

The board president and vice-president work with the superintendent to develop efficient agendas, using input from other board members and staff. Any board member can add an

item to a future agenda by notifying the president and superintendent seven days before the scheduled meeting. This helps ensure proper public notice and adequate board preparation. The board president, vice-president and superintendent identify the objectives for each agenda item and the associated time requirements. Agendas and packets are emailed to board members 72 hours before a school board meeting to give board members time to review materials. Standard reports or items supplied to the board monthly include: superintendent's report, previous board meeting minutes, transfer and summary of activity account funds, activity account fundraising projects, encumbrances and accounts payable, change orders, treasurer's report, and bond expenditures and revenues report. The following reports may be presented annually or periodically throughout the year.

Architect's Report and Bond Update / Owner's Representative Report – As Needed  
Board Member Training Report – August and February  
Class Size Report – January  
Emergency Plans – August  
Facilities Department and Summer Maintenance Projects Report – August  
Financial Audit Report – December - April  
Handbook Update Report – July  
Master Contract and Negotiated Agreement Report – Monthly During Negotiations  
School Report Cards / Academic Performance Report – When released by SDE  
Student College Remediation Report - December  
Student Dropout Report - December  
Summer Educational Services – September

Reports to the board of education may extend beyond this list for emergency or urgent matters. The board of education will review the schedule of reports annually and will adjust prior to the school year.

#### 4.2 DECISION-MAKING PROTOCOL

The board governs as a legal entity and is therefore subject to Open Meeting Laws. Thus, the board makes decisions only when a quorum of the board (at least three members) is present at properly noticed meetings. Board members recognize that individual members have no authority to take individual action. The board follows a two-phased approach to decision-making on major issues. The first phase includes the opportunity for discussion, dialogue, and study. The second phase involves board decision. Depending on the complexity of the issue and requirements for a timely decision, the board may deliberate a decision at multiple meetings or a single one.

#### 4.3 PREPARATION

The board president encourages all board members to fully participate in the meeting through thoughtful discussion and effective decision-making. The superintendent will contact board members prior to the meeting to ensure they have the information needed to effectively contribute. Board members must actively participate in board meetings with a

focus on key policy issues and problem-solving. They should come to meetings with an open mind, and seek to clarify issues by engaging each other's points of view. Board members effectively prepare by thoroughly reading the board packet materials so that they can ask meaningful questions and consider solutions. To allow thorough preparation, packet materials will generally be available 72 hours before the meeting.

#### 4.4 QUESTIONS

Board members provide questions and communicate with the superintendent regarding agenda items prior to actual meetings. If a question arises, the superintendent will send an email and copy the board member on correspondence. Often, board members repeat questions at the public meeting to enhance community understanding. Questions at board meetings requiring the study or review of new data by the administration or other board members at the board meeting should generally be avoided. Board members should avoid contacting fellow board members to avoid a "rolling meeting." Rolling meetings are not allowed and potentially break the Oklahoma Open Meetings Act. See open meeting primer to learn about open meetings at:

<http://media.okstate.edu/faculty/jsenat/foioklahoma/meetingprimer.html>

#### 4.5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The board president ensures that community members who speak at board meetings are appropriately thanked and provided information about their concern. At the beginning of each board meeting before public comments, the board president will give a statement explaining that, due to Open Meeting Laws, the board cannot respond to public comments at that time.

#### 4.6 PURPOSEFUL CONTRIBUTIONS

Board members focus on problem solving by building consensus and making decisions. Board members communicate in a polite and respectful manner even though disagreements may occur. Discussions among board members serve as a model for positive and constructive public dialogue. Board members highlight both district successes and opportunities for improvement.

#### 4.7 MEETING RECORDS

The board clerk prepares meeting minutes. Because the minutes are the official record of the meeting discussion and decisions, the board reviews and approves them. There is also a livestream recording of each meeting.

#### 4.8 ROBERT'S RULES/SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

The Stillwater school board uses the following meeting protocols: (All action items require a vote and informational items are for discussion only.) For a basic Robert's Rules Cheat

Sheet see: [http://diphi.web.unc.edu/files/2012/02/MSG-ROBERTS RULES CHEAT SHEET.pdf](http://diphi.web.unc.edu/files/2012/02/MSG-ROBERTS_RULES_CHEAT_SHEET.pdf)

- At the start of the meeting, the president calls the meeting to order. Roll call is taken;
- The superintendent gives his monthly report;
- The board president recognizes board members and provides them the opportunity to speak;
- Consent agenda follows, and the president asks if anyone wants to pull an item from the consent agenda for further discussion, prior to a vote. The board uses the consent agenda action item to expedite meeting activities. The consent agenda includes decisions that are either routine or have had reasonable time for prior discussion;
- A board member presents a motion with respect to any item that requires board action. Another member must offer a second to move to a vote. Discussion follows the motion and second, and the president calls for a vote;
- After reports and votes on action items, often there will be presentations by the various school officials on happenings in their buildings;
- The president adjourns the meeting.

#### 4.9 EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board of education begins every meeting in open session. The board, at its discretion, may enter into executive session after the executive session is authorized by a vote in open session only if a proposed executive session is listed on the agenda and the specific section of law authorizing an executive session is also listed on the agenda. Allowable topics for discussion are labor negotiations; employment or dismissal of a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent; real property transactions; litigation; superintendent hiring and performance; matters relating to school safety or a plan that responds to safety threats made toward a school; student expulsion/medical records, and student confidentiality. Members of the public are not permitted to attend an executive session. News media can be excluded. Board members must respect the confidentiality requirement of board executive sessions. The board recording secretary prepares minutes of the executive session consistent with minutes for regular business meetings. Portions of the minutes that involve confidential matters are not made public; they may be privately reviewed as part of a legal action.

## 5 – SCHOOL BOARD AND THE PUBLIC

### 5.1 BOARD STATEMENTS TO THE MEDIA

The board president speaks on behalf of the board to the media with regard to board policy and decisions. Other members should refer media inquiries to the board president for response. When speaking to the public about matters not yet decided by the board, board members should qualify and clarify their responses as “speaking as one board member.”



## 5.2 EMAIL

It is critical to frequently check email to stay abreast of school-related notices and updates. A board member receiving an email inquiry responds incorporating known district details commonly available on the district website or in board policy, and can thank the person for his/her interest in school matters. If the board member would like to include other key information in their response, the board president should approve. The board member copies the board president and the superintendent on the response. If an email is sent to all board members, only the president should respond. Please remember to copy the superintendent. Board members recognize that district email is public record. Private email used to conduct district business is also public record. Board members are sensitive in their use of email, remembering that decisions are discussed and made with a quorum in public forums. Board members who send emails to the entire board should use the 'blind carbon copy (BCC)' feature in their email program, thereby limiting the possibility of members "replying all" in error, and avoiding the perception of a "rolling meeting". A "rolling meeting" occurs when three or more board members contribute in an exchange of group emails. Or, when one or two board members in a group email of three or more board members provides opinions that result in decisions being made by the board or sufficient exchanges occur that a person reviewing the emails would be able to determine the position of board members on school issues, including those that could result in an agenda item and vote of the board at a board meeting. Always remember that all board emails are subject to Oklahoma Open Records Act. For more information please see: <http://media.okstate.edu/faculty/jsenat/foioklahoma/recordsprimer.html>

## 5.3 TEXT

Board members are sensitive in their use of text messaging, remembering that decisions are discussed and made with a quorum in public forums. Board members use group text only for announcement purposes and should not respond in order to avoid a rolling meeting.

## 5.4 INQUIRIES/COMPLAINTS

When board members receive communication that expresses a complaint, the protocol is to:

- Politely respond (if it is an individual email). It is up to the president to respond to all group emails;
- Communicate understanding of the issue;
- Refer the complainant to the appropriate staff member to respond to the complaint;
- Copy the superintendent and board president on the communication.

## 6 – SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS

Board members often represent the board on special assignment. For example, they may serve on a negotiating committee, advisory committee, curriculum team, task force, long

range planning committee, or policy committee. In that role, they present agreed-upon positions as a board representative and communicate activity to the full board.

## **7 – BUDGET PROCESS**

Every year, the Stillwater school district works to create a budget that reflects the district's strategic plan and complies with negotiated agreements, federal and state laws, education standards, and school board policies. The budget will be available for the board to review at least two weeks before the meeting at which they will approve the budget. The school board annually approves and adopts the budget process and calendar. Preparation of the budget involves many steps and months of work by district staff. The board typically adopts the budget at the October board meeting each year.

## **8 – STUDY SESSIONS/SPECIAL MEETINGS**

The Stillwater school board plans study sessions several times each year. Study sessions provide board members the opportunity to spend more time gathering information and discussing district issues. The public is invited to attend. The board recording secretary prepares meeting minutes. Because the minutes are the official record of the meeting discussion and decisions, the board reviews and approves them.

## **9 – BOARD LEADERSHIP**

The board annually elects a president and vice-president at a meeting held at the first regular or special meeting after the annual school board election. In case the current president and vice-president leave the board, the elected board selects officers. The term of office is for one school year. Any board member may nominate an officer. The board president works to ensure the board follows its own operating policies and provides training as needed to address issues of non-compliance. The board president facilitates all meetings in a collaborative, focused and timely manner. The president ensures that board members attend important district events such as public forums, district celebrations, and state/national conventions.

After the election of the board president and vice president, the board president will appoint board members to serve as executive session minute clerk, legislative liaison, and assign members to other various committees. Examples of committees are long range planning committee, policy committee or any additional committees that are needed by the superintendent.

The regular term of office for elected school board members is five years. Should a board member have to leave office without completing his/her term, vacancies shall be filled as follows: The remaining members of the board shall appoint a qualified individual to fill the office until the next election. If the appointment is not made within sixty (60) days, the board shall call for a special election to fill such office. If a vacancy occurs during the last half of a board member's term, the remaining members of the board shall appoint a qualified individual to fill the office and complete the term.

## **10 – ANNUAL RETREAT**

The Stillwater school board may conduct an annual retreat each July with the following objectives:

- Build board unity among the board, cabinet and principals;
- Review the strategic plan;
- Assess board performance;
- Provide board training;
- Inform annual board goals.

The board president and vice-president jointly plan the retreat. The public is welcome.

## **11 – DISTRICT POLICIES**

The board sets policy for the district and ensures effective policy implementation. The board recognizes that to guide district activities, policies must reflect community interests and education best practices.

## **12 – GRADUATION**

A highlight for many board members is Stillwater High School graduation, and board members typically attend unless they have a conflict. The SHS graduation coordinator will provide additional details at the appropriate time.

## **13 – BOARD WARDS AND SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS**

The board has divided the district into five (5) wards that are nearly equal in population, as shown by the latest federal census. The board approves both the school assignments and the geographical board zone.

## **14 – BOARD MEMBER TRAINING**

A new school board member must complete twelve (12) hours of specific training approved by the State Department of Education within the first fifteen (15) months of office. Board members are encouraged to prioritize the required courses (Ethics, Open Meetings/Records, and Finance) over the nine elective courses when one is not able to obtain the training in one workshop or training session. Plus, fifteen (15) hours of continuing education credit must be completed within the remainder of the term for an office term of five years, twelve (12) hours for an office term of four years, and nine (9) hours for an office term of three years.

Re-elected school board members must complete six (6) hours of training emphasizing changes in the law within fifteen (15) months of reelection. PLUS, fifteen (15) hours of continuing education credits are to be completed within the remainder of the term for an

office term of five years, twelve (12) hours for an office term of four years, and nine (9) hours for an office term of three years. [70 O.S. §5- 110] (effective July 1, 2013)

## **15 – SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE**

One of the duties of the board of education is to evaluate the superintendent. The board provides feedback to the superintendent on a monthly basis. The board may adjust the process and timeline when needed. The evaluation criteria are as follows:

### **Evaluation Category**

Operations  
Personal Qualities  
Human Resources  
Finance  
Teaching, Learning & Assessment  
Student Services  
Professional Community  
Staff Relationships  
Community Relationships  
Board/Superintendent Relationships

The process and timeline are:

### **July**

- Superintendent goals formulated in concert with the board

### **August**

- Superintendent goals presented at the regularly scheduled August meeting of the board

### **January**

- Formal evaluation of the superintendent by the board

### **February**

- The board consider the employment contract of the superintendent, and provide the public with a statement regarding the most recent evaluation and contract recommendation

### **June**

- Formal evaluation of the superintendent by the board

### **July**

- Board retreat

## **16 – BOARD MEMBER SITE VISITS**

Board members are encouraged to visit school sites. A good general rule for board members is to call ahead before visiting sites, thus ensuring the principal does not have a previously scheduled meeting/activity and will be able to meet with the board member.

## **17 – ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

See the district website at [www.stillwaterschools.com](http://www.stillwaterschools.com) for the following information:

- School board members and contact information;
- School board meeting dates;
- District calendars;
- District policies;
- Board member wards and maps;
- Strategic plan;
- District bond details and information;
- School information for each building;
- Board handbook;
- Department information.

## **18 – CODE OF ETHICS (Board Policy BBF)**

The Stillwater Board of Education will be guided by the following Code of Ethics. As a member of the board of education, I will:

1. Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of all students attending school in our district;
2. Strive to improve my board involvement by studying educational issues and participating in board training opportunities;
3. Respect and obey the laws of Oklahoma and the United States, working to bring about desired changes through policies adopted by the board of education and through legal and ethical procedures;
4. Formulate legislative goals, policies, and strategic plans for the district, delegating to administrators the administrative functions of the school(s);
5. Recognize that I, have no legal authority as an individual board member, outside the meeting of the board and will take no private action that will compromise the board or administration;
6. Make every effort to be prepared, punctual, and attend every board meeting;
7. Respect the confidentiality of privileged information and refrain from disclosing information that may injure individuals or the school(s);
8. Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members and staff, seeking efficient communications between board members and the public inside and outside the school district;
9. Commit to promoting a cooperative atmosphere in order for the board to effectively serve the students;
10. Recognize and reward excellence in student achievement, teacher performance, and administrative leadership;

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

\*Parts of this handbook was taken from <https://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/about-us/school-board/Documents/Board%20Handbook.pdf>