The Individual Trustee and the School Board

The Individual Trustee

In Nevada's public education system, a trustee is a person elected or appointed to serve on a school district. Individual trustees bring unique skills, values, and beliefs to their school boards. In order to govern effectively, individual trustees must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high quality education is provided to each student.

To be effective, an individual trustee:

- Keeps learning and achievement for all students as the primary focus;
- Values, supports, and advocates for public education;
- Recognizes and respects differences of perspective and style on the board and among staff, students, parents and the community;
- Acts with dignity, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior;
- Keeps confidential matters confidential;
- Participates in professional development and commits the time and energy necessary to be an informed and effective leader;
- Understands the distinctions between board and staff roles, and refrains from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff; and
- Understands that authority rests with the board as a whole and not with individuals.

The School Board

School districts are governed by boards, not by individual trustees. While understanding their separate roles, the board and superintendent work together as a "governance team."

This team assumes responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture in order to govern effectively.

The Board of Trustees is composed of five or seven members as provided by NRS 386. "Each board of trustees is hereby given such reasonable and necessary power, not conflicting with the Constitution and the laws of the State of Nevada, as may be requisite to attain the ends for which the public schools are established and to promote the welfare of school children, including the establishment and operation of schools and classes deemed necessary and desirable" (NRS 386.350).

To operate effectively, the board must have a unity of purpose and:

- Keep the district focused on learning and achievement for all students;
- Communicate a common vision;
- Operate openly, with trust and dignity;
- Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect;
- Govern within board-adopted policies and procedures;
- Take collective responsibility for the board's performance;
- Periodically evaluate its own effectiveness; and
- Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform board debate and deliberations.

Research finds that those school boards that are most effective typically demonstrate a cluster of behaviors. The most effective school boards:

- Involve the community, parents, students and staff in developing a common vision for the district focused on learning and achievement and responsive to the needs of the students;
- Adopt, evaluate and update policies consistent with the law and the district's vision and goals;
- Maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress;
- Hire and support the superintendent so that the vision, goals and policies of the district can be implemented;
- Conduct regular and timely evaluations of the superintendent based on the vision, goals and performance of the district, and ensure that the superintendent holds district personnel accountable;
- Adopt a fiscally responsible budget based on the district's vision and goals, and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district;
- Ensure that a safe and appropriate educational environment is provided to all students;
- Establish a framework for the district's collective bargaining process and adopt responsible agreements; and
- Provide community leadership on educational issues and advocate on behalf of students and public education at the local, state and federal levels.