

The Uniqueness of Elected School Board Members

VS.

Other Elected Government Officials

In the state of Georgia, what makes the position of elected school board member different from the positions of other elected government officials (county & city commissioners, state senators & representatives, U.S Congress House of Representatives & Senators)?

- ◆ School boards are the only **elected** Special Purpose Local Government in Georgia. Other local elected officials are considered General Purpose Local Government positions. What does this mean?
 - ◆ School board members don't just serve as a representative to their voting district. They are required to represent ALL students; therefore, they represent ALL districts in their school system. As O.C.G.A. § 20-2-49 states, the motivation to serve as a member of a local board of education should be the improvement of schools and academic achievement of all students.
Given the specialized nature and unique role of membership on a local board of education, this elected office should be characterized and treated differently from other elected offices where the primary duty is independently to represent constituent views.
 - ◆ Because school board members are responsible for making decisions for the greater good, they do not make decisions just so they can get re-elected or at the benefit of special interests or lobbyists. (This can anger constituents who voted for them when they feel their own interests have been shortchanged by a decision.)
- ◆ While school board members represent everyone in their districts, they are charged with making sure the students' needs in their school system are first and foremost their top priority.
- ◆ School boards have executive, legislative and judicial authority.
- ◆ School board members only hold "collective" authority when they meet in an official meeting and act as a board, not when they act as individuals. One board member has no power or authority acting alone.
- ◆ O.C.G.A. 20-2-61(a) states that board members must not micromanage the superintendent, therefore, school board members should not get involved in the day-to-day operational aspects of running the school system. As a result, they can't directly "fix" their constituents' operational problems by going directly to staff outside of the superintendent. They instead need to direct constituents to follow the appropriate chain of command. (Example -If a parent complains to a board member about their child's teacher, the board member cannot contact the teacher or principal to fix the issue as this type of behavior could put the district's accreditation in jeopardy.)
- ◆ In the state of Georgia, since 2010, board members are held to a higher ethical standard than all other elected officials in Georgia, thanks to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-51, which requires board members to adopt and follow a Code of Ethics policy, a Conflict of Interest policy, obtain a required number of annual training credits and adhere to a nepotism requirement. Governance teams are also guided by 8 Domains in the GaDOE's Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems.
 - ◆ Local board of education members should abide by a code of conduct and conflict of interest policy modeled for their unique roles and responsibilities. And although there are many measures of the success of a local board of education, one is clearly essential: maintaining accreditation and the opportunities it allows the school system's students.

