

# Leadership and Governance in Minneapolis Public Schools

## Roles and Responsibilities

The Minneapolis Board of Education is the elected body that governs Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS). It is a policy-making body whose responsibilities include hiring and evaluating the superintendent, overseeing the District's budget, curriculum, personnel, and facilities at the highest level and representing the MPS to the community and the community to MPS. The superintendent is the only MPS employee over whom the board has direct supervision. All other personnel decisions are the purview of the superintendent or his/her designee.

The Superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer of the district and is responsible for the administration, coordination, and supervision of the entire school system, including both its academic and business functions. The Superintendent leads and guides the establishment, maintenance, and continuous improvement of educational programs designed to meet the needs of the students enrolled in MPS. Along with senior staff and District leaders, the superintendent develops and manages the budget, manages all facilities, implements policies, represents the District to other jurisdictions and community partners, and leads the District in the furtherance of its goals and strategies.

## School Board Districts

For decades Minneapolis schools were governed by a seven-member board of directors, with each member elected citywide to staggered four-year terms. In 2008, following a directive from the Minnesota Legislature, a measure was put before the citizens of Minneapolis to approve a change in how school board members would be elected. The proposal was to move from a seven-member at-large board to a nine-member board, with both district and at-large representatives. This change was approved by the voters of Minneapolis.

As a result, Minneapolis now has a nine-member school board with three directors elected citywide and six directors elected by district. The school district boundaries align with park board district boundaries.

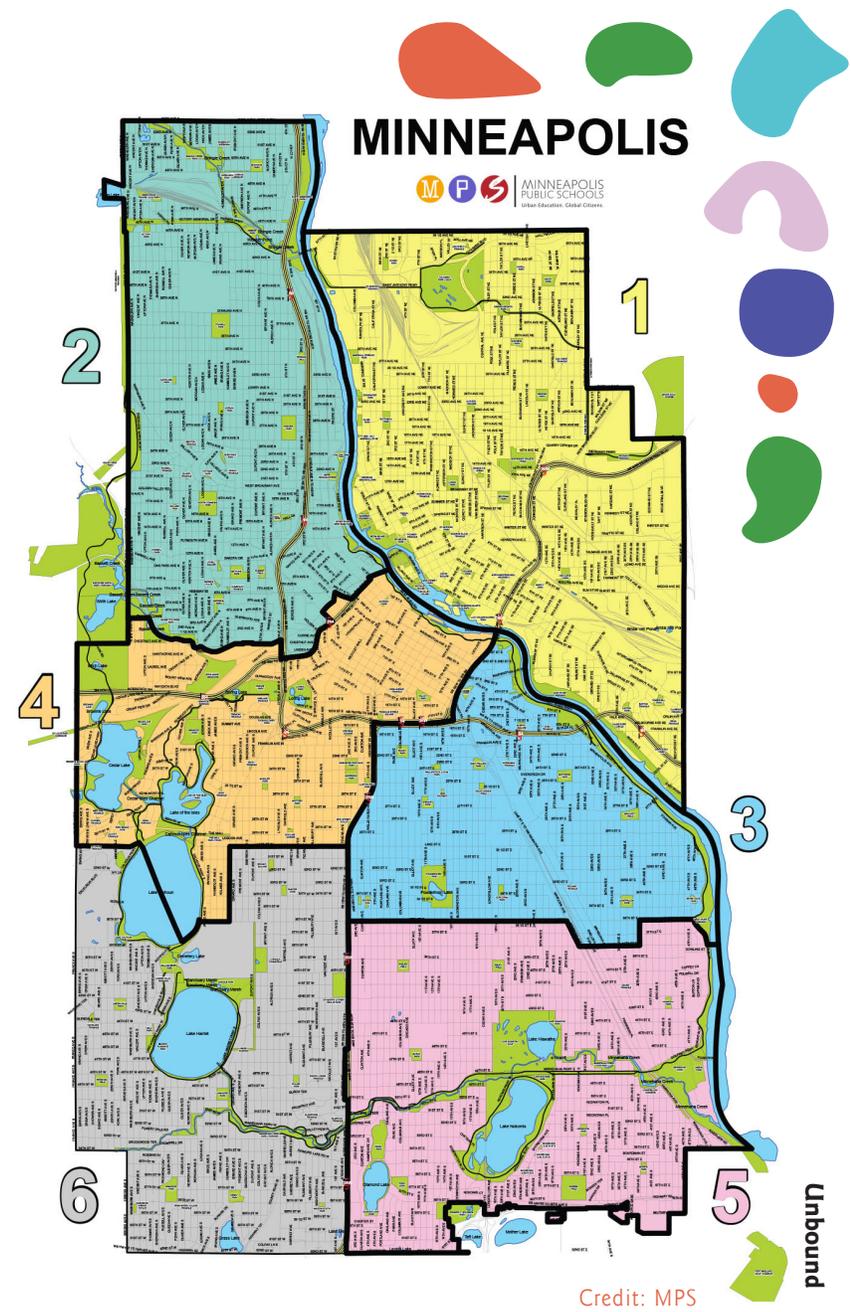
Those advocating for district elections argue that this makes the board more accountable to their constituents, more visible in their community and more able to understand the needs of the schools in their area. Those who believe that directors should all be elected citywide argue that it is the responsibility of every school board member to represent the needs of the whole district and the needs of all children. They believe the current district boundaries encourage more parochial thinking and less accountability.

Over the years different ideas about strengthening representation on the board have been discussed, including that the mayor of Minneapolis be given the power to appoint individuals to the board. Proponents argue this would ensure a mix of professional skills, as well geographic, racial and ethnic diversity. This is the practice in most large urban areas across the country. Opponents argue that all school board members should be approved through elections. Still others advocate for a hybrid of elected and appointed members. Any change would require legislative action and voter approval.

## School Board Elections

Currently school board elections are held every two years, alternating between the election of two at-large directors and the three districts on the east side of the city in one year and one at-large director and the three districts on the west side of the city in the other year. School board elections are held in even numbered years.

School board elections are nonpartisan which means that candidates for office do not appear with a party affiliation on the ballot. However, many Minneapolis candidates seek the endorsement of the DFL party at the city



Credit: MPS

convention so they can appear on the sample ballot and benefit from their proximity to other DFL-endorsed candidates. Other candidates bypass the DFL endorsement process, run with the endorsement of other parties or decide to run even if they have not been endorsed.

**There has been much debate about the role of the DFL endorsing process in recent years.**

Some argue this system closes the debate on candidates too early and puts decisions about candidates

into the hands of too few people. Others argue this system allows party activists with the most interest and background in education to make the initial decision on who is best suited to be a candidate for the school board.

## Serving on the School Board



Directors serve four-year terms. There has been significant turn-over on the board in recent years as several people have chosen to serve only one or two terms. This is due to several factors. The job requires a minimum of 10 hours a week to prepare for meetings, understand the complex issues of urban school districts and respond to constituents. (Some directors give much more than 10 hours weekly). The compensation for board service is \$20,000 for directors and \$22,000 for the chair and vice chair. This amount has risen modestly over the last 10 years, but it is still difficult for many people to consider board service and balance other life/work responsibilities. School board directors also serve with far less staff support than other elected officials and very high expectations on the part of the community.

**The impact of policy decisions is experienced quite personally and immediately by families and students, so being the face of those decisions can be daunting.**



Finally, resources are always limited in public schools, and decisions about their allocation can be extremely tough to make.

Nevertheless, Minneapolis needs an extremely adept and highly-qualified school board to make

the important decisions that will affect the lives of 36,000 children and their families. Disparities in educational outcomes, lack of sufficient resources, the varying needs of different schools and areas of the city and the management of a staff of more than 5,000 educational professionals all require time, attention, integrity, strong principles and a commitment to great outcomes for every child in the district.

The City of Minneapolis needs strong school board candidates and an informed electorate that will take the time to carefully evaluate those seeking to hold the office. We also need to hold our elected school board members accountable for their decisions and their decision-making process.

**Governance of school districts, especially large urban school districts, is one of the biggest challenges in the public arena.**



Our public schools are at the nexus of many difficult and complex social issues—racial and socio-economic disparities, disability rights, equity, homelessness and housing insecurity, the rights and responsibilities of public employees, limited resources, and the community's aspiration that all children will have a bright future.

**Become informed, vote thoughtfully, run for office yourself, hold our elected representatives accountable for their decisions and strengthen governance of our schools.**

