

Your school Board of Trustees

Schools and kura in New Zealand are self-managing and governed by boards of trustees. Standing for election to the board of trustees is a great way to get involved in your child's education.

What is a board of trustees?

Every state and state-integrated school and kura in New Zealand has a board of trustees that governs it.

The board of trustees is a Crown entity. A Crown entity is an organisation that is part of New Zealand's public sector.

The board's job is to see that everything that needs to be done gets done - legally, ethically, and as well as possible in the best interests of its students.

It is also the employer of all staff, including the principal, and sets the overall strategic direction for the school or kura. The principal is the board's 'chief executive' and manages the school or kura in line with the board's direction and policies.

Boards are made up of:

- trustees elected from the community
- the principal
- a staff-elected representative
- a student representative - for year 9 and above
- for state-integrated schools only - one or more proprietors' representatives.

What does the board do?

The board has the overall responsibility for the school or kura. [Section 75 of the Education Act](#) says that the board's most important responsibility is for student achievement. To achieve this, the board is also legally responsible for the curriculum (what is taught), property, personnel, finance and health and safety.

This means that the board is responsible for making sure that all students are getting a high quality education that will prepare them to survive and thrive in the world by the time they leave school. Being able to show that your school or kura is doing this well is what they mean when they talk about "progress and achievement".

It is responsible for being able to show to its parents and community and to the government that students are being well prepared for life beyond school. The process of being able to provide evidence to show how well they are doing things is what schools and kura mean when they talk about "accountability".

The board must be able to provide leadership for its local community and its principal and staff. At the same time, the board is elected by the community to ensure that the community

has a voice in how their school operates. An effective board needs to be able to balance these two responsibilities.

The board is also responsible for acting as a good employer to all the staff in the school or kura.

Here are some specific things the board does

- works with its local community to make sure that the school or kura works in a way that is appropriate for the students, families and wider community that it serves. This is what schools and kura mean when they talk about "the needs and aspirations of the local community"
- creates the school or kura's Charter and Strategic Plan. These describe the board's long term plans for the school or kura and sets goals that will help make them happen
- monitors progress towards the long-term plan and goals to make sure the things that are happening in the school are going in the right direction
- monitors and evaluates student progress and achievement to make sure that every student is getting the preparation they need to survive and thrive in the world
- makes overall decisions about the school or kura's property (grounds and buildings), finances, curriculum (what is taught) and administration. These decisions are often made on the advice of the principal and staff, and are carried out by the principal and staff once they are made.
- makes sure that the school or kura meets the government's responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi
- makes sure that other government requirements are met - for example, the requirements for the needs of priority learners (Māori learners, Pasifika learners and learners with special education needs) to be identified, planned for and met
- appoints and supports the principal and assesses their performance
- is a good employer to its staff. The board employs all the staff including the principal. This means that the board has a responsibility to make sure that the school or kura provides a safe and healthy environment for them all to work in, and obeys the law about employment conditions.

What skills do trustees need?

Trustees are active leaders in their schools and kura, just as your mayor and councillors are in the wider community. A board of trustees needs the same skills that a city council or other local body needs to work effectively. All trustees need to be able to:

- work well in a team
- understand and think about what they are being told
- ask relevant and challenging questions
- have good communication skills.

Boards also need a balance of specific skills and experiences to make sure that all the board's responsibilities are being met, and that the important business of preparing students for life beyond school is being done really well. Some of those skills are:

- passion

- energy
- people skills
- honesty
- integrity.

Financial know-how and strategic thinking are also valuable.

Who can be a trustee?

Parents, caregivers and people from the wider community can all be elected to a board. Most people who are New Zealand citizens can become a trustee. There are a few groups of people who cannot become trustees and they are identified in [Section 103 of the Education Act 1989](#).

Trustees do not have to be parents, or have children at the school or kura they stand for. What they do need is a commitment to children and education and the skills to help the school or kura improve student achievement.

Over 100,000 people have taken on being a trustee since self-managing schools and kura were introduced in 1989. Most of these have found the position extremely rewarding.

How and when is a board elected?

The school or kura community elects boards of trustees every 3 years.

All parents of students who are enrolled full-time in a state or state-integrated school or kura can and should vote in the elections for parent representatives.

There are also mid-term elections held halfway between each 3 year election. Some boards have chosen to make some positions elected in the mid-term elections to avoid the risk of having the whole board change over at the same time.

Elections are run under the same rules as the parliamentary general. They are a very formal process, overseen by the Chief Electoral Officer. Your school or kura will be happy to help you find out more about standing for election or nominating someone.

Most trustees are elected, but boards are also allowed to "co-opt" additional trustees for a particular purpose and a limited time, or to appoint additional trustees, for example if they have some particular skills that the board does not have otherwise.

What help and training does a trustee get?

The [New Zealand School Trustees Association](#) (NZSTA) provides free advice and support for boards of trustees through a contract with the Ministry of Education.

NZSTA also fund professional development opportunities for trustees to help them in their role and hold an annual national conference for trustees.

Board meetings

Boards of trustees meet regularly. The meetings are not public meetings, but they are "open to the public". This means that even if you're not a trustee you are welcome to attend as an observer although you will not have speaking rights the way you would if it was a public meeting.

Some items on the agenda may need to be discussed in private, for example if they concern a complaint to the board or a disciplinary matter. This is usually called "in-committee" or "public-excluded". The board chair will tell you when you need to leave the meeting, and when you can come back in after the in-committee discussion is complete.

Meeting minutes and agendas

You should be able to find a copy of the board's meeting minutes on your school or kura website, and/or in the school office. These are public documents and you have a right to see them.

The minutes of the meetings will also record whether the board went into committee. If they did you will not be able to see what was discussed in that part of the meeting. all you will see then is when that part of the meeting started and finished.

You should also be able to find the agreed time and place of the next meeting, and an agenda once it has been decided.

How can I get involved with the board?

You can get involved with your school or kura board by:

- contacting the board to discuss an idea or issue that you think they should consider. Usually the best person to contact is the board chair
- attending board meeting and/or reading the meeting minutes
- attending other meetings, like parent evenings
- reading the board newsletters and notices
- responding to board requests for assistance
- being elected, appointed or co-opted to the board.

Other ways to get involved at the school

If you're not sure if you would like to be involved with the board of trustee just yet, you might like to talk to your child's teacher to see if there are other things you could help with, such as:

- help in the classroom
- make resources
- help with class trips
- coach or manage a sports team
- go along to Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and even join the PTA
- train to be a teacher aide for special needs or special abilities programmes.