It’s easy to find school policies on your district’s Web site, but you may be wondering how those policies came to be. Who makes school policies? And how do they decide what the policies should be? The school board adopts policy, usually upon the recommendation of the superintendent, and the superintendent then implements those policies; however, public school policies originate from federal, state, and local sources.

When you look at your school district’s policies, the policies that have (LEGAL) in the upper right hand corner of the page include the relevant law on that particular topic. Because they are merely a summary of the law, they are not adopted by the school board. The policies that have (LOCAL) in the upper right hand corner of the page reflect decisions made by your district’s school board and are board adopted.

**Federal law**

Education is primarily a state and local responsibility, in that funding and governance mostly come from state and local sources. However, the federal government does provide funding to schools and passes education laws. For example, the:

- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** ensures early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities;

- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act** includes a number of measures created to increase student achievement and hold schools more accountable for student progress;

- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** protects the privacy of student education records.

To continue with one of our examples, let’s say there is a (LEGAL) policy in your district that restricts access to students’ personal information to specific individuals. Most of the content of that (LEGAL) policy likely comes from FERPA.

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At this point, you may ask, “How are federal laws made?” A law begins as an idea and goes through a multistep process through Congress to become a law. Read how a bill becomes a law at [tlc.state.tx.us/gtli/legproc/process.html](http://tlc.state.tx.us/gtli/legproc/process.html).

**State law**

The Texas Education Code (TEC), created by the Texas Legislature, is one set of state statutes (laws) governing public education in Texas. TEC applies to all independent school districts.

For instance, the vaccinations your child is required to get before enrollment in school are determined by the Texas Legislature and set out in the TEC and the Texas Administrative Code.

When lawmakers amend state or federal law, school district policies must be modified to reflect those changes.

**Local considerations**

If we all live in Texas and are accountable to the same state and federal laws, why do policies vary from district to district?

One reason is that federal and state laws sometimes leave the implementation of the law up to the local districts. Therefore, district A’s policy may differ from neighboring district B’s policy because the districts have chosen different routes for implementation.

Another reason is because of unique local goals, priorities, and needs. No two districts are identical in population, demographics, enrollment numbers, wealth, and educational performance. This is the beauty of local school district governance—school board members work to form policies that best fit the needs of their own district. Policy changes may become necessary when there are changes to these factors or to the relevant law.

New policies become necessary when circumstances change, like the use of emerging technology in schools.

**How parents can influence policy**

The superintendent and other school administrators recommend policies for the board to adopt. They discuss these policies during school board meetings that you can attend. Remember that the local community elects school board members, so you have a say in who gets a seat on the board.

School administrators may seek input from parents and citizens before proposed policies or procedures become final. As parents, you are a critical political force in public education, so make your opinions known!

School board meetings are open to the public. Look for school board meeting agendas and times on your local district Web site.