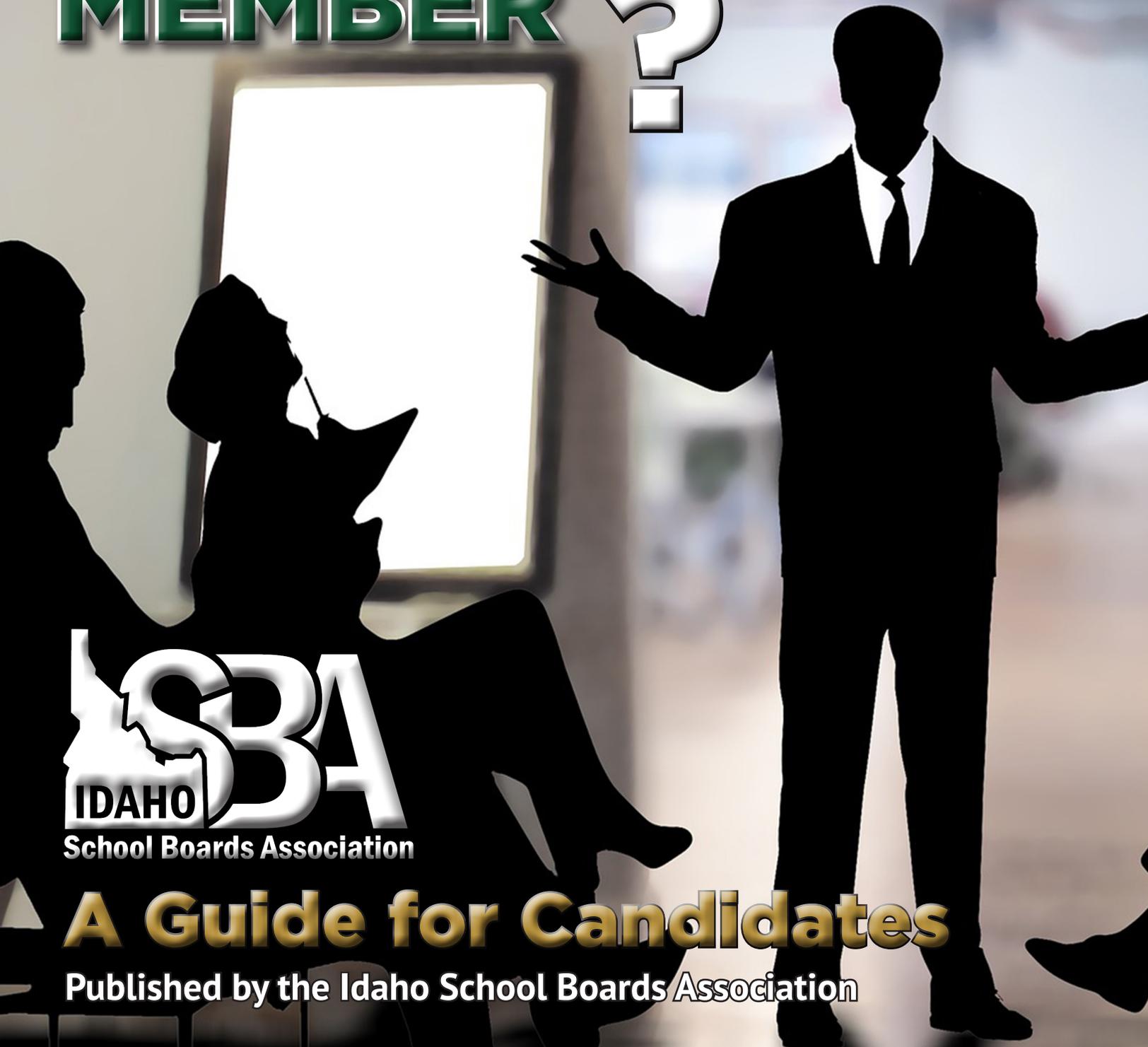


# SO YOU WANT TO BE A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER ?



**ISBA**  
IDAHO  
School Boards Association

## A Guide for Candidates

Published by the Idaho School Boards Association

# The School Board

## **Q:** What is the School Board?

**A:** The School Board is a local governing body of the school district/charter school.

## **Q:** What does a School Board Member do?

**A:** One of the most important jobs a school board member has is to join in setting goals and establishing policy for the school system. All board decisions should logically follow these objectives.

A look at an agenda for a board meeting confirms the fact that the board member is expected to make decisions on a wide range of problems. Some decisions are strictly routine - such as approving the minutes of the last meeting. Others are somewhat more complex - for instance, the implementation of a new policy. Some decisions are the result of numerous sub-decisions - such as whether the board should adopt the proposed budget for the coming school year.

A board member should be a skilled decision-maker but must also remember that decisions are made only by the board acting as a whole. Individual opinions on board matters can and should be defended vigorously, but once the board as a team has made a decision it should be accepted gracefully and implemented whole-heartedly.

Another essential duty is the selection and evaluation of the superintendent. The right superintendent can mean a school system where children learn, where administration and teaching staff work together harmoniously, and where student achievement soars.

Effective board members establish good working relationships with the superintendent or administrator. Although it has been frequently said that the board makes policy and the superintendent carries out policy, it is difficult to draw an exact line between policy and administration. Often a superintendent will recommend policy which the board, after consideration, may accept or reject. Once a policy is adopted, the superintendent is responsible for its implementation.

The board should refrain from becoming involved with the day-to-day operation of the schools. However, it should oversee the administration and operation of the schools and require periodic reports for purposes of evaluation.

A board member must help build public support and understanding of public education and to lead the public in demanding better education. This means communication, serving as a link between the school system and the public, interpreting the schools to the public and the public to the schools, and helping to establish a climate for change when necessary.



## **Q:** What are the qualifications of a good school board member?

- A:**
- The board member should have a broad background of experience and knowledge – or be ready, willing, and able to learn quickly. The complexity of every area of school operation – whether finance, student-employee-community relationships, and curriculum – demand intelligence, awareness, and sensitivity.
  - The board member should be able to look beyond yesterday’s solutions and yesterday’s education, and be willing to provide today’s education for today’s children.
  - The board member should be visionary – able to understand the forces of change and to foresee, at least to some extent, the shape of the future in order to plan wisely.
  - The board member should be tolerant and avoid prejudice. The diversity in the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic composition of the student populations in many of our schools; as well as the changing mores of our society, make it imperative that the board member be understanding of all children and patrons.
  - The board member should understand that education today is extremely complex, and that simplistic approaches will not meet today’s challenges.
  - The board member should be able to defend the board’s philosophy and goals and withstand criticisms from people with opposing views.
  - The board member should be willing to invest the many hours necessary to discharge their responsibilities.
  - The board member should serve out of sincere desire to serve the community and its children, rather than for personal glory or to carry out personal objectives or a hidden agenda.
  - The board member should bear in mind that their responsibility is to all the children in the State, not solely to those in their own district.

# Becoming a School Board Member

## **Q:** Who is eligible to serve on a school board?

**A:** School boards are nonpartisan. Candidates are not required to belong to a political party. The legal requirements to become a school district board member are found in Idaho Code 33-501. The requirements include:

- Be a citizen of the United States
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a school district elector of his/her district
- Be a resident of the trustee zone from which nominated or appointed
- Being a resident in Idaho and the county for at least thirty days prior to the election

For charter schools, the process for selecting board members will be laid out in the school’s charter and/or bylaws.

## **Q:** How long are school board terms?

**A:** District school board members serve for terms of four years beginning at noon on January 1 next succeeding his/her election. Terms are usually staggered so there will be openings every two years.

For charter school boards, the amount of board members, board member terms, and how they are selected are typically outlined in the charter school’s bylaws.

## **Q:** When are elections held?

**A:** Starting in 2018, school district trustee elections are held the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November in odd numbered years. Specially chartered districts may differ. (Idaho Code 33-503)

**Q:** How does someone become a candidate for a school board?

**A:** According to Idaho Code 33-502, candidates must file a “Declaration of Candidacy” form. That form must bear the name of the candidate, state the term for which the declaration of candidacy is made, and bear the signature of not less than five (5) school district electors who reside in the trustee zone of which the candidate is a resident. The declaration shall be filed with the clerk of the board of trustees of the school district as provided in Idaho Code 34-1404.

## Questions & Answers for School Board Candidates

**Q:** What are the legal qualifications for being a school board member?

**A:** A member of any board of education must be a citizen and resident of the zone they are to represent. Qualifications may differ in specially chartered districts and charter schools.

**Q:** Do school board members get paid for their services?

**A:** A board member does not receive compensation for services nor may they be interested directly in any contract with or claim against the board.

**Q:** How many people serve on a board? What is their term of office?

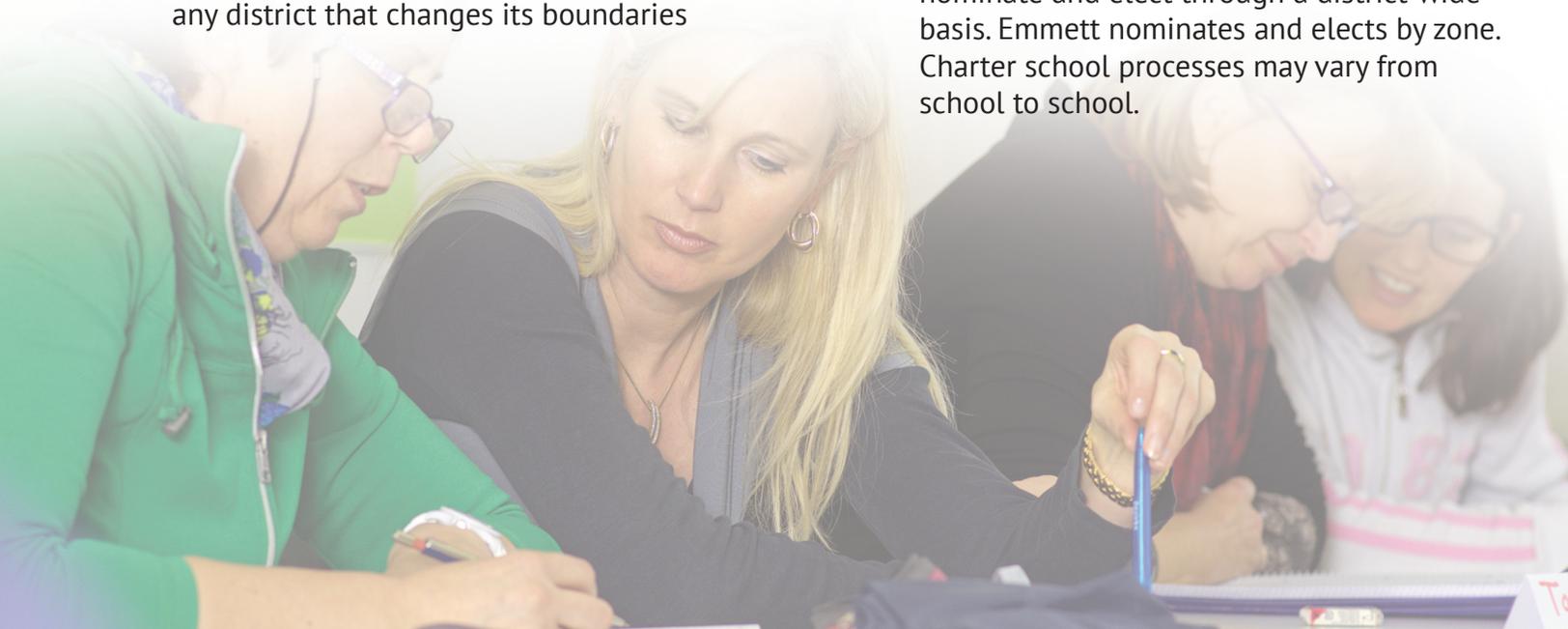
**A:** In most traditional school districts, the board consists of five members. A law passed in 1973 makes it possible for any district that changes its boundaries

to increase its membership up to nine, at local option. Specially chartered districts have either six or seven members while elementary districts (those without a high school) have three members. The term of office is four years on a staggered basis, though specially chartered districts’ terms may differ.

For charter school boards, the number of board members, board member terms, and how they are selected are typically outlined in the charter school’s bylaws.

**Q:** Who votes for a school board member?

**A:** Any person who is legally able to vote and resides in the same trustee zone as the person running for the board may vote in that school board election. The three specially chartered school districts use different methods. Boise and Lewiston both nominate and elect through a district-wide basis. Emmett nominates and elects by zone. Charter school processes may vary from school to school.



**Q:** Are board members protected from civil suits?

**A:** Generally, a district carries insurance which entitles a board member to be indemnified against the cost of defending any civil or criminal action arising out of the performance of his or her duties. Such protection extends to criminal actions only if the final disposition favors the member.

**Q:** What happens when a school board member moves to another community?

**A:** Whenever a board member ceases to be a bona fide resident of the zone they represent, their membership on the board shall cease. The board then appoints someone to serve until the next election.

**Q:** When are school board elections held?

**A:** A uniform election date is set by the Legislature. Starting in 2018, school district trustee elections are held the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November in odd numbered years. Specially chartered districts and charter schools may differ. (Idaho Code 33-503)

**Q:** Is attendance at board meetings mandatory?

**A:** The board member has been elected to bring their voice to the governance of the school district. It is important for all the trustees to take an active role in the board meetings. As such, while there is no mandatory requirement, any board member who fails to attend four consecutive public meetings without good cause may be removed by the board. Furthermore, if a board member must, they can attend remotely by phone and their attendance shall be recorded as present.

**Q:** Who serves as Chair of the Board?

**A:** The board is required to reorganize every year at the annual meeting. For school districts, this occurs during the regular meeting in January. At that time, the board selects a chair, vice chair, clerk, and treasurer. Some boards keep the same chair for several years, others change periodically and some rotate it so that everyone has an opportunity to serve; either are acceptable methods.

**Q:** May an employee of a school district serve as a board member?

**A:** No. A school board member may not have any pecuniary interest in the school district or charter school in which they serve.

**Q:** May a spouse of an employee serve on the school district board?

**A:** Only under certain circumstances. School districts with 1,200 or fewer students can hire a trustee's spouse for certain positions when no other qualified candidate can be found. However, there are special requirements for posting the position. The board member must be absent from the meeting while their spouse's employment and other decisions affecting the spouse are being considered. The spouse may only be employed on a Category 1 contract. For further details, see 33-507, Idaho Code.