

# Welcome to your Somerville Board of Education

## Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Somerville Board of Education members are responsible for setting the course of the school district and strive to make informed decisions. Board of Education meetings provide an opportunity for the community to witness Board members discuss and act on matters directly affecting the Somerville Public Schools. What follows are some Frequently Asked Questions and Answers to help residents better understand the role and responsibilities of the Somerville Board of Education.

*What are the primary responsibilities of the Somerville Board of Education?*

The stated mission is “to provide quality education through an environment which promotes individual excellence” for all of our PreK-12 grade students. To that end, the Somerville Board of Education sets district policy which is then implemented by the superintendent of schools and administrators. The Board also develops the annual school budget, sets student and district achievement goals, and reviews curriculum changes.

*When and where are Board meetings held?*

Board meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. on designated Tuesday evenings at the Board of Education Headquarters at 51 West Cliff Street. All regularly scheduled meetings are noted in the district calendar, district website ([www.somervillenjk12.org](http://www.somervillenjk12.org)), and published on the *Courier-News* website. You may also call 218-4101 for the meeting schedule and updates.

*What is the composition of the Board?*

The Board consists of ten community members elected for three-year terms. The Board includes nine Somerville residents elected by the Somerville community, and one Branchburg resident, appointed by the Branchburg Board of Education from among its members.

*What is the role of the Branchburg member?*

The member represents Branchburg and is a voting member on all issues affecting Somerville High School students. Branchburg sends its 9-12 grade students to Somerville High School and, as a result, is entitled to one voting member on the Somerville Board of Education.

*What transpires at Board meetings?*

There are two types of meetings: Workshop/Regular Sessions and Regular Sessions. At Workshop/Regular Sessions, the Board often reviews reports from school administrators and staff and discusses general school district matters. At Regular Sessions and Workshop/Regular Sessions, the Board has an opportunity to formally vote on and/or resolve issues.

*What role does the public play at Board meetings?*

The public is able to witness what takes place at Board of Education meetings since all meetings are open to the public as required by the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act of 1975. The public also has two opportunities to raise issues at meetings as well. The first opportunity is at the beginning of the meeting, when public comment is generally restricted to those agenda items for that meeting (agendas are available to the public in the meeting room). There is another public comment period at the end of the meeting during which time citizens may comment on any general school issue.

*Are there any guidelines for addressing the Board?*

When addressing the Board, individuals are asked to state their name and address, and, if representing a group or organization, identify it by name. Speakers are also asked to focus their discussion on school programs, be brief and to the point so others can address the Board, and refrain from commenting on individuals and school personnel.

*Can I bring concerns about a classroom situation to the Board of Education?*

There is a chain of command within the district that helps ensure that all concerns, requests, and questions are handled efficiently. The chain begins with the classroom teacher, moves to the building principal, and then to the superintendent of schools. If the issue is still not resolved to your satisfaction, the Board of Education is a last resort. This chain enables concerns to be solved by the person closest to the situation who can generally provide the quickest and most accurate answer.

*Does the Board ever meet in smaller committees?*

The Board has a variety of standing committees to deal with such issues as buildings and grounds, curriculum, finance, athletic, and student activities. The Board also creates Ad Hoc Committees to consider new initiatives. Ad Hoc Committees generally include Board members, faculty, staff, and district residents. Previous Ad Hoc Committees have resulted in improvements to the high school grading policy and better school facilities for the entire district.

*Is the Board permitted to meet privately?*

There are occasions when the full Board meets privately in Executive Session. Scheduled Executive Sessions are indicated in the Board Agenda. Board members are "honor bound" not to disclose Executive Session information. Among the topics that Executive Session discussions usually entail are: personnel issues, labor negotiations, legal matters, and items of a confidential nature.

*How long do Board members serve?*

Board members serve overlapping three-year terms. As a result, three members are typically elected each year on the same date as the annual school budget election in April. The Branchburg Board member is appointed by the Branchburg Board of Education each April and serves a one-year term.

*What happens if a member moves away or decides to step down from the Board?*

In the event of a mid-term vacancy, the public is invited to apply to fill the opening. The existing Board members interview the candidates and then appoint one to the open seat.

*What are the requirements necessary to run for the Board of Education?*

Board candidates must meet specific legal qualifications. Candidates must also submit a notarized nominating petition endorsed and signed by ten (10) registered Somerville voters. For additional information, the New Jersey School Boards Association publishes a “School Board Candidate Kit,” which is available by contacting the NJSBA at (888) 886-5722.

*What kind of time commitment should Board members anticipate?*

Board members can anticipate attending at least two Board meetings a month, several committee meetings, and various school functions. A significant amount of time for reviewing written materials is also required.

*Where can I get further information about the Somerville Board of Education?*

For further information, please contact the Somerville Board of Education directly by calling (908) 218-4101, or writing the Board of Education at 51 West Cliff Street, Somerville, New Jersey 08876.