

What You Need to Know about Running for Your School Board



If you're considering running for your local school board, there are a lot of things to think about.

You don't need a background in local government, public education, or public policy to run for the school board. Your children don't have to attend a school in the district either. But you should be able to answer a few questions for yourself.

Why am I running for my local school board?

It's best to start at the basics and determine what's motivating you. Answering this question will help you to determine:

- What your focus might be when campaigning
- If running for the school board is even the right step for you at this time

Is there a specific issue you want to change in your school district, or do you want to improve the overall quality of your district?

Perhaps you're thinking about running for the board because you want to "get rid of a coach," or "make sure the principal is held accountable." Or maybe you think the state has overstepped their bounds on school accountability.

Reasons like these don't line up well with the work you would do as a school board member, and you might find it unfulfilling. Understand exactly what the roles and responsibilities of the school board are before taking the plunge.

Remember: The school board is responsible for making decisions that will affect all students in the district.

"If you have an agenda, you're subject to being disappointed when you're elected to the board," said Longview ISD Board Member Ted Beard. "You're there for the students, and if you're focused on one thing, you're missing the big picture."

Can I make the time commitment to run for the school board?

Campaigning takes time. How much time you commit varies depending on a lot of factors, from the size of the district to how many candidates are running for a seat.

At a minimum, launching a campaign for the school board requires learning the basic ins and outs of running a legal and ethical campaign for office.

TASB's [Guide for School Board Candidates](#) provides information about how the school board works, ethical campaigning, and a summary of election laws. It also includes resources and detailed information about

- Campaign finance
- Reporting requirements
- Election advertising guidelines

Tips on ethical campaigning for the school board

"How you campaign absolutely sets the tone for how you will serve," said former school board member and current TASB Senior Board Consultant Kay Douglas. "I once had a board member say, 'I campaigned on the idea that all of them were messing up. Now how do I work with them?' And that's exactly it. In your campaign, you want to make sure you're focusing on service."

Maintaining a high ethical standard while campaigning means more than just following the law. There are expectations to live up to. [Review the Code of Ethics for School Board Members](#), and understand nepotism and conflicts of interest.

These are general practices to ensure you conduct your campaign ethically:

- Focus attention on issues and avoid attacking or finding fault in opponents and district employees.
- Get familiar with the specific issues in your district.

- Always share accurate information during your campaign.
- Keep your focus on what you would like to see happen in your district.
- Avoid making promises that you as an individual cannot keep without board support.

Running an ethical campaign demonstrates your leadership to the community. It helps you establish a positive foundation for working with the board and administrators if you do get elected.

Can I make the time commitment to serve on the school board?

Before you run, you'll want to know what it takes to be a successful board member. Election to the board comes with a whole new time commitment.

You'll definitely be a bit busier because of the time needed to prepare for and attend board meetings and other related obligations.

"Just be prepared to commit that time, if you want to be an effective board member," said Beard. "You're going to be called to do various things just because you're on the school board, and also prepare for school board meetings. You'll need to be doing research of your board packets, being informed and educated as to what's going on in your school district, and not just coming in blind."

Nobody is born knowing how to be a board member. You need training. In fact, the state requires it.

The preparation and getting up to speed are a big part of the first year on the board. During your first year of board service you'll learn about:

- District priorities
- The state accountability system
- District budgeting
- The difference between open and closed meetings
- And so much more

If you're elected, TASB offers a variety of training opportunities throughout the year held around the state, in your district, and even online.

What knowledge and skills do I bring to the school board?

It is useful to consider what you'll bring to the table that can benefit your local board. Take an honest assessment of the knowledge and skills you have that could be an asset to your board.

As a school board member, you'll need to:

- Attend meetings regularly
- Learn about new and sometimes complex issues
- Interact with a variety of community members
- Make decisions on issues that at times can be difficult

“Joining a board is like jumping on a train that’s moving. They have been working together. They have a vision. They have goals. You want to figure out how you can be part of that, what you can add to that, and how you can be of service,” said Douglas.

There’s no one type of person or background that makes for a good school board member, but all good school board members need to:

- Work as a team to create a vision for the district and set measurable goals to achieve that vision
- Understand finances and budgets and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district
- Focus on the true bottom line: student achievement and implementing policies that ensure success for all students
- Inform the public regularly on the district’s progress and challenges
- Collaborate with others and be respectful of the full leadership team
- Advocate for the value of a strong public education system at every chance and at every level of government

While you are at it, think of some of your shortcomings that, if left unaddressed, could hinder your efforts to be an effective board member. Knowing your opportunities for growth is just as important as knowing your strengths.

Serving as a board member can be challenging. But making decisions that benefit your students and community can be very gratifying.

Preparing to Serve: A Webinar for School Board Candidates

TASB hosts a webinar twice a year for school board candidates. This webinar is an opportunity to:

- Learn about the difference between the board's and staff's responsibilities
- How to campaign constructively
- Find more information and insights about being a candidate
- Ask your questions