



Crucial Questions

*A Checklist for School Board
Candidates and Citizens*

TERRY STOOPS
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INTRODUCTION

According to the North Carolina General Statutes, school boards have three broad functions: 1) to maintain general control and supervision of all matters pertaining to the public schools, 2) to enforce and execute the school law, and 3) to ensure that the administration of schools is efficiently and more economically accomplished.¹

Within the scope of these broad functions, state law outlines hundreds of guidelines, recommendations, and requirements related to the work of the state's 115 school boards. Even seasoned school board members often find the work to be laborious and complex. Unfortunately, these challenges often discourage parental involvement, as well as deter competent members of the community from pursuing a seat on a local board of education.

To simplify the process of understanding the work of school boards, the John Locke Foundation has developed a checklist for school board candidates and citizens. Checklist items are not direct quotes of state statutes, although several include key language used in them. Instead, this checklist applies existing statutes to five fundamental principles about the work conducted by local boards of education.

- 1) School board members must adhere to the powers and duties granted to local boards of education by state and federal law.
- 2) School board members must ensure that the public school system spends as much of its taxpayer dollars as possible on classroom instruction.
- 3) School board members must ensure that the public school system minimizes wasteful bureaucratic and programmatic expenditures.

¹ North Carolina General Statute §115C 36 (Designation of board) and §115C 40 (Board a body corporate). All elementary and secondary education statutes cited here and throughout the document were accessed via the North Carolina General Assembly website, <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/Statutes/StatutesTOC.pl?Chapter=0115C>.

- 4) School board members must work to best meet the educational needs of children, families, and communities in which they live. To this end, school board members should collaborate with charter, private, and home schools, as well as post-secondary institutions in their jurisdiction. Public school systems exist for the benefit of families; families do not exist for the benefit of school systems.
- 5) School board members must ensure that the school system is fully transparent. The school board must guarantee that the public has easily accessible, searchable, and timely information about all aspects of the operation of the school system, except those subject to confidentiality statutes.

Each question on the checklist is followed by one or more references to the applicable statute. The appendix provides a list of education resources from the John Locke Foundation Research Division.

Attendance Areas and School Calendar

Yes No 1. Has the school board established reasonable attendance areas that minimize disruptions for families and maximize learning opportunities for students? (§115C 47)

Yes No 2. Has the school board established a school calendar that minimizes disruptions for families and maximizes learning opportunities for students? (§115C 47)

Community Involvement

Yes No 3. Does the school board, in consultation with local business leaders, have voluntary guidelines relating to after school employment, including an agreement to limit the number of hours a student may work or to tie the number of hours a student may work to his academic performance, school attendance, and economic need? (§115C 47)

If yes:

Yes No 3.a. Are these guidelines available on the school district website?

Yes No 4. Does the school board make an effort to increase community and parental involvement in the public schools? (§115C 207; §115C 105.32)

Yes No 5. Do school board meetings accommodate students, parents, and members of the community? (§115C 41; §115C 51)

Following up:

Yes No 5.a. Does the school board make agendas, meeting minutes, and meeting handouts available on the school district website?

Yes No 5.b. Do school board members respond promptly to constituent concerns?

Instructional Program

Yes No 6. Does the school board ensure that average class sizes meet state requirements? (§115C 47)

Yes No 7. Does the school board ensure that the school system complies with requirements under North Carolina's Basic Education Program? (§115C 81)

Yes No 8. Does the school board fully support optional public school programs authorized by the State Board of Education? (§ 115C-230 – § 115C 238.55)

In other words, does the school board fully support:

Yes No 8.a. Adult education courses?

8.b. Summer schools?

8.c. Charter schools?

8.d. Cooperative innovative high schools?

Yes No 9. Does the school board willingly contract with private special education facilities or service providers to furnish services that the public providers are unable to furnish? (§ 115C 111.2)

Yes No 10. Does the school board evaluate the effectiveness of all services and alternative learning programs offered to at-risk students? (§115C 47; §115C 105.47A)²

² According to the statute, the evaluation should include the following: whether the programs incorporate best practices for improving student academic performance, reduce disruptive behavior, are staffed with professional public school employees who are well trained and provided with appropriate staff development, are organized to provide coordinated services, and provide students with high quality and rigorous academic instruction.

If yes, the school board does evaluate services and alternative learning programs for at-risk students,

Yes No 10.a. Are written evaluations available on the school district website?

Yes No 11. Does the school board evaluate the effectiveness of all services and alternative learning programs offered to academically or intellectually gifted students? (§115C 150.7)

If yes,

Yes No 11.a. Are written evaluations available on the school district website?

Yes No 12. Does the school board provide appropriate vocational and technical education options? (§115C 157)

Yes No 13. Does the school board use their resources to carry out instructional, extracurricular, and educational research projects with nonpublic schools, charter schools, home schools, community groups, nonprofit corporations, and other local boards of education? (§115C 47)

Yes No 14. Does the school board produce school improvement reports? (§115C 47; §115C 105.38)

If yes,

Yes No 14.a. Is this information available on the school district website?

Personnel

Yes No 15. Does the school board release a report to the public that describes the organization of each school, the duties of each teacher, the size of each class, the teaching load of each teacher, and reasons for teacher attrition? (§115C 47; §115C 12)

- If yes,*
- Yes No
 15.a. Is this information available on the school district website?
- Yes No
 16. Does the school board limit and evaluate non-instructional duties assigned to teachers? (§115C 47)
- Yes No
 17. Does the school board eliminate any duplicate or obsolete reporting requirements imposed on instructional and administrative personnel by the central office? (§115C 47)
- Yes No
 18. Does the school board monitor and evaluate the conduct, duties, and performance of all personnel? (§115C 47)
- If yes,*
- Yes No
 18.a. Does the school system make aggregate personnel data available to the public?

Student Services and School Facilities

- Yes No
 19. Does the school board ensure that the district operates an efficient and healthy food service program? (§115C 47)
- Yes No
 20. Does the school board ensure practicable, appropriate, safe, orderly and efficient transportation of pupils? (§115C 239)
- Yes No
 21. Does the school board take measures to ensure that students are safe from school-based health and environmental hazards? (§115C 47)
- Yes No
 22. Does the school board use lease purchase, installment purchase, and energy savings contracts to lower the cost of building and maintaining school facilities? (§115C 47; §115C 530; §115C 531; §115C 532)

Yes No 23. Does the school board have reasonable rules and regulations with respect to parking on public school grounds? (§115C 46)

If yes,

Yes No 23.a. Are parking rules and regulations available on the school district website?

Student Retention and Conduct Policies

Yes No 24. Does the school board enforce policies related to student retention decisions that maintain high expectations for students and parents? (§115C 47)

If yes,

Yes No 24.a. Are written policies available on the school system website?

Yes No 25. Does the school board promote safe and orderly learning environments in schools? (§ 115C 47; §115C 105.33; §115C 105.47)

Following up:

Yes No 25.a. Does the school board ensure accurate reporting of incidents of school crime and violence?

Yes No 25.b. Does the school system make school crime and violence statistics and emergency response plans readily available to the public?

Yes No 26. Does the school board enforce policies that protect the ideological and religious beliefs of all students? (§115C 47)

If yes,

Yes No 26.a. Are written policies available on the school system website?

School District Finance

Yes No 27. Does the school board seek funds from
 sources other than state, federal, and local ap-
 propriations? (§115C 238.54)

Yes No 28. Does the school board monitor the
 expenditure of state, local, and federal funds
 and release that information to the public?
 (§115C 47)

If yes,

Yes No 28.a. Does the school system post check-
 book registers and invoices on its website?

APPENDIX: RESOURCES

NC Transparency

<http://www.nctransparency.com>

City & County Issue Guide 2009: Education

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/CLI/2009issueguide/education.html>

Agenda 2008: School Standards and Testing

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/agenda2008/schoolstandards.html>

Agenda 2008: School Choice and Competition

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/agenda2008/schoolchoice.html>

Agenda 2008: Education Spending

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/agenda2008/educationspending.html>

Agenda 2008: Child Care and Early Childhood Education

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/agenda2008/childcare.html>

Agenda 2008: Education Lottery

<http://johnlocke.org/site-docs/agenda2008/educationlottery.html>

Annual Report on Teacher Pay: N.C. teacher compensation is more than \$4,000 higher than the national average

http://johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=218

No Bureaucrat Left Behind: N.C. public schools add staff at a much faster rate than enrollment

http://johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=224

Career and Technical Education: Meeting the needs of the 21st century economy isn't rocket science

http://johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=212

The Parental Prerogative: How 'parent-friendly' are school districts in North Carolina?

http://johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=207

Special-Needs Tax Credits: Giving parents a choice in education

http://johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=202

Performance Pay for Teachers: Increasing Student Achievement in Schools with Critical Needs

http://johnlocke.org/policy_reports/display_story.html?id=175

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Stoops earned a bachelor's degree in speech communication from Clarion University of Pennsylvania and a M.Ed. in Administrative and Policy Studies from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. He is completing a Ph.D. in Foundations of Education at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education. While pursuing his doctorate, Stoops received the Bache Renshaw Fellowship from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and was a research intern for the Publications and Educational Services Division of the Library of Virginia.

ABOUT THE JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION

The John Locke Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute based in Raleigh. Its mission is to develop and promote solutions to the state's most critical challenges. The Locke Foundation seeks to transform state and local government through the principles of competition, innovation, personal freedom, and personal responsibility in order to strike a better balance between the public sector and private institutions of family, faith, community, and enterprise.

To pursue these goals, the Locke Foundation operates a number of programs and services to provide information and observations to legislators, policymakers, business executives, citizen activists, civic and community leaders, and the news media. These services and programs include the foundation's monthly newspaper, *Carolina Journal*; its daily news service, *CarolinaJournal.com*; its weekly e-newsletter, *Carolina Journal Weekly Report*; its quarterly newsletter, *The Locke Letter*; and regular events, conferences, and research reports on important topics facing state and local governments.

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“To prejudge other men’s notions
before we have looked into them
is not to show their darkness
but to put out our own eyes.”

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704)

Author, *Two Treatises of Government* and
Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina



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