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Governance support resources

The role of presiding member (chair)

The school boards are required to appoint a board member to preside at meetings of the board, [regulation 11](#), Education (School Boards) Regulations 2020. This cannot be the principal, or a staff or student representative. The appointment of the presiding member must be made at the first meeting of each year, unless it is a triennial election year, in which case it must be held at the first meeting after the election.

What is this notion of role and what does it really mean for school boards?

Governance is about strategic leadership and stewardship – acting on behalf of our stakeholders. The board needs to have to have processes and systems in place that can be implemented in a planned and focused way.

Boards need a leader who has the qualities and skills to enable the board to act effectively and lead the school into the future. By default, this often falls to the board member who has been on the board the longest, or person who is currently in this role.

Wise boards give careful consideration to the expectations of this role and who around the board table is best placed to take on the extra responsibility. Before any appointment takes place, it is wise to have the board's expectations of the presiding member documented and discussed.

At School we believe that the role of the presiding member is pivotal in ensuring the ongoing success of our board and school. The following are the key responsibilities that we have identified:

Key responsibilities of the chair

To provide leadership for the board

As a “first among equals” the presiding member is expected to lead the board whilst being mindful that they cannot act independently of the board unless through a delegated authority.

To ensure the work of the board is completed

This does not mean they are responsible for doing this work. All board members are equally accountable for the work for the board.

To effectively organise and preside at board meetings

The presiding member has a key role in ensuring meetings run smoothly, board members conduct themselves appropriately, and the board acts as a unified body.

To ensure the board works as a team

By including all board members in decision making the presiding member is creating an environment of unity and common purpose. The presiding member needs to motivate board members, ensuring their differing views are heard and individuals feel valued for the contribution they bring to the team. Once the board decides on a matter any differing opinions should not be reopened or discussed outside the meeting.

To establish and maintain an ongoing working relationship with the principal

It is important that this relationship has the essential ingredients of honesty, support, and mutual respect. The quality of this relationship is one of the most important factors in determining a successful partnership between the board and the school. Some presiding members and principals find it useful to prepare a set of ground rules or guidelines, eg:

- The presiding member and principal must work as a team, and there should be no surprises
- The relationship must be professional
- Each must be able to counsel the other on performance concerns
- The presiding member supports the principal and vice versa as appropriate
- Each agrees not to undermine the other's authority
- There is agreement to be honest with each other
- Each agrees and accepts the need to follow policy and procedures
- Neither party will deliberately hold back important information
- Neither party will knowingly misinform the other

If either the presiding member or the principal is new to the partnership, then at the first one on one meeting you may wish to agenda items similar to the following:

1. get to know each other as people
2. what do you see as your role?
3. what is your understanding of the vision of the school?
4. discuss the expectations of the board and each other
5. are we each other's critical support person?
6. agree on the frequency and length of one on one meetings
7. establish when, how, and the reasons for contact to be made out of these times
8. agree to no surprises at board meetings
9. discuss the process for opening and distributing mail
10. where do you go for advice and support?

To ensure the principal's performance agreement and appraisal are completed on an annual basis

Boards have a variety of different ways of meeting this requirement. It is the responsibility of the presiding member to ensure that the boards chosen process is completed in a thorough and timely manner.

To promote good communication between the board and the wider community

The presiding member needs to ensure the board has processes in place and strategies developed to enable it to understand and give effect to the aspirations the community has for its students. They are responsible for communicating school policy and appropriate board decisions to the school community.

An example presiding member role description policy can be found in the [Governance Framework – Role of the presiding member policy](#).



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For further advice please contact the *Advisory and Support Centre* on
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