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# 4 Tips for Running a Smart Campaign for the School Board

Follow these tips to run a positive campaign for the school board that is focused on the issues and will prepare you to be successful if elected.



BEST PRACTICE

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If you're planning to run for your local school board, now is the time to act. The first day to file an application for a place on the Nov. 5 general election ballot is Saturday, July 20.

Running for your local school board — whether as a first-time candidate or as an incumbent — is an exciting and memorable experience. Campaigns are an opportunity to connect with your community, share your commitment to public education, and explain the goals you hope to achieve as a school board member.

The best campaigns focus on the issues, providing voters with clear outcomes that a candidate wants to focus on while outlining a path toward meeting those goals. A candidate who offers an actionable plan is more likely to have a successful run and a more productive term in office. Here are several tips for navigating election season.

## 1. Study Local Issues

One of the best ways to understand the issues in your district is to communicate with a variety of people. When you ask questions and listen to what school community members have to say, it will expand your knowledge of school issues, while allowing you to connect with people who may be your future constituents.

Key stakeholders in public education who will offer different perspectives, include:



Other community leaders

Superintendent

Current trustees

When you seek input from these stakeholders, you will establish positive relationships and learn about the issues that matter most to your community.

Part of this work should also include understanding the district's current priorities and associated policies, which are available on the district's website for public review. Also, it's important to take the time to learn about other important or pending issues that will be coming before the board, so it's a good idea to review past and current board agendas and meeting minutes. The more knowledge you have about district issues, policies, and programs, the more likely you will expertly and accurately explain them during your campaign and, if elected, you'll be able to get up to speed more quickly.

## 2. Focus on a Positive Campaign

As you learn more about your school community and the role of a trustee, you will gain a better understanding of the work being done by the current board. This is an opportunity to create a dialogue with your community, highlighting your qualifications and your reasons for wanting a seat on the board.

If you understand the district, its challenges, and the opportunities that lie ahead, you can use that insight to explain why you believe you are the best candidate.

Sometimes a candidate may consider pursuing a negative campaign against an opponent, but this type of campaign can cause community members to question a candidate's judgement and integrity, diminishing their qualifications in the process. If you run what is viewed as a negative campaign and win your race, it may affect your relationship with other board members, and impact your ability to do your job as a trustee should you be elected.

When you do your research about what is working well in your district and what needs to improve, while showing constituents you understand the complexity of the issues, you're creating a campaign that prioritizes knowledge, understanding, and a willingness to learn as much as possible to be an effective trustee.



It is critical for candidates to understand that individual trustees have no official authority outside of a legally called board meeting, and the board cannot commit to actions which are not passed by a majority of those present at a legally called meeting. Making promises that cannot legally be fulfilled may cause embarrassment and lead to disappointment and anger among constituents.

Candidates should be careful when making any promises during a campaign. A school board can only take official action as a body corporate. It is unethical to make promises that may appear to bind or commit the entire board. If you must make promises, commit to attending meetings regularly, studying issues carefully, taking your role as a trustee seriously, and doing what you believe is best for public education and all students.

## **4. Share Your Goals and Values With Your Community**

During your campaign, you want to show constituents what makes you the best person for the job and how your values align with the role of trustee. When you focus on the issues and share your values, voters begin to understand what you stand for and believe in. Knowing the issues facing your district will help you present a clear picture of who you are as a candidate, allowing you to stay focused on your key priorities during the campaign.

Running for school board is an important decision but also rewarding. For anyone who cares about public education and student success, school board service is an excellent way to make a difference for the children and families in your community.

*This article was published on Feb. 18, 2022. It was updated on July 19, 2024.*

### **What You Need to Know about Running for Your School Board**

Before you file as a candidate and campaign to get elected to the school board, find out the questions you need to ask yourself. Then get the answers you need to launch your school board campaign.