



# Springfield Public Schools

## Governance Handbook

---

Approved: February 21, 2024

Springfield Board of Education

Meredith Murphy, President

Laura Gamarekian, Vice President

Jerome Fernandez

Hector Munoz

Kristy Rubin

Paula Saha

Adriana Silva

Hillary Turnbull

Yelena Zolotarsky

### **Superintendent**

Dr. Rachel Goldberg

Developed as part of the District's Annual Plan, which includes Vision, Mission, Core Values,

Norms, Board Goals and Values, and Board Protocols.

## Table of Contents

<b>Elements of effective governance</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>Effective Governance and High Performing Boards of Education</i> .....	3
<b>Commit to a unity of purpose with a shared vision and mission to lead and serve the community</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>Our Vision</i> .....	4
<i>Our Mission</i> .....	4
<i>Board of Education Goals &amp; Values</i> .....	4
<b>Govern with a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<i>Governance Roles</i> .....	4
<i>The Role of Board Members</i> .....	5
<i>Best Practices for Board Members</i> .....	5
<i>The Relationship Between the Superintendent and the Board</i> .....	6
<b>Commit to create, participate in, and sustain a positive governance culture</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<i>Springfield Board of Education Communication Norms</i> .....	7
Communication with the Community .....	7
Communication Among Board Members .....	7
Superintendent & Board Members .....	7
Email Communications .....	8
<i>Chain of Communication</i> .....	8
<b>Maintain a supportive structure for effective governance</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<i>Springfield Board of Education Annual Agenda Overview</i> .....	9
<i>Board of Education Committees and Roles</i> .....	12
<b>Code of ethics for school board members (N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1)</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>16</b>

Adapted from Mountain View School District, Santa Barbara School District, and other resources.

## Elements of effective governance

“[I]t is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts hold a high, shared vision about the capabilities of both students and staff—they believe that more is possible and are motivated to improve results for students.” Dervarics and O’Brien, 2019

“Effective school boards are strong advocates of meaningful engagement. They promote and facilitate partnerships with community and parents as a powerful way of creating and sustaining change that leads to student engagement and success.” Villareal, 2007

“[B]oard members are responsible for and to all the students in the schools. Every policy they approve and every action they take needs to be based on what is best for the education of students.” New Jersey School Boards Association, 2021

## Effective Governance and High Performing Boards of Education

In Springfield Public Schools, the Board and Superintendent work together as a governance team. This includes:

- Commit to a unity of purpose with a shared vision and mission to lead and serve the community
- Govern within a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities
- Commit to create, participate in, and sustain a positive governance culture
- Maintain a supportive structure for effective governance
- Adhere to the code of ethics for school board members

Effective governance tenets encompass the basic characteristics and behaviors that enable governance team members to effectively create a climate for excellence in a school district and maintain the focus on improved student learning and achievement.

## Commit to a unity of purpose with a shared vision and mission to lead and serve the community

Annually, the Springfield Board of Education approves an annual plan that includes the district’s vision, mission, goals, and values for the upcoming school year.

The vision and mission provide a unified focus and common language to guide the work of the board and the district leadership. They have been developed based on stakeholder feedback gathered around the values of education in our community.

### Our Vision

Cultivating compassionate and extraordinary learners!

### Our Mission

Springfield Public Schools will challenge every student through meaningful, engaging experiences — empowering all students to flourish and contribute in an evolving world.

### Board of Education Goals & Values

Adopted September 2023

- I. All students will achieve at high levels with the goal of developing life-long learners and global citizens. This includes providing inclusive opportunities for all types of learners to engage in meaningful learning experiences. *Core Value: Instructional Excellence*
- II. Provide all students and staff with a safe, secure, and educationally appropriate instructional environment. Core Value: Safety & Security
- III. Maintain a strong organization through fiscal responsibility, policy review, high standards for operational efficiency, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds. *Core Value: Fiscal & Operational Excellence*
- IV. Engage in clear, consistent, and timely communication with our community. Core Value: *Communication*
- V. Springfield Public Schools will work to address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of all students. Core Value: *Social-Emotional Support & Learning*

## Govern with a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities

### Governance Roles

There are important distinctions to be made between the board's role and that of the superintendent and staff. All board members are equal under the law, and authority rests with the board as a whole. Board actions must be consistent with the laws of the State of New Jersey and the regulations provided by the New Jersey Board of Education.

Direction is given to the superintendent only at board meetings through actions taken by the board. It is important to understand and respect the separate roles of the board and superintendent, yet work together as a "governance team" taking collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture.

### The Role of Board Members

New Jersey School Board Association, "Fundamentals of School Board Membership" (2021)

- Board members determine the overall vision and mission of the school district.
- They plan and approve district goals.
- They monitor and oversee the district's programs.
- They communicate the district's goals and performance to the community and act as ambassadors for the district.
- They determine district policies.
- They secure financial resources for the district, through voting to approve a school district's yearly budget, and they accept responsibility for monitoring district finances.

### Best Practices for Board Members

Adapted from New Jersey School Board Association, "Fundamentals of School Board Membership" (2021)

- Listen to understand; whether a community member, fellow board member or the superintendent, a productive board member is thoughtful about their role in providing a stable and positive board of education
- Remove the private sector hat; recognize there are rules and regulations that govern many of the decisions made by the district
- Participate in the NJSBA trainings as soon as possible, they provide critical guidance related to the roles of board members
- Recognize the differences between the roles of a "concerned citizen" and a member of a policy-making body. What you say in public has a different impact on you and the school community after you are elected
- Be familiar with critical resources such as the associations' contracts and the board of education policies, especially before recommending a change or suggesting an action

- Recognize and follow the chain of command established to address community concerns
- Board members can add resources or use resources:
  - Add a resource by reading the agenda, preparing for meetings, and asking appropriate questions of the superintendent. Share feedback with the superintendent and other board members that moves the district forward productively so that your voice will be respected and valued, even when you disagree.
  - Critical district resources may also be taken from the school system when a board member requires the use of the Board Attorney related to their conduct, when the superintendent is directed to spend time addressing issues related to board member behavior, or other behaviors that consume the resources of time and funding.
- Take advantage of opportunities to visit schools with the superintendent and attend school events, they are great reminders of the importance of serving as a board member!

## The Relationship Between the Superintendent and the Board

Adapted from New Jersey School Board Association, “Who Does What in Public School Governance” and “Fundamentals of School Board Membership” (2021)

To ensure that the board and superintendent, in carrying out their respective duties, maintain the best relationship, each partner should follow best practice-based guidelines.

For the board, these are:

- Not taking action without consulting the superintendent and getting his/her recommendations
- Recognizing the superintendent as the district’s educational leader and listening to him/her as such
- Not confusing the role of setting policy for the district with that of running the schools
- Not surprising the superintendent

For the superintendent, these are:

- Understanding what the board needs to know and when, in order to fulfill its governance
- Implementing policies of the board in the most effective and efficient manner and evaluating the results
- Recognizing the board as the final authority in the school district and conveying that recognition to the rest of the staff

- Not surprising the board

In carrying out their separate responsibilities cooperatively, the board and the superintendent work collaboratively towards the effective management of the school system.

## Commit to create, participate in, and sustain a positive governance culture

The Board of Education members work collaboratively to develop the norms and protocols that support a productive relationship at the board level and with the Superintendent, and community as a whole.

### Springfield Board of Education Communication Norms Presented March 2021

Communications and reasoning for decisions should be open and transparent; there shouldn't be any surprises. Data and information should be presented in a user-friendly manner. The board understands that open dialogue with our community is essential for building and maintaining relationships. These relationships are the foundation of a strong school system.

#### Communication with the Community

- Continued recurrent communication of information to the community, using a variety of media - Email, superintendent report presentations, social media posts, district website, phone blasts, school principal emails - providing timely and appropriate updates, modifications, timelines.
- Superintendent should take opportunities to engage with the public at school functions/sporting events.

#### Communication Among Board Members

- The Board President will ensure board members are fully informed of issues.
- Board members are expected to discuss issues and/or dissenting opinions prior to moving into a public meeting.
- Board members are encouraged to ask questions and not assume.

#### Superintendent & Board Members

- Superintendent will bring forth information at committee meetings to discuss/communicate/provide time for board members to ask questions/research prior to a vote.

- Superintendent will utilize committee meetings, not only as a platform to discuss current issues for that night's meeting, but as a venue to apprise members of upcoming issues that may reach the board for decision.
- Information should be disseminated from the superintendent to the board president and its members.
- If a certain concern should arise and the superintendent or a board member deems it is important or beneficial, an exchange of communication should occur between both parties.
- The board members will rely on the superintendent to determine what information is disseminated, shared, advised and is permissible to be shared with the board president. The board members should trust the superintendent in such matters.

#### Email Communications

- Acknowledgment of receipt of email is expected.
- Email responses should occur in a timely manner, ideally within two school days of receipt.
- When emails are addressed/copied to the superintendent and the board, the board president will respond on behalf of the board by acknowledging receipt and clarifying any follow up, and communicate the response to the rest of the board members.
- The superintendent and board president should endeavor to respond to all appropriate inquiries from the community. However, in some extreme cases, a response is not to be expected - i.e.: abusive/threatening language/behavior and threats of legal action (which will go directly to district council).

#### Chain of Communication

- The Board of Education (BOE) is the last step in the communication chart, primarily because they do not function as administrators. Ultimately, if an issue comes to the BOE for resolution, it is essential that they are able to make an impartial judgment on the concerns presented. When presented with a concern at a public meeting, the Board will ask the Superintendent whether the concern had been shared using the appropriate communication process. Frequently, these concerns have not been brought to the school leader or the Superintendent prior to the Board Meeting, and will be sent through the communication process before coming back to the BOE. One of the purposes for developing the communication charts and the FAQ is to address the appropriate way to ask questions of the district and venues for gaining accurate information.
- [This information is available on the district website](#) and is updated when appropriate. It also includes a helpful “Frequently Asked Questions” section to assist the public in communicating challenges.



## Maintain a supportive structure for effective governance

The governance structures are specified in the board bylaws. These are policies that have been adopted by the board specifically related to how the board functions, in adherence to state law and regulations. The policies are updated based on feedback from board members, updates to school law, and with the advice of legal counsel. They can be accessed at any time on the district website.

### Springfield Board of Education Annual Agenda Overview

#### January

- Board reorganization (after November elections)
- Board of Education Code of Ethics training and discussion
- Board Committee members assigned
- Board Secretary will review mandatory training requirements for board members
- Board President may review requirements of the superintendent contract renewal for contracts expiring July 1. (N.J.S.A. 18A:17-15. Title 18 A)
- For new board members, financial disclosure forms are due to the School Ethics Commission within 30 days of joining the board
- Board President and/or appropriate committee may review preliminary budget numbers with Superintendent and board administrator
- Review audit report / approve and oversee the corrective action plan if needed\*

#### February

- Superintendent provides an update on progress toward achievement of district goals and objectives
- District presentations; school presentations
- Approval of following year Program of Studies for high school programs
- Committee meetings related to budget development and capital and maintenance needs of the facilities
- Presentation/ public hearing of the SSDS/HIB Report (By law a board must have a public hearing twice yearly; once between Sept. 1 – Jan. 1 and again between Jan. 1 – June 30.)\*

#### March

- Hold public budget hearing / adopt budget

- Board President and/or appropriate committee members review superintendent and board evaluation process and set timelines for completion
- Complete financial disclosure forms for Board Secretary review

#### April

- Financial disclosure forms due to the Ethics Commission for all continuing board members by the Board Secretary
- Hold public budget hearing / adopt budget
- Approve the comprehensive equity plan\*

#### May

- Recognition of the Governor’s Educators of the Year and Education Support Professionals of the Year
- Complete online Superintendent evaluation forms once Superintendent has completed his/her goals portion
- Complete online board self-evaluation form
- End-of-year staff review report to Board President by Superintendent (all staff: non-tenured, tenured, and administration)
- Approve annual appointments

#### June

- Schedule closed-session meeting (all nonconflicted board members) to review board members’ evaluations and organize the overall superintendent evaluation narrative. (Provide “Rice” notice to superintendent and school employees when matters affecting their employment will be discussed privately by the school board)
- Finalize the superintendent’s evaluation and conduct closed-session summary conference (provide Rice notice to superintendent and all non-conflicted\* board members) before July 1 as per statute
- Review and revise as necessary the superintendent evaluation instrument for upcoming year based on goals and objectives
- Plan a board annual goal-setting retreat and approve governance goals
- Approve vendor contract renewals for the upcoming school year
- Approve reserve account deposits

#### July

- Board of education approves district and board of education goals and appropriate objectives, activities, and strategic planning as agreed upon by the Superintendent and Board
- Approve board professional development improvement plan
- Review curriculum writing process and the connection to increased

- Approve district curriculum, textbooks in use, and 5-year curriculum revision plan that clearly and specifically aligns with the most recent State Board adopted standards

#### August

- Review and approve staff development plans for next year and the connection to student achievement
- Review and approve the district mentoring plan
- Approve the school health nursing services plan\*
- Approve evaluation instruments
- Approve district professional development plan
- Approve bus routes
- Approve field trip destinations
- Annual review of memorandum of agreement (MOA) and law enforcement operations for alcohol, other drugs, weapons and safety\*

#### September

- Swear in the student representative to the school board
- Review progress of all students at key grade levels in mastering the current education standards and on the performance of student subgroups on state tests\*
- Approve the safety and security plan
- Board plans for negotiations for employee contracts ending in June of upcoming year

#### October

- Presentation/ public hearing of the SSDS/HIB Report (By law a board must have a public hearing twice yearly; once between Sept. 1 – Jan. 1 and again between Jan. 1 – June 30.)
- Superintendent provides update on progress toward achievement of district goals and objectives\*
- Approve the comprehensive maintenance plan
- Approve the long-range facility plan (every five years)\*
- Attend NJSBA Workshop

#### November

- Board election (November elections)
- Approve submission of the NJQSAC Statement of Assurance\* (once every 3 years)
- Approve Preschool Operational Plan\*

#### December

- District holiday card celebration

- District in-house orientation for new board members (for districts with November elections)
- Negotiations begin if association(s) contract(s) ends in June of upcoming year

At any meetings Board Members may be asked to:

- Act on personnel recommendations of Superintendent
- Act on policy introductions and revisions at the recommendation of the committee overseeing such work
- Approve changes to organization chart, job descriptions as recommended by the Superintendent
- Approve contractual agreements between the district and the board of education in strict adherence to all rules and regulations
- Review and approve financial transactions (i.e. account transfers, grant approvals, payroll, etc)
- Approve Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying (HIB) findings. May include a closed session for an appeal of district findings

\*Indicates an anticipated presentation that is dependent on communication from the State; may be in a variety of time periods based on information received from the NJDOE.

## Board of Education Committees and Roles

Springfield Board of Education utilizes a committee structure, where select members — totaling less than a quorum of the board, often working with the superintendent or key administrators, study a specific issue and make recommendations to the full board for a vote. By the time the full board meets for a regular “agenda” or “business” session, where it votes on issues, agenda items usually have been vetted or studied.

The committee structure, as well as the types of committees utilized in Springfield can be found in Policy 0155, Board Committees. Below is an overview of the approved committees:

### 1. Board Governance, Policy, and Communications

The work of this committee includes, but is not limited to:

- Coordination of the Superintendent annual evaluation
- Development, review, and recommendations to the full board of the district governance manual
- Development, review, and recommendations to the full board of the district policies and regulations

- Development, review, and recommendations to the full board of the district annual calendar
- Review Superintendent's recommendations related to personnel, as appropriate
- Review and make recommendations related to district public relations and communication strategies
- A full list can be found Policy 0155, Board Committees

## 2. School Administration, Academic Programs, and Athletics

The work of this committee includes, but is not limited to:

- In coordination with the Superintendent, review and make recommendations to the full board related to district athletic programming
- When appropriate, meet with staff members involved in the school administration, academic programs, and athletics for program updates
- Review Superintendent's recommendations current instructional materials, including textbooks in use, district-wide curricula, and five-year curricula development plan on an annual basis
- In consultation with the Superintendent, review data related to student academic programs
- Review Superintendent's recommendations related to personnel
- In coordination with the Superintendent, review and make recommendations to the full board related to the district organizational chart
- A full list can be found Policy 0155, Board Committees

## 3. Finance, Facilities, and Safety/Security

The work of this committee includes, but is not limited to:

- Review all bills and requisitions by one member of the committee prior to consideration by the full Board
- In consultation with the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary, make recommendations as necessary regarding programs and policies and including such items as insurance policies and firms, auditors, audit reports, budget
- Conduct a preliminary budget review prior to the presentation to the full Board
- Consider the general operations and programs related to school buildings and grounds and consider the condition of buildings and grounds, repairs, renovation, replacements, and general care and maintenance thereof

- In consultation with the Superintendent, ensure that proper and adequate safety and security policies are in place for all school facilities and school-sponsored functions
- Review Superintendent's recommendations related to personnel, as appropriate
- A full list can be found Policy 0155, Board Committees

#### 4. Negotiations and Teacher-Administrator-Board (TAB) Committee

The work of this committee includes, but is not limited to:

- Representing the Board in all negotiation sessions with all units as necessary;
- Consulting with the Superintendent and School Business Administrator/Board Secretary during negotiations as needed
- Recommending action to the Board regarding negotiations
- Serving as an information mechanism to relay ideas and/or opinions regarding major Policy changes that may affect the staff
- Report to the entire Board regarding TAB recommendations
- Review Superintendent's recommendations related to personnel, as appropriate
- A full list can be found Policy 0155, Board Committees

Members of the committees will set annually, and meetings will be scheduled in relation to the annual calendar shared in this manual.

Committee meetings are not open to the public, and discussions in such committees are considered deliberative. No decisions or recommendations made in the committees are considered binding until voted on by the full board.

## Code of ethics for school board members (*N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1*)

A school board member shall abide by the following:

- I will uphold and enforce all laws, rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, and court orders pertaining to schools. Desired changes shall be brought about only through legal and ethical procedures.
- I will make decisions in terms of the educational welfare of children and will seek to develop and maintain public schools that meet the individual needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, sex, or social standing.
- I will confine my board action to policy making, planning, and appraisal, and I will help to frame policies and plans only after the board has consulted those who will be affected by them.
- I will carry out my responsibility, not to administer the schools but, together with my fellow board members, to see that they are well run.
- I will recognize that authority rests with the board of education and will make no personal promises nor take any private action that may compromise the board.
- I will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interest or partisan political groups or to use the schools for personal gain or for the gain of friends.
- I will hold confidential all matters pertaining to the schools which, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the schools. In all other matters, I will provide accurate information and, in concert with my fellow board members, interpret to the staff the aspirations of the community for its schools.
- I will vote to appoint the best qualified personnel available after consideration of the recommendation of the chief administrative officer.
- I will support and protect school personnel in proper performance of their duties.
- I will refer all complaints to the chief administrative officer and will act on the complaints at public meetings only after failure of an administrative solution.

## Resources

Villareal, Abelardo. (2007) <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/school-board-accountability-for-school-reform/>

National School Boards Association (2021) Reimagining school board leadership: actions for equity. Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education <https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/css-reimagining-school-board-leadership-actions-for-equity-guide-august-2021.pdf>

Devarics, C., & O'Brien, E. (2019). Eight characteristics of effective school boards. Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education <https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards-report-december-2019.pdf>

New Jersey School Boards Association Resources:

Open Public Meetings Act Law Text  
<https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/open-public-meetings-act.pdf>

Who Does What in Public Governance (2014)  
[https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/publications\\_whodoeswhat2014.pdf](https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/publications_whodoeswhat2014.pdf)

Fundamentals of School Board Membership (2021)  
<https://www.njsba.org/news-information/publications-and-resources/fundamentals-school-board-membership/>

Board Responsibilities: 12 Month Planning Agenda  
<https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/board-responsibilities.pdf>

A Guide to Board of Education Meetings in New Jersey  
<https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/guide-to-boe-meeting.pdf>

Exemplar Board Governance Manuals:

Santa Barbara Unified Board Governance Handbook  
<https://www.sbunified.org/board/board-governance-handbook>

Mountain View School District Governance Handbook



[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ig2CBeV18ndZd17yZOHDdeE\\_mgah\\_C06N/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ig2CBeV18ndZd17yZOHDdeE_mgah_C06N/view)