

## Fact Sheet: Key Authorities in U.S. Public Education

In the U.S., states are given the authority to oversee the delivery of education. As a result, **there are variations in degrees of authority that a school district or state has over education policies and oversight.** Complex organizational hierarchies and variations between states, districts, and individuals schools can make it difficult for families to know where to turn for assistance. The following presents an overview of the roles of key authorities common to school sites, districts, and states.

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### School-level Organization

Individual school sites are organized differently. However, in most cases the following key authorities will have important roles:

#### **Classroom Teachers**

Classroom teachers plan, prepare, and deliver lessons to meet the needs of all students, setting and marking work and recording pupil development as necessary. Lead teachers often work in partnership with teaching assistants or paraprofessionals.

#### **Subject Leaders and Curriculum Coordinators**

These leaders command the development and management of a particular curriculum subject. Classroom teachers may be expected to accept these responsibilities as part of their normal professional duties.

#### **Human Capital**

Commonly referred to as human resources, this area supports the hiring, firing, and professional development of teachers and school administrators.

#### **Special Education Coordinator**

This individual or team of individuals coordinates and oversees provisions for students with special educational needs.

#### **Vice or Assistant Principal**

The vice or assistant principal supports the principal with the management of the school, usually only in larger primary and secondary schools.

#### **Principal**

The principal oversees and manages the school, its staff, its pupils, and the education they receive.

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### District-level Organization

**Local educational agencies, or school districts, are responsible for the oversight of schools within specified boundaries within the public school system of any given state.** In many cases, local schools also have governing boards, or school improvement councils, whose authority is determined by local laws. In some large cities, mayors have control over the education system and the school district is an agency of the city government. **Local school boards have authority over schools and appoint the superintendent.** Though structures vary, there are several common categories of authority that are significant at the district-level:

#### **Instruction**

This department oversees academic instruction and curriculum.

#### **Labor Relations**

This department works with teachers and teachers unions to determine things like wage scales, working hours, training, and health and safety.

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### **Pupil Services**

Pupil services facilitate improvement of instruction and service, directs the provision of psychological and social work services, participates in school staffing, supervises and evaluates special education and pupil services staff, and administers compliance with state and Federal regulations.

### **Legal**

This department represents the district in lawsuits and ensures that the district complies with applicable laws.

### **Human Capital**

Human Capital supports the hiring, firing, and professional development of teachers and school administrators. Commonly known as human resources.

### **Finance**

Finance manages the budget of the district, including overseeing revenues from government and private sources and sets guidelines for expenditures.

### **Special Education**

This department oversees the education of students with disabilities to ensure that the district complies with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **Security**

This department ensures the safety and security of all district buildings, personnel, and students. It also develops and manages security policy for the district. Some districts contract with local police and/or have their own security systems, but broad policies about the function of school security is overseen by districts.

### **Transportation**

This department plans, provides, and maintains busing and other special transportation for students.

### **Food Services**

Oversees the provision of school meals and ensures that the district complies with the National School Lunch Program.

### **Facilities**

This department manages district facilities and custodial staff. The physical plant and school operations are generally centralized at the district level, but each school manages its own facilities and custodial staff.

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## State-level Organization

**The state board of education, which can be elected or appointed, has oversight authority over the state education agency (except in two states).** These boards generally have authority over curriculum standards, testing, and teacher licensure. **State education agencies (SEAs), sometimes referred to as state departments of education, generally have authority over student and teacher standards.** SEAs also implement most state-level policy initiatives and programs as well as manage the implementation of Federal programs, such as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Some SEAs also oversee other programs, such as adult education, early childhood education, professional licensure, and higher education within the state. SEAs' local authority is structured differently in each state.

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## More Information About Education Authorities

To find out more, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html>.