

A Guide for School Board Candidates in Nebraska



Nebraska Association of School Boards
2006



Introduction...

If school boards did not exist, a wise observer once said, the American public would have to invent them—just as it did two hundred years ago. Today's boards, challenged though they are, continue to fulfill our enduring desire to keep the schools close to the people.

In a time of social, economic, technological and geopolitical turbulence, the local school board remains the tried and true governance mechanism for delivering excellence and equity in public education for all our children. As an integral part of the American institution of representative governance, boards have a crucial role to play in preserving our democracy, preparing our young people to be productive citizens, and enriching the lives of our communities.



About this Candidates' Guide...

More often than not, people run for a position on the school board based on a single issue or situation that concerns them within the school system. What most people don't understand is the breadth and depth of the school board's responsibilities. This publication will attempt to cast a light on what it means to be a member of a local school board.

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About Board Service...

Building Blocks for Effective Service

Although the legal requirements for school board candidacy are few, the qualifications needed for effective service are many. A board member should:

- have a sincere interest in public education and an abiding faith in its contribution to our democratic way of life;
- have a broad background of experience and knowledge or be ready, willing, and able to learn quickly—the intricacy and complexity in every area of school operation demand intelligence, awareness, and sensitivity;
- be visionary—able to understand the forces of change in our society and formulate potential impacts;
- be tolerant and free of prejudice—the diversity of cultural backgrounds in the composition of the student populations of today’s schools, as well as the changing norms of society, make it imperative that the board member be understanding of children;
- understand that education today, like the world it reflects, is extremely complex—systemic thinking is necessary to meet today’s challenges;
- be able to defend the philosophy and goals of the board of education and to understand, but not necessarily agree or accept, the criticisms that will inevitably come from people of opposing views;
- possess a sincere desire to serve the community, rather than a desire for personal glory or personal vendetta;
- listen to opposing views and consider all sides of an issue before making decisions;

- be willing to invest the many hours necessary to meet your responsibilities;
- understand and work through the district's defined channels of authority and responsibility; and,
- engage in in-service training programs and create opportunities to network with other area school board members for the purpose of becoming knowledgeable, well-informed leaders.

Since decision-making authority is vested in the school board and **not** in the individual board members, you will be successful in implementing your personal goals and ideas only if you can convince a majority of the members of the board that your proposals have merit. The special contributions of each board member are critical to the overall effectiveness of the board. The key is cooperation. Thus it is important that you enter into school board service with the understanding that you will be working in partnership with the other members of the board.

What Do Board Members Do?

Planning

The public expects the nation's schools to provide a learning environment conducive to student achievement at the highest levels. In order to provide the leadership necessary to create that learning environment, the local school board must (1) ensure that the district and community work together to establish a clear vision of student achievement as their top priority, (2) implement the vision through the development of short- and long-range goals which focus on improving student learning, and (3) regularly assess the district's progress toward the achievement of the goals.

Policymaking

Another fundamental role of the board in fulfilling its leadership role is that of developing, adopting, and reviewing its written policies. Through policy, the board establishes

and communicates its focus on student learning and defines the limitations and directions governing all aspects of the district's operations. Well-crafted policies have the force of law at the local level.

Designating the Chief Executive

One of the school board's most critical responsibilities is that of selecting and evaluating the district's chief executive. The superintendent acts as the board's primary advisor and ensures that its vision and policies are translated into the day-to-day effort to provide a quality education program for all children. In simple terms, the relationship between the board and the superintendent is that the board sets policy while the superintendent implements policy. In reality, however, the relationship requires strong teamwork between the board and the superintendent in order to maintain the highest level of leadership performance.

Financial Resources

In consultation with the superintendent, the board is responsible for approval and adoption of an annual budget that will provide the financial basis for the buildings, furnishings, staff, materials, and equipment needed to carry out educational programs. Other financial responsibilities include:

- authorizing the administration to make the necessary expenditures budgeted and appropriated by the board;
- adopting policies for the purchase, disposal, and distribution of supplies, property and equipment;
- approving and adopting an insurance program for the district;
- making decisions on the time, size, and sale of bonds and the investment of bond proceeds; and,
- authorizing the administration to invest and borrow funds within the limitations of state law.

Staffing and Appraisal

The school board is the ultimate employer of all district employees. Ordinarily, however—other than approving staff contracts as required by law—the boards of all but the smallest districts delegate to administration the tasks of recruiting, hiring, evaluating, promoting, and disciplining staff. The board’s primary responsibility related to staff is to adopt policies which clearly communicate the expectation of a high level of performance and which establish a system of staff appraisal and professional development to support such performance.

It is important to note that in most districts, the school board directly supervises only one employee—the superintendent. The board evaluates the performance of the superintendent and holds him or her accountable for what happens in the district.

Instructional Program

A school’s primary contribution to society is its instructional program—the vehicle through which the school prepares well-educated citizens who are capable of contributing to society locally, nationally, and globally. Working closely with the administration, the school board must ensure that the district’s instructional program provides every student with the opportunity to achieve federal, state and local standards of performance, that the district is held accountable for student learning through a comprehensive system of assessment, and that the district’s resources are aligned to support its vision of student achievement.

Facilities

The board is responsible for adopting and monitoring a plan for the continuous maintenance of school facilities, determining present and future facility needs; communicating those needs to the community; purchasing, disposing of, or leasing school sites; and approving building plans that will support and enhance the district’s educational programs as well as the health and safety of its staff and students.

Students

Although the board does not deal directly with students, it does adopt the vision, goals, and plans that set the district's expectations for high achievement and establishes policies that guide the actions of administrators and other school staff.

Adjudication

From time to time, the board may have to hear appeals from staff members or students on issues which involve board policy implementation.

Advocacy

Perhaps the most important work of the school board is to serve as the link between schools, parents, and the community. Because more than 75 percent of households do not have children in public schools, districts must clearly communicate their educational vision and goals to taxpayers and to the community as a whole to secure their support. With one foot in the community and the other in schools, school board members are uniquely positioned to listen to the concerns of all the people who have a stake in education and to be vocal advocates for student achievement.

It is up to school board members to help build support and understanding of public education and to lead the public in demanding quality education.

How Much Time Does It Take?

The amount of time board members spend carrying out their duties varies greatly from district to district. Some boards hold regular meetings once a month, others meet twice or more each month. Board members are also called upon to attend committee meetings, special meetings, and hearings as required, and to spend time reading board materials and participating in professional development activities. It is absolutely imperative that those who choose to run for local boards of education be prepared to commit the substantial amount of time necessary to serve effectively.



Effective School Board Members...

Philosophy

- show a commitment to the democratic way of life
- are registered voters
- show commitment to the continuous improvement of the educational process/system
- show a willingness to commit the time required to be prepared for activities
- show evidence of being life long learners
- avoid personal and professional situations that may constitute a conflict of interest
- are goal and task directed
- are purposeful leaders and positive role models

Decision Making

- show courage in facing difficult decisions
- recognize the power is in the position and not abuse it
- see the wider picture with both short- and long-term dimensions
- use consensus and team empowerment

Personal Interactions

- communicate effectively in the listening, speaking, and writing processes
- are sensitive, evenhanded, honest, and emotionally stable
- show strong interpersonal skills
- show both freedom from prejudice and a value for diversity
- show a sense of humor

Planning

- are capable of representing the entire community
- show the ability to set policy and delegate its implementation to others
- show risk-taking behavior in situations where it is appropriate
- understand financial matters common to boards of education
- are innovative in defining problems and generating solutions



About Becoming a Candidate...

Candidate Qualifications

To be eligible for election to the board of education in any public school district in Nebraska, you must simply be a registered voter in that district.

Election Information

School board election information varies according to school district classification. Under state statute 79-102, Nebraska's public schools are classified according to the following criteria:

- **Class I**—any district that maintains only elementary grades under the direction of a single school board [§79-102(1)];
- **Class II**—any district embracing territory having a population of 1,000 inhabitants or less that maintains both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board [§79-102(2)];
- **Class III**—any district embracing territory having a population of more than 1,000 and less than 150,000 inhabitants that maintains both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board of education [§79-102(3)];
- **Class IV**—any district embracing territory having a population of 100,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the primary class within the territory of the district that maintains both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board of education (*Lincoln only*) [§79-102(4)];
- **Class V**—any district embracing territory having a population of 200,000 inhabitants or more with a city of

the metropolitan class within the territory of the district that maintains both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board of education (*Omaha only*) [§79-102(5)];

- **Class VI**—any district that maintains only a high school or a high school and grades 7 and 8 or 6 through 8 under a single board of education [§79-102(6)].

Filing Dates

The filing period for candidates in the 2006 elections began the day after the 2004 General Election. Deadlines for filing are:

- All districts which nominate or elect in the Primary Election [§32-606 (1)]:
 - ✓ Incumbents (anyone who holds **any** elective office)—February 15, 2006
 - ✓ Other—March 1, 2006
- Class II districts [§32-606(2)]:
 - ✓ Incumbents (anyone who holds **any** elective office)—July 17, 2006
 - ✓ Others—August 1, 2006

If you are interested in filing, you should contact your local school district to find out about the availability of the necessary forms.

Statewide Election Dates

- Primary Election—May 9, 2006 [§32-401]
- General Election—November 7, 2006 [§32-403]

School Board Election Dates

- Class I districts which are not within any city or village containing 150 or more children who are five through twenty years of age:
 - ✓ nominated by petition filed not less than 15 days prior to the annual school meeting [§79-565];
 - ✓ elected at the annual school meeting held on or before August 8, 2006 [§79-556].

- Class I districts which have a school census of more than 150 persons and which have elected to have a six-member school board [§32-541]:
 - √ elected in the Primary Election.
- Class II districts [§32-542]:
 - √ elected in the General Election.
- Class III districts (except Westside Community Schools) [§32-543(2)]:
 - √ nominated in the Primary Election;
 - √ elected in the General Election.
- Westside Community Schools [§32-543(1)]
 - √ nominated by caucus;
 - √ elected in the Primary Election.
- Class IV district [§32-544]:
 - √ next election in 2007
- Class V district [§32-545]:
 - √ nominated in the Primary Election;
 - √ elected in the General Election.
- Class VI districts [§32-546]:
 - √ elected in the Primary Election.

Term of Office

With a few statutory exceptions [§32-543(2) and §79-565], school board members generally serve four-year terms. These terms are staggered so that the entire board is not up for election at the same time.

Campaign Costs

The amount of time and money required to campaign for a seat on your local school board is still minimal in most districts. However, despite the fact that board members serve without pay, the cost of financing a campaign in the state's urban districts has risen to thousands of dollars. Specific information about the cost of campaigning in your district is available from the sources listed on Page 13.



Election Information

- Neal Erickson, Assistant to the Secretary of State for Elections
State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509
402-471-2554
- County Clerk's Office
- Administrative office of local school district

Campaign Information

- Local school board members
- Administrative office of local school district
- Omaha 2000 (in the metro area only)
402-346-5000

Information about Board Service

- Local school board members
- Administrative office of local school district
- Nebraska Association of School Boards
800-422-4572 or www.nasbonline.org
- National School Boards Association
703-838-6722 or www.nsba.org
- Nebraska Department of Education
402-471-2295 or www.nde.state.ne.us



About the Nebraska Association of School Boards...

The Nebraska Association of School Boards is a not-for-profit organization which has served local boards of education since 1918. Now in its ninth decade, NASB continues to provide assistance and information for the boards and districts it represents. Governed by school board members, the organization is committed to these general goals on behalf of its member boards:

- enhancing the ability and authority of local boards of education to represent the citizens of their school district;
- working for increased public awareness and financial support of the public schools;
- providing development, training, and consulting opportunities for school board members that will assist them in meeting their responsibilities for policy making, and effective and efficient management of the school district;
- representing the interests of public education, and in particular, the viewpoints of local boards of education, to those who impact public education; and,
- providing member boards with the specialized information needed to operate the public schools in the most efficient way possible.

In order to fulfill its goals, the NASB offers a broad range of membership services including:

- a legislative presence at the state level to represent the concerns of local education policymakers;
- a selection of money-saving programs—such as all lines insurance and lease purchase—designed to give schools the services they need at the most competitive price possible;

- opportunities to share expertise and solutions to common problems through participation in workshops and conferences;
- access to a full-time legal counsel to answer members' questions about the complexities of the laws affecting public schools;
- access to up-to-the-minute information through publications, e-mail, and the NASB website;
- access to an innovative electronic meeting management tool;
- a program to provide local boards with comprehensive policy development and update support; and,

NASB Governance

The Nebraska Association of School Boards is governed by a 24-member Board of Directors. Local school board members are elected to the NASB Board of Directors on a regional basis and serve three-year terms. The Board meets five times a year as a whole, with other subcommittees meeting throughout the year.

The Association's bylaws and annual legislative agenda are developed through a representative process which begins with the initiation of proposals by member boards. Proposals are submitted to the NASB Legislation Committee which is composed of 17 members elected by size-specific districts, plus six members appointed from the NASB Board of Directors. The Legislation Committee reviews local district bylaws and legislative proposals and then makes a recommendation to the NASB Delegate Assembly. Through the Delegate Assembly, each member district is able to exercise its vote to establish the Association's direction for the year.

National School Boards Association

The Nebraska Association of School Boards is a member of the National School Boards Association. Founded in 1940, the NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards from across the United States. NSBA is a nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance and provides vital information and services to its members.



For more information, please call or write:

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