



British Columbia School Trustees Association

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS FOR SCHOOL TRUSTEES



Glossary of key terms for school trustees

As an elected school trustee, you will encounter a range of terms related to governance, education law, and board operations. This glossary is intended to help familiarize you with the language of your role so you can engage confidently and effectively from day one.

Accountability:

The obligation of the board and school district to answer to the public, the Ministry of Education and Child Care, and the communities they serve for the decisions made and outcomes achieved in public education.

Administrative Procedures:

Written guidelines developed by district staff, typically under the direction of the superintendent, that outline how board policies are to be carried out in day-to-day operations. Administrative procedures are operational in nature and are the responsibility of district administration, not the board. They describe the specific steps, processes, and responsibilities required to implement board policy. Trustees should understand the distinction between policy (set by the board) and administrative procedures (developed and managed by staff).

Amended Budget:

A revised version of the board's annual budget, updated mid-year to reflect changes in revenues, expenditures, or other financial circumstances that have arisen since the original budget was approved. Boards are required to amend their budget when significant changes occur. The amended budget must also be formally approved by the board and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

See also: Budget / Annual Budget.

Board of Education:

The elected governing body responsible for overseeing a school district. The board is composed of elected trustees who collectively set direction, establish policy, and ensure the effective delivery of public education within their district.

Budget / Annual Budget:

The financial plan that outlines how a school district will allocate its resources over a fiscal year. Trustees are responsible for approving the budget and ensuring that resources are directed to support student achievement.



Bylaw:

A rule or regulation formally adopted by a board of education to govern its own internal procedures and operations, such as meeting schedules, voting processes, and committee structures.

Capital Budget:

The portion of a school district's budget dedicated to the acquisition, construction, renovation, or replacement of physical assets, such as school buildings, land, and major equipment. Capital funding is typically provided by the provincial government through the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the Ministry of Infrastructure, and is distinct from the funds used to deliver day-to-day educational programs and services. Capital projects are generally long-term investments and subject to provincial approval processes.

Co-governance:

A co-governor is a person who shares the authority, responsibility, and duties of leadership over a specific entity (such as an organization, territory, or institution) equally with one or more other individuals. The term implies joint management, partnership, and shared decision-making.

Co-governance in Trustee Terms:

The shared governance relationship between the board of education and the superintendent. Trustees and the superintendent work together as partners. The board sets strategic direction and policy, while the superintendent leads the operational implementation. Neither can be fully effective without the other.

Collective Agreement in Trustee Terms:

A negotiated contract between the school district and an employee union that outlines the terms and conditions of employment, including salaries, benefits, and working conditions. Trustees must be aware of collective agreements as they have significant implications for district operations and budgeting.

Committee of the Whole:

A meeting format in which all trustees sit together as a single committee, typically used for in-depth discussion of issues before formal decisions are made at a regular board meeting.

Conflict of Interest:

A situation in which a trustee's personal, financial, or professional interests could, or could appear to, influence their decision-making in their role as a trustee. Trustees are required to declare and excuse themselves from discussions and votes where a conflict of interest exists.



Fiduciary Duty:

A fiduciary (the Trustee) is someone who has undertaken to act for and on behalf of another (the District) in a particular matter in circumstances which give rise to a relationship of trust and confidence. In such a relationship, good conscience requires the fiduciary to act at all times for the sole benefit and interest of the one who trusts (the District). Fiduciary duty requires a Trustee to act in the best interests of the students and public they serve, prioritizing the well-being of the school district over personal interests or the interests of any individual constituent group.

Role of First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC):

FNESC is formally recognized as the primary organization for discussing education matters concerning First Nations rights holders.

Governance:

The framework of rules, practices, and processes by which a board of education provides strategic leadership and oversight for a school district. Governance is distinct from management, trustees govern by setting direction, establishing policy, and holding the superintendent accountable for results, rather than directing the day-to-day operations of the district.

Indemnification:

The legal protection provided to trustees that shields them from personal financial liability for actions taken in good faith in the performance of their duties as elected officials. Under the *School Act*, school districts are generally required to indemnify trustees against costs, damages, or legal proceedings arising from their official conduct, provided the trustee acted honestly and in accordance with their responsibilities. Trustees should be aware that this protection does not extend to actions taken outside their official capacity or in bad faith.

In Camera (Closed Session):

A portion of a board meeting that is closed to the public, typically used to discuss confidential matters such as personnel issues, legal matters, or land transactions. Information discussed in camera is confidential, and trustees are bound to maintain that confidentiality.

Indigenous Education Council (IEC) – Bill 40:

As mandated by *Bill 40 (School Amendment Act, 2023)*, Indigenous Education Councils are advisory bodies that school districts in BC are required to establish in partnership with local First Nations and Indigenous communities. The IEC provides advice to the board of education on Indigenous education matters, including the development and implementation of the district's *Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement*. The IEC is intended to strengthen the voice of Indigenous families and communities in local education decision-making and reflects the province's commitments to reconciliation and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA).



Minister of Education and Child Care:

The provincial cabinet minister responsible for overseeing the public education system in British Columbia, including legislation, funding, and policy direction. The board of education operates within the legislative framework established by the Minister.

Ministry of Infrastructure:

The provincial ministry responsible for planning, funding, and overseeing capital infrastructure projects across BC, including the construction, renovation, and seismic upgrading of school facilities. School districts work with both the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the Ministry of Infrastructure when pursuing capital projects. Funding and approval for major school construction and renovation projects are provided by this ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

Motion:

A formal proposal put forward at a board meeting for the board to take a specific action or adopt a particular position. Motions must be seconded, debated, and voted on in accordance with the board's procedures.

One-Time Funding:

Provincial funding provided to school districts for a specific purpose in a single fiscal year, with no guarantee of continuation in subsequent years. One-time funding may be provided for targeted initiatives, special programs, or to address particular needs. Because it is non-recurring, boards should be cautious about using one-time funding to support ongoing operational expenses.

See also: Targeted Funding; Operating Budget.

Operating Budget:

The component of a school district's budget that covers the day-to-day costs of delivering educational programs and services, including salaries, benefits, supplies, utilities, and other recurring expenditures. The operating budget is funded primarily through the provincial per-pupil funding formula and other grants. It is distinct from the capital budget, which addresses longer-term physical infrastructure investments.

See also: Capital Budget; Targeted Funding; One-Time Funding.

Policy:

A formal statement adopted by the board that establishes the direction, values, and expectations guiding the school district's operations. The board sets policies, and district staff develop procedures for implementing those policies.

Public Education:

A system of free, publicly funded schooling available to all children, governed by locally elected boards of education and funded through a combination of provincial grants and local taxation.



Quorum:

The minimum number of trustees required to be present for a board meeting to proceed and for decisions to be made. If a quorum is not met, the meeting cannot conduct official business.

Regulation:

A legally binding rule made under the authority of a statute, such as the *School Act*, by the provincial government (typically through an Order in Council). Regulations have the force of law and set out specific requirements that boards of education and school districts must follow. Previously referred to as “Procedures” in earlier versions of provincial education legislation, regulations are distinct from board policies or administrative procedures and are not within the board’s authority to amend or override.

Resolution:

A formal decision made by the board, typically recorded in the minutes, that commits the district to a specific course of action or position.

Rightsholders:

In the context of BC public education and reconciliation, rightsholders refers to Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who hold constitutionally recognized Aboriginal and Treaty rights, including rights related to education and the transmission of language and culture. This is distinct from the term “stakeholder,” which refers to those with an interest in education outcomes. Recognizing Indigenous and First Nations peoples as rightsholders, rather than simply stakeholders, reflects a meaningful shift in how boards engage with Indigenous and First Nations communities, from consultation to genuine partnership and shared decision-making, consistent with the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP).

School Act:

The primary provincial legislation governing public education in British Columbia. The *School Act* establishes the roles and responsibilities of boards of education, trustees, superintendents, the Ministry of Education and Child Care and associations. It sets out the legal framework for how school districts are organized, how trustees are elected, how boards must operate, how schools are funded, and the rights and responsibilities of students, parents, and educators. All board decisions and actions must be consistent with the *School Act* and its associated regulations. Trustees are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the *School Act* as a foundational reference for their role.

School District:

The administrative unit through which public education is delivered in a defined geographic area of British Columbia. Each school district is governed by an elected board of education and led operationally by a superintendent.



Secretary-Treasurer:

Is a senior district leader responsible for managing the financial affairs of the school district, including budget preparation, financial reporting, payroll, and compliance with provincial financial requirements. The secretary-treasurer reports to the superintendent and plays a key role in supporting trustees in understanding the district's financial position. The secretary-treasurer is also responsible for maintaining official board records and, in some districts, supporting the corporate functions of the board.

Strategic Plan:

A document that outlines the board's long-term vision, goals, and priorities for the school district. The strategic plan guides resource allocation and decision-making and serves as a key accountability tool for measuring progress over time.

Superintendent of Schools:

The senior staff leader of a school district, appointed by and accountable to the board of education. The superintendent is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the district and for implementing the board's strategic direction and policies.

Targeted Funding:

Provincial funding provided to school districts for specific, designated purposes. Targeted funding must be used for its intended purpose and cannot be redirected to general operating expenses. It is separate from the base per-pupil operating funding that districts receive.

See also: Operating Budget; One-Time Funding.

Trustee:

An elected member of a board of education who represents their community in the governance of the local school district. Trustees serve four-year terms and are collectively responsible for the strategic oversight of public education within their district.

**Please be advised that this glossary is intended as an introductory reference. Trustees are encouraged to continue building their knowledge through BCSTA's professional development programs and resources throughout their term.*



