

Becoming A School Board Member

A Guide for School Board Candidates

***G**ood school systems begin with good school boards. The quality of a school board depends to a considerable extent on the interest taken by citizens. It is not an exaggeration to say that service as a school board member is one of the most unselfish forms of public service that anyone can be called upon to perform.*

***D**o you have the qualifications necessary to be a public school leader? If so, consider using your leadership skills by running for your school board.*



Provided by the
Wyoming School Boards Association



WHAT IS A SCHOOL BOARD?

The local school board grew out of the town meeting, dating back more than 200 years to the original Thirteen Colonies. Times have changed, but the basic function of school boards today remains the same: To provide local citizen

control over public education. This means that the school board should represent the citizens of the school district - not just *some* of the citizens, but *all* of them. Because different people have different ideas about schools, this responsibility always presents a challenge.

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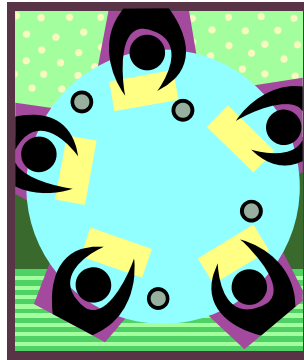
The ultimate responsibility for education rests with the State of Wyoming. The state has seen fit to delegate much of that responsibility to the local school board. School boards - although elected locally - are state agencies carrying out a state function. While school boards are granted wide latitude in governing their schools, they are subject to numerous state laws and regulations.

Perhaps the single most important job of a school board is to employ a superintendent and to hold that person responsible for managing the schools in accordance with federal law, state law and the school board's policies. The board also should set educational goals for the schools - based upon state laws and community values - and see that the superintendent and the total staff vigorously pursue those goals.

Because a school board is a governmental body, it can take action only by majority vote at a public meeting. The individual board member has no authority other than the right to cast a vote at such a meeting. A board member who attempts - without authorization - to speak for the total board, to direct members of the staff, or to make other individual decisions is acting outside the law.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

<u>Roles/Responsibilities</u>	<u>School Board</u> Governs the District	<u>Superintendent</u> Advises the District
1. General		
2. Policy	Adopts	Suggests and implements
3. Meetings	In charge of	Serves as resource person
4. Budget/Finance/Audits	Adopts and monitors	Prepares, administers, monitors, details
5. Instruction	Establishes criteria, approves, monitors	Recommends, oversees, monitors, details
6. Personnel	Establishes criteria, approves or rejects	Interviews, recommends, hires, evaluates, promotes, trains
7. Labor Relations	Provides guidelines, ratifies contracts	Monitors process within guidelines
8. Student Services care and control	Adopts policies for directs	Recommends, implements,
9. Facilities/Food Service/Transportation	Develops policy on use of	Implements policy, writes rules and regs, recommends
10. Community Relations	Creates a positive image for district	Creates a positive image for district, directs communications



WYOMING ELECTION CODE

The election of members of the board of trustees of each school district is held at the regular polling places in each district on the Tuesday next following the first Monday in November in general election years. Terms of office run for four (4) years beginning at 12:00 noon on the first day in December following the election.

A qualified elector resident in a school district is eligible to hold the office of school district trustee in the school district, but only from the trustee residence area in which he/she resides if the district is divided into residence areas. A "qualified elector" is defined as:

- (i) A citizen of the United States;
- (ii) At least eighteen (18) years of age on the day of the next election;
- (iii) Actually and physically a bona fide resident of Wyoming.

A qualified person may file an application for election in the office of the county clerk not more than ninety (90) or less than seventy (70) days prior to the election.

No person may hold an elective public office in any governmental entity which either provides any funding for or receives any funding from another governmental entity in which that person holds elected public office. If a person also is elected to a public office while holding another public office, the person shall resign from the public office first held prior to assuming the new office.

School board members in Wyoming serve without pay and are prohibited by law from having a significant financial interest in any business transacted by the school district.

The term of office for most school board members is four years. Research shows that most board members are elected for two or more terms.

Today's board members say they spend at least 30 hours a month in board work. The figure is undoubtedly increasing each year because of the changing nature of our society and its schools.

WHY SERVE ON A SCHOOL BOARD?

On the surface, being a school board member may seem to be the most thankless job in the world - struggling for long hours with the most complex problems facing America and taking all the criticism when things don't go right.

But scratch the surface and you will find that school board members feel rewarded in the inner satisfaction that comes from ensuring a good education for the youth of their community.

The public schools are often a community's largest employing organization - one with the mission of preparing the future workforce for the community. Governing an organization of this magnitude is an awesome responsibility!

Yes, school boards attract a few ax carriers and crusaders who seem to ignore the educational mission of our schools. But the vast majority of board members are well aware of the responsibilities they have accepted and conscientiously look out for the best interests of all students and all citizens.

Serving on a local school board can be viewed as one of the most important volunteer services in the community.

THE BEST BOARD MEMBERS

School board members come from all walks of life. The ability to function as one member of a governing board is not determined by sex, occupation, race, income or social standing. Effective school board members, however, are characterized by the following:

- The ability to work as a member of a team, including an open mind and an ability to engage in give-and-take and to arrive at a group consensus.
- The willingness to spend the time required to become informed and to do the homework needed to take part in effective school board meetings.
- A desire to serve children and the community, and a strong belief in the value of the public schools.

- Respect for the needs and feelings of other people, a well-developed sense of fair play, and the ability to listen and communicate well.
- Recognition that the school district is probably the largest business in town and that the board is responsible for seeing that the business is well managed.

PREPARATION FOR SERVICE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

A person who plans to run for the school board should acquire a basic understanding of the local district, including:

- Purpose (what are the schools trying to accomplish?)
- Organization (who does what?)
- Finance (income and expenses)
- Governance (state laws/regulations and local school board policies)
- Board procedures (how is business conducted?)

The board member must also understand the proper relationship of the school board to the state, the community, and the superintendent - and the proper relationship of the individual board member to the other members of the board.

The board candidate should make an appointment with the district superintendent to acquire factual information about the district and to discuss challenges and problems facing the board.

The candidate also should read as much as possible about the nature of school board work and the laws affecting schools. Reading material is available in most school district offices and from the Wyoming School Boards Association.

The place to start in preparing for school board candidacy is by attending meetings of the board.

WYOMING ETHICS AND DISCLOSURE ACT

Definitions: "Family member" means an individual who is the spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandparent, grandchild, or is a member of the individual's household.

Use of title and prestige of public office: No school board member shall use his office or position for his private benefit.

Nepotism: No school board member shall advocate or cause the employment, promotion, transfer or advancement of a family member to an office or position of a school district. A school board member shall not supervise or manage a family member who is in an office or position of the school district.

Misuse of office: A school board member shall not use public funds, time, personnel, facilities or equipment for political or campaign activity. A school board member shall not disseminate to another person official information which the school board member obtains through or in connection with his position, unless the information is available to the general public or unless the dissemination is authorized by law.

Official decisions and votes: A school board member shall not make an official decision or vote on an official decision if the school board member has a personal or private interest in the matter.

Actions taken while negotiating for employment: A school board member may not vote or take an official action in a matter affecting a person with whom the school board member is negotiating for prospective employment.

Courts have upheld that a school board member cannot in any manner or way be employed by the school district.



CODE OF CONDUCT

for members of school boards

As a member of my local board of trustees, I shall do my utmost to represent the public interest in education by adhering to the following commitments:

- I shall represent all school district constituents honestly and equally and refuse to surrender my responsibilities to special interest or partisan political groups.
- I shall avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety which could result from my position, and shall not use my board membership for personal gain or publicity.
- I shall recognize that a board member has no legal authority as an individual and that decisions can be made only by a majority vote at a board meeting.
- I shall take no private action that might compromise the board or administration and shall respect the confidentiality of privileged information.
- I shall abide by majority decisions of the board, while retaining the right to seek changes in such decisions through ethical and constructive channels.
- I shall encourage and respect the free expression of opinion by my fellow board members and others who seek a hearing before the board.
- I shall be involved and knowledgeable about not only local educational concerns but also about state and national issues.

In addition, I shall encourage my board of trustees to pursue the following goals:

- The development of educational programs which meet the individual needs of every student, regardless of ability, race, sex, creed, or social standing.
- The development of procedures for the regular and systematic evaluation of programs, staff performance, and board operations to ensure progress toward educational and fiscal goals.
- The development of effective school board policies which provide direction for the operation of the schools and delegate authority to the superintendent for their administration.
- The development of systematic communications which ensure that the school board, administration, staff, students and community are fully informed and that the staff understands the community's aspirations for its schools.
- The development of sound business practices which ensure that every dollar spent produces maximum benefits.