



ENGAGING WITH YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

What is a school board and what is its role?

In Montana, a school board is a group of people who make important decisions for the local school district. They are like the bosses of the schools. The primary roles of a school board in Montana includes:

- **Make Rules (Policies):** School boards create rules for how the schools should run. These rules cover things like what students should learn, how they should behave, and how teachers and staff should do their jobs.
- **Handle Money (Budget & Finance):** School boards help decide how the district's money should be spent. They work with the school administrators to figure out how much money each school should get and what it should be used for.
- **Hiring and Evaluation:** School boards choose the Superintendent and have a say in hiring principals and teachers. They make sure the people who work in the schools are doing a good job.
- **Community Engagement:** School boards talk to parents, students, teachers, and others in the community. They want to know what people think and what they need. They take all of this information into account when making decisions.
- **Plan for the Future (Educational Planning & Accountability):** School boards set goals and plans for the district. They want the schools to do well, so they keep track of how students are doing and make sure everyone is accountable for how well the schools are doing.

It's important to note that the specifics of a school board's structure and responsibilities may vary slightly between districts in Montana, as each district operates autonomously under the oversight of the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

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Engaging with your local school board is a great way to have a direct impact on your community's education system. Here's a quick guide to help you get started:

1. **Understand the Role of the School Board:** Familiarize yourself with the responsibilities and functions of your local school board. This will help you understand how they make decisions and how you can effectively engage with them.
2. **Attend School Board Meetings:** Regularly attend school board meetings to stay informed about the issues being discussed and decisions being made. Meetings are typically open to the public, and it's an opportunity to observe and understand the board's operations.
3. **Research and Educate Yourself:** Stay informed about the current issues in your local school district. Research on topics like curriculum development, budget decisions, school policies, and any ongoing initiatives. This will enable you to have an informed opinion and contribute to the discussion effectively.
4. **Participate in Public Comment Sessions:** Many school board meetings have a designated time for public comments. Use this opportunity to share your thoughts, concerns, suggestions, or questions with the board members. Prepare your comments in advance and keep them concise and relevant.
5. **Form or Join Parent/Community Groups:** Connect with other parents, educators, and community members who share your interest in supporting quality education. Form or join parent-teacher associations (PTAs), advisory committees, or other local groups with a focus on education. These groups can provide a collective voice and influence to advocate for the needs of students and schools.
6. **Communicate with School Board Members:** Reach out to school board members individually to discuss your concerns or ideas. Most board members have public email addresses or contact information available. Be respectful and concise in your communication, and provide facts, examples, or suggestions to support your position.
7. **Run for School Board:** If you want to have a direct and long-term impact, consider running for a seat on the school board. This allows you to actively participate in decision-making and represent the interests of your community.
8. **Support School Board Initiatives:** Stay updated on new initiatives and projects taken on by the school board. Show your support by attending relevant events or meetings, volunteering, or spreading awareness about these initiatives within your community.

Remember, engaging with your local school board requires patience, perseverance, and a commitment to improving education. Your involvement can help shape policies, influence important decisions, and ultimately contribute to the betterment of the education system in your community.

Montana County Board Handbook: Overview of Boards, Districts, Commissions and Committees:
https://www.montana.edu/extension/localgov/resourcesandhandouts/publications/countyboardhandbook2021/2021boardhb_overview.html
Montana Office of Public Instruction: <https://opi.mt.gov/>

