

Governance support resources

The role of the staff representative

What is the role of the staff representative?

The staff representative is elected to bring a staff perspective to the board in the same way that parent trustees bring a parent view. First and foremost the staff representative is a trustee and like all trustees must act in the best interests of the students at the school. The staff representative is bound by the same roles and responsibilities, codes of conduct, etc, as other trustees and must look to form part of the board team rather than holding a single representational focus. This primary understanding is vital to the success of this role within the board.

This means that the staff as a whole need to be aware of the role of their "representative". This can alleviate any role confusion further down the track when there could be difficult issues that the board needs to grapple with that may have a direct impact on the staff.

The staff representative is not there to necessarily vote the way that the staff would want them to vote. They are privy to much more information than the staff and understand both the strategic direction and the financial position of the board.

This also means that the staff representative is not akin to a union rep or employment advocate that must take every staff issue or cause to the board table.

Staff representatives, like parent trustees, should take part in discussion and decision making based on personal views but always with the best interests of the students in mind. Bringing governance issues to the attention of the board must be within the board's set processes and must not undermine the role of the principal.

Boards may find it useful to have a staff representative role description in their governance manuals. Here is an example:

Staff representative role description

The staff representative fulfils legislative requirements relating to board composition. The role of the staff representative is to bring a staff perspective to board decision making.

As a trustee the staff representative has an obligation to serve the broader interests of the school and its students and has equal

Staff representative accountability measure	Standard
1. To work within the board's charter	1.1 The charter is obviously considered in all board decisions and actions
2. To abide by the board's governance and operational policies	2.1 The staff representative has a copy of the governance manual and is familiar with, and ensures compliance with, all board policies
3. The staff representative is first and foremost a trustee and must act in the best interests of the students at the school at all times.	3.1 The staff representative is not a staff advocate 3.2 The staff representative does not bring staff concerns to the board.
4. The staff representative is bound by the trustee code of behaviour	4.1 The staff representative acts within the code of behaviour
5. It is not expected that the staff representative act as a union delegate	5.1 The staff representative does not bring staff issues to the board 5.2 The staff representative does not sit on staff discipline committees as a matter of right.

What are the reporting expectations?

The staff representative is not expected to report to the board on any matter in the school unless specifically requested to do so by the board. Parent trustees do not report on the day to day happenings of the parent body or the issues that parents may have with the school and it is no different for the staff representative.

Some boards require staff representatives to present a staff representative report to each board meeting. These reports, more often than not, add no governance information to support the board in its role and can in fact help to sideline staff representatives to a five minute slot at meetings. At times the content of these reports has been a cause for conflict with the principal who may feel their authority is being usurped. If the board wishes to instigate this practice, or continue it, careful thought should occur as to what outcomes the board is expecting from these reports, what should they and what shouldn't they contain, and, most importantly, what benefit is this information to the board at a governance level. The board needs to respect the principal's role of day to day manager of the school.

Any governance information that the board needs regarding the staff should come from the principal as the day to day manager after he/she has had an opportunity to deal with whatever the issue may be.

What is the staff representative's role at board meetings?

The relationship between the principal and the staff representative is slightly unusual. As a board member the staff representative is a member of the employing body. However, on a day to day basis, he/she is still a staff member working under the principal's management. This can cause tensions and has on occasion led to boards excluding these trustees from in committee or sensitive discussions. The staff representative has just as much right as any other trustee to be there unless they have a conflict of interest.

The role of the staff representative at board meetings is to participate in the same way as any other trustee on all issues before the board.

The board should work under a no surprises rule whereby there are no surprises for either the principal or trustees in terms of topics for discussion.

Being a staff representative does not mean that the concerns/complaints process for staff can be bypassed. In the same way parent trustees cannot bring a specific complaint from a member of the community to the board neither should the staff representative. Staff must work through the internal staff grievance process.

The staff representative is entitled to be treated the same as any other trustee and should not be asked to leave when discussing the Principal for instance. The trustees themselves can declare a conflict of interest or request to leave the meeting if they feel uncomfortable in any way.

The staff representative may report back to the rest of the staff if so desired by the staff. This could be incorporated into the staff meeting perhaps.

Staff representatives are elected every 3 years during a triennial election year.

If a staff representative resigns before their term is up, then a casual vacancy occurs, and it must be filled by holding a by election. Boards cannot simply place someone in the role. They must follow the election process outlined in the Returning Officer's Handbook. An example staff representative role description policy can be found in the [NZSTA governance framework](#) (policy B6

Where do I get advice?

The *Governance advisory and support centre* advisers can also assist and are contacted on 0800 782 435, option 1 or govadvice@nzsta.org.nz