

SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

THE RIGHT WAY

**A Comprehensive
Professional Resource
for School Board Members**

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DR. KAREN HILTZ**



Published by Best In Ed
20 F Street NW, Suite 700
Washington DC 20001
www.BestInEd.org

ISBN 979-8-218-59227-1

Library of Congress Control Number 2025900469

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First Edition

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Introduction



In an era of constant flux in education, school board roles have never been more demanding. ***School Board Leadership: The Right Way*** is designed as a beacon for current and aspiring school board members, expertly guiding them over hurdles of governance, accountability, and community engagement.

The pages are filled with comprehensive professional learning resources, skillfully prepared by Laura Zorc and Dr. Karen Hiltz—both former school board members—who offer invaluable insights and practical strategies to assist you in your important role. Unlike many existing resources on the market today that often come from the perspectives of consultants, former administrators, superintendents, or professors, this book is a foundational resource grounded in the lived experiences of school board members and uniquely written *by school board members for school board members*. It gives insights backed by over 40 years of collective wisdom from school board members across the country. Integrating the experiences of both new and veteran members asserts a comprehensive perspective that gives a clearer understanding of areas to look out for and questions to ask in making informed decisions and driving positive change in our communities.

Sir Isaac Newton once famously stated, *“If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.”* This acknowledgment highlights that progress is rarely achieved in isolation. The “giants” are the researchers, visionaries, and mentors who have cleared the way before us. By recognizing and learning from those we trust and by becoming the giants others can rely upon, you can build a strong foundation for your success as a school board member.

Whether you feel satisfied with the current state of management and leadership within your local public education system or are frustrated by the endless cycle of ineffective practices that yield slight improvement, you are in the right place. This book will inspire you to ask vital questions such as: “Why are we doing what we do?” and “Is there a logical reason for our practices, or are we adhering to them simply because they have always been done this way?”

As stewards of local education, you must deal with complex challenges while championing the interests of students, families, and the community. This book lays the groundwork for effective leadership by providing essential knowledge about state statutes, governance structures, and the myriad responsibilities accompanying your role. From understanding the subtleties of board dynamics to cultivating a culture of transparency and trust, each chapter will enhance your capacity to lead with confidence and integrity.

About the Authors and Contributors



AUTHORS



Laura Zorc – Biography

Laura Zorc is a prominent leader in education reform and a recognized grassroots strategist, currently serving as the President and Founder of Best In Ed, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. In this role, she bridges the gap between national educational policy and local community decision-making, focusing on enhancing school board leadership and community advocacy.

Zorc has been instrumental in developing the first professional development program specifically tailored for school board members by their peers, emphasizing principles such as limited government, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and transparency. This initiative has significantly strengthened the effectiveness of school boards nationwide.

Her leadership experience includes serving as a school board member and chairman for the Indian River County School Board in Florida, where she governed a \$320 million budget and championed transformative accountability measures. Through her commitment to improving education, Zorc faced significant political pushback while advancing fiscal responsibility and accountability. Despite the challenges, her resilience is a testament to what is possible through steady leadership, leading to enhancements in student services, expansion of vocational and technical education programs, and the development of alternative education pathways. Her tough governance approach has laid the groundwork that transformed her school district into one of the highest-performing and best-managed school districts in the nation.

Since leaving the school board in 2020, Laura Zorc has remained committed to education, sharing invaluable lessons by mentoring over 1,000 members about their essential roles in local school boards, culminating in this book. Through Best In Ed, she has expanded her influence nationwide in post-COVID education reform, spearheading initiatives to enhance educational outcomes and promote local control. This commitment includes a movement involving parents and community education leaders, where the Best team coaches aspiring candidates on effective campaign strategies through the School Board Candidates Academy and advocates for transformative education policies at both state and federal levels. Their testimony shapes policies that encourage local decision-making, improve student outcomes, and contribute to state committees driving meaningful legislation.

With a blend of business acumen, operations management expertise, and a background in forensic accounting, Zorc is dedicated to advancing educational outcomes through fiscally responsible policy and proactive governance across the country. Frequently featured in national media, she provides insightful commentary informed by her extensive experience and strong connections within grassroots education communities.



Dr. Karen Hiltz – Biography

Dr. Karen Hiltz is a dedicated public servant and expert in educational governance. She is known for her commitment to enhancing the quality of education through leadership and strategic planning. From 2016 to 2020, she served a four-year term on the Franklin County School Board in Virginia, where she focused on vital areas such as policy development, strategic planning, and contract and agreement management.

Dr. Hiltz's tenure exemplified her dedication to creating a transparent and accountable educational environment. A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Dr. Hiltz brings a wealth of experience from her military service and a successful career in federal procurement. This background has equipped her with a unique perspective on governance and the importance of effective resource management in public institutions.

Dr. Hiltz's expertise extends beyond her service on the school board. She is actively involved in mentoring school board members nationwide, sharing her knowledge and experience to promote effective leadership. She plays an important role in creating school board leadership curricula that emphasize principles such as limited government, accountability, transparency, and responsibility—key tenets for modern educational governance. Her commitment to service is further demonstrated through her roles as a Planning and Zoning Commissioner and Community College Advisory Board member. Dr. Hiltz has also contributed to private education as a school board member and has advised various non-profit organizations, leveraging her expertise to benefit her community.

An accomplished author, Dr. Hiltz has written numerous articles and two influential books: *The Case for Choice: One Size Fits All – An Outdated Education Model for the 21st Century* and **The Apple Report: Diary of a Public School Board Member*. She holds a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Business Administration in Management, as well as a Doctorate in Leadership Studies. Currently residing in Florida, Dr. Hiltz continues to advocate for educational reform and effective governance, firmly believing in the power of informed leadership to transform educational systems.

CONTRIBUTORS



Anniece Barker – Anniece Barker was elected to the Central Valley School District outside Spokane, Washington, in 2023. Barker received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Brigham Young University in Idaho. She has focused on her own children’s schooling while also striving for the exceptional academic education of all students. As an active parent volunteer, Barker is the founding chair of A Voice for Washington Children, formed in 2020 to help protect parent’s rights in their children’s education. As a mom of four boys, Barker advocates for community values, fiscal stewardship, parent involvement, and high academic standards.



Evelyn Brooks – Evelyn Brooks is the Texas State Board of Education representative for District 14, having served since 2022. Brooks has extensive experience educating and helping youth to develop a Biblical worldview, challenging them to strive for excellence, to think independently, and to develop self-discipline and self-control. Evelyn’s mission is to ensure that all children have access to a quality education that is grounded on the preservation of the liberties and rights of citizens and is free from indoctrination. She promises to protect children’s innocence and be the voice of the unheard.



Amy Carney – Amy Carney is an experienced leader serving a four-year term on the Scottsdale, Arizona, school board. Previously, she was the Deputy Director of Building Education for Students Together (BEST), a national program dedicated to improving the quality of education K-12 and parental rights in education, reflecting her passion for improving education in America. As a mother of six, Carney actively engages with parents on intentional parenting and is the author of *Parent on Purpose*. Her work with the American City County Exchange (ACCE) Executive Committee further enriches her expertise in local governance.



Thomas (Tom) Hach – Tom Hach is currently in his fourth term as a veteran Ohio school board member and serves as the State Director of the Ohio Freedom Action Network, having previously held the position of Executive Director for Free Ohio Now. Through these roles, he has collaborated with dedicated individuals to unite like-minded leaders across Ohio. After retiring as an IT program manager and completing a 21-year career in the Navy Reserve, which included service in Iraq from 2006 to 2007, Tom has also earned a BS in Chemistry from Miami (Ohio) University and an MBA from Case Western Reserve University.



Jacqueline “Jackie” Rosario – Jackie Rosario is a school board member, serving a second term in Florida, since 2018. She brings over three decades of educational experience to her roles, which began as an English as a Second Language teacher and included positions such as Assistant Principal, Professional Learning Facilitator, and Instructional Leader. She holds two permanent certifications from New York: one as a Teacher of English as a Second Language and the other as a School District Administrator. Passionate about education, as a homeschooling mother, Jackie advocates for school choice and parental rights while mentoring other school board members in policy writing.



Sherri Story – Sherri Story has dedicated her life to education, serving as a school board member in Suffolk County, Virginia (2018-2022). With over 40 years of experience as an educator in the public, private, and homeschooling sectors, she is a dedicated innovator and entrepreneur. After retiring from teaching and completing a four-year term on the public school board, Story co-founded the School Board Member Alliance of Virginia, which promotes a conservative, common-sense approach to school board governance.



Angie Todd – Angie Todd is a member of the Onslow County Board of Education in North Carolina, currently serving her first four-year term, which began in 2023. With a strong commitment to enhancing educational opportunities, she actively engages with the community and advocates for the needs of students and families. As a school board mentor, Angie fosters collaboration and effective governance through her mentorship initiatives. Her passion for education and student success in a vibrant military community positions her as a valuable resource, providing insightful guidance for new school board members and contributing significantly to the educational landscape.

Dedication

To all the moms, dads, and grandparents who have had enough of being silenced at the podium and feeling ignored by those you trusted to advocate for your child's education. This book is dedicated to you! Thank you for stepping up, running for office, and now serving on your school board.

To the devoted parents who once believed they couldn't make a difference in your child's education, remember that your voice matters and your actions can create change. By choosing to run for school board positions and embracing the insights and fundamentals shared within these pages, you can impact your child's educational experience and uplift the entire school district.

Like the authors and contributors of this book, you can be a catalyst for transformation that creates a rippling effect. Your commitment to advocacy and leadership is shaping a successful future for generations to come.

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Section 1: Onboarding

Objectives for Section 1: Onboarding

1. **Clarify Roles and Responsibilities:** Equip school board members with a comprehensive understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and authority granted under state laws and board policies, enabling them to navigate their duties effectively.
2. **Facilitate a Smooth Transition to Governance:** Support newly elected board members in transitioning from candidate to active decision-maker, celebrating their achievements while preparing them for the governance challenges ahead.
3. **Build a Knowledge Foundation and Historical Context:** Encourage members to research state statutes, review board policies, and gain insights into the historical evolution of K-12 education in the United States, creating a solid knowledge base to inform their decision-making.
4. **Enhance Time Management and Critical Thinking Skills:** Emphasize the importance of effective time management to balance board responsibilities with other commitments while promoting critical thinking and discernment regarding training and information received from various sources.
5. **Encourage Reflective Practice and Adaptability:** Inspire board members to articulate their motivations for serving on the board and provide them with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate potential shifts in governance structure and educational policy, ensuring they remain proactive and effective leaders.

Welcome to the Onboarding section, where we'll help you to properly understand your role as a school board member. This section is designed to equip you with the knowledge and tools necessary for success in your new position. In Chapter 1, "You Are Elected - Now What?", we will explore the transition from candidate to board member, celebrating your achievement while preparing you for the responsibilities that lie ahead. The excitement of your election is just the beginning; the real work of governance and leadership begins now.

In this chapter, we will address the overwhelming nature of the initial period following your election. Regardless of whether you are a seasoned member or new to the board, it's necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of your responsibilities and the authority granted to you. Familiarizing yourself with state laws and board policies is foundational for your success. This knowledge will build your confidence and enable you to make informed decisions that will have a lasting impact on your educational community. As you settle into this new role, we will underscore the importance of treating your position as a part-time job that requires a full-time commitment.

Moreover, effective time management will be a focal point of our discussion. As a school board member, you will find that flexibility and dedication are paramount. The role's demands can be significant, requiring you to juggle various responsibilities, from attending meetings to engaging with constituents. We will provide insights into how to balance these commitments while ensuring you remain focused on your district's needs. The landscape of school governance is rapidly evolving, and taking a proactive approach to your responsibilities is essential for meeting your constituents' expectations.

In Chapter 2, “Brief History of K-12 Education,” we look at the historical context of the educational system in the United States. Understanding the evolution of K-12 education will provide you with valuable insights into the current situation and the challenges you may face as a board member. From the establishment of foundational school finance laws to the increasing federal influence over education, this chapter will highlight key milestones that have shaped public education governance. By grasping the system’s historical underpinnings, you’ll be better equipped to carry out your role effectively and advocate for responsible governance in your district. Together, these chapters will lay a solid foundation for your effectiveness as a school board member, enabling you to lead with confidence and clarity in your important role.

Chapter 1

You are Elected – Now What?

Congratulations! The election is over, the swearing-in has taken place, the excitement is wearing off, and the real work is beginning. The period between candidate elect to the first school board meeting can be overwhelming.

Whether you are a seasoned school board member or new to the role, it's never too late to deepen your understanding of your responsibilities and authority. Familiarizing yourself with the state laws that govern school boards and the board policies related to your role is foundational for your success. Rest assured, the longer you serve on the board, the more confidence you will gain. This acquired knowledge and confidence will help you make informed decisions and be effective in your position. No one would start a new job without a clear understanding of their job description. For you, this involves knowing the state laws that define your authority, roles, and responsibilities.

With adequate time management and a commitment to learning, you *can* confidently and effectively fulfill your responsibilities. However, it is important to remain mindful of norms and influences with misguided or self-serving intentions. This also means learning to sift through biased perspectives and question their origins. By being cautious and discerning, you can ensure that any professional learning is not influenced by biases that could hinder sound board decision-making.

Step 1 – Time Management

To be a successful school board member, you must approach the responsibility with realistic expectations. While many consider it a volunteer position, it must be treated as a part-time role that demands a full-time commitment. Here are a few specifics:

- Serving on a local school board will require a minimum of approximately ten hours of work per week for small districts, 15 to 20 hours for midsize districts, and 20 to 40 hours for large districts.
- In your first year on the board, you will likely spend considerable time getting acquainted with all aspects of the district, such as visiting schools and facilities. The aim is to gain enough understanding to approve a fiscally responsible budget by understanding the district's needs.
- Due to its unpredictable nature, this job requires flexibility. This is based on the need to attend emergency meetings with the superintendent and respond to constituent phone calls at any time. Votes are conducted during regular board business meetings, special meetings, and routine workshops.
- Spring planning meetings and graduation season are typically the busiest periods for school board members, with numerous graduation ceremonies and budget meetings occurring.

A new generation of school board members is stepping into office, determined to address troubling trends in academic performance, rebuild public trust, and create a competitive educational landscape for parents. To tackle these challenges, board members must actively engage with parents and prioritize their concerns.

This level of understanding requires dedication and a willingness to invest significant time. What was enough in the past is no longer sufficient. School districts have become accustomed to board members taking a hands-off approach, which has proven ineffective. This new wave of board members is increasingly engaging in self-training and ready to challenge the status quo. The shift demands higher expectations and greater involvement from everyone. To move forward, board members must adopt proactive strategies that measure success and lead to tangible improvements in our schools. Effective time management strategies will help board members achieve these goals (see the Board Calendar section).

Step 2 – Build Your Knowledge Foundation

1st: Research State Statutes

Every state differs slightly in terms of the exact parameters of a school board member's role. Still, there are noteworthy constants that all or most states require. Review the relevant constitutional passages, statutes, and local board policies. This vital background knowledge will help ensure a member is not being taken advantage of or misled and won't overstep legal authority. Knowing what authority boards have is probably the most valuable knowledge you as a board member can have.

To be an effective school board member, you must be familiar with the specific guidelines outlined in state statutes. While there may be slight variations in the roles and responsibilities of school board members across states, standard requirements apply to most. Familiarity with constitutional passages, statutes, and local board policies regarding the board's role is crucial for relevant knowledge and protection. ***Check out Appendix to scan the QR codes specific to the authority and roles for school board members unique to your state (Articles, Chapters, or Statutes) laws.***

2nd: Review Board Policies

A later section will provide in-depth policy information. However, members must carefully review the board's governance policies to become familiar with them. You must also conduct research and make any necessary changes that are appropriate for the district.

While you don't need to memorize these policies, you should know where to find them and how to conduct research for meetings and votes. Board members should develop the habit of doing their homework and not accept everything at face value. By investing time and resources into making board policies accessible and transparent to the public, you'll benefit the community and enhance your own efficiency and effectiveness.