

**Shelter Island Union Free School District  
Code of Conduct  
for Board of Education Trustees**

**LEGAL AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

The legal authority of boards of education is derived from the State of New York. It is incumbent upon school boards and individual school board members to follow the laws of New York State and the United States of America, as well as act in accordance with the Rules of the state Board of Regents and the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

School board members have a further obligation to keep apprised of court rulings and administrative decisions that interpret and apply these laws, rules and regulations, and ensure their decisions are informed by these interpretations of law.

**EXCLUSIVE AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

While school boards in New York State have an array of responsibilities, they have exclusive authority to:

1. Hire and evaluate the superintendent of schools
2. Propose an annual budget to voters
3. Establish policy

Boards and board members have a responsibility to act with fairness and integrity in these roles and other district-related business and activity.

**RESPECT FOR STAKEHOLDERS**

Each school board member should make decisions based on what he or she believes to be in the best interest of the community of stakeholders, including but not limited to:

1. All students (in contrast to individual students or certain groups of students)
2. Employees, including teachers, administrators and non-academic staff, as well as volunteers
3. Parents and guardians
4. Taxpayers
5. Employers, colleges, universities, and others with a vested interest in the education provided by the district or BOCES
6. Educational partners, business partners and contractors
7. The community at large

School board members have a duty to be open to feedback and information received from all stakeholders.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

It is the duty of each school board member to make a good faith effort to serve with integrity and to the best of one's ability. Each school board member should:

- Try to attend all school board meetings absent exigent circumstances.
- Be prepared for school board meetings by reviewing relevant information supplied by the superintendent or board clerk.
- Be well-versed in parliamentary procedure<sup>1</sup> and the state Open Meetings Law.<sup>2</sup>
- Communicate and interact in a civil and professional manner with fellow board members, the superintendent and district stakeholders with the aim of serving as role models for all students.
- Understand and honor the roles and responsibilities of a school board as opposed to those of the superintendent.
- Keep abreast of current issues in education.
- Participate in training and educational opportunities relevant to board service, ideally on an ongoing basis.
- Make decisions based on a careful review and discussion of relevant facts.
- Vote consistent with a sincere belief regarding what is in the best interest of students and other stakeholders, free from bias or favoritism.
- Respect and abide by each decision of the board as a whole, regardless of one's personal vote.
- Set high expectations for students and employees.

## **RIGHT OF FREE EXPRESSION**

As citizens of the United States, school board members have a right to free expression that is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution of the State of New York. However, when making statements to stakeholders, the public or the media, school board members have a duty to distinguish personal opinion from the established policy or articulated views of the board. Only the board as a whole, or its designee, has authority to speak for the board. Therefore, whenever communicating about issues related to the district, each board member should clearly state that he or she is communicating a personal opinion and is not speaking for the board.

## **OFFICIAL CONDUCT**

In their official capacity, school board members:

- Should not engage in any personal or commercial activity which presents a conflict of interest or an appearance of impropriety which would bring discredit upon the school district, its staff and/or its students.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 11th Edition.

<sup>2</sup>Public Officers Law Section 103 et. seq.

- Must publicly disclose the nature and extent of any personal interest in any proposed contract or agreement that comes before the board and recuse oneself from voting as appropriate.
- Must never use one's position as a school board member to benefit either oneself, a family member or any other individual or entity in a manner inconsistent with the law or one's sincere belief that one is acting in the best interest of the school district and all stakeholders.
- Must keep confidential all matters that one is privy to as a school board member that would constitute a violation of law to disclose and should keep confidential all matters that would gratuitously harm or embarrass one or more individuals, or would fail to serve any goal of the school district.
- Should behave in a manner consistent with this Code of Ethics.

### **PRIVATE CONDUCT**

School board members should refrain from any private action that is:

1. contrary to their oath of office;
2. antithetical to the formally adopted vision, mission and/or goal statements of the school district; or
3. inconsistent with this Code of Ethics.