



LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

Elections & Appointments

SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE GUIDE

Good school systems begin with good school boards. And the quality of a school board depends, to a considerable extent, on the interest taken by citizens. Just like municipalities, community service agencies and other worthwhile nonprofit institutions, public schools depend on effective citizen leaders for their success. Do you have the qualifications necessary to be a public school leader? If so, consider using your leadership skills by running for your local school board.

What is a school board?

The local school board grew out of the town meeting, dating back more than 200 years to the original 13 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.

The Colorado Constitution gives the state responsibility for providing a “thorough and uniform system of free public schools.” It also requires the General Assembly to organize school districts governed by local boards of education. The Colorado Constitution reserves to locally elected school boards the control of instruction in the public schools of their respective districts.

School board members in Colorado’s 178 districts serve without pay and are prohibited by law from having a significant financial interest in any business transacted by the school district, with certain exceptions cited in state law. The regular term of office for most school board members is four years.

What do school boards do?

School boards are local policy makers, and the policies they set have the force of law at the local level. The guidance and control that the board provides through its policies is critical to the successful operation of the school system and to setting a direction for staff. Today’s board members say they spend an average of 45 hours each month on board work. This estimate will undoubtedly increase each year because of the changing nature of our society and its schools.

One of the most important jobs of a school board is to employ a superintendent and to hold the superintendent 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 school, based upon state laws and community values. School boards and all of its members should be the leaders in:

- envisioning the community’s education future
- assessing and reflecting the educational needs and values of the community
- developing an educational philosophy
- establishing school district goals
- overseeing the school district budget
- adopting operating policies
- assuring systemic review and evaluations of all phases of the school program
- advocating on behalf of students and schools

As elected public officials, school board members are in a unique position to serve as a link between the school system and the public – connecting schools to the public and interpreting the public’s views of the schools. It is up to school board members to help build support and understanding of public education and to lead their communities in demanding quality education.



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Why serve on a school board?

On the surface, being a school board member may seem like a thankless job – struggling for long hours with complex problems and taking criticism when things don't go right.

But scratch the surface and you will find that school board members feel rewarded by the inner satisfaction that comes

from ensuring a good education for the youth of their communities.

In fact, serving on a local school board can be viewed as one of the most important volunteer services in the community. Public schools are often a community's largest employing organization, with the mission of preparing its future workforce. Governing an organization of this magnitude is an awesome responsibility.

What are the characteristics of successful 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 age, sex, occupation, race or income. Effective school board members, however, share the following characteristics:

- desire to serve children and the community, and a strong belief in the value of the public schools
- ability to work as a member of a team, including an open mind and ability to engage in give-and-take
- willingness to spend the time required to become informed and to do the homework needed to take part in effective school board governance
- 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 may be the largest business in town and that the board is responsible for ensuring that business is well managed

The essential qualities needed for school board success are the very qualities possessed by many who rise to the top of successful organizations:

- vision and ability to see the big picture
- excellent communication and human relations skills
- ability to listen to all sides of the story before making an informed decision
- sound judgment
- confidence
- ability to disagree agreeably
- strong sense of fairness and justice
- desire to be a leader, not a manager

Beyond these qualities – and perhaps the most important – excellent school board members demonstrate a sincere passion for children and concern for providing a quality education for all. Board Resources are available at the Great Governing section of CASB's website, www.casb.org.

Code of ethics for board members

Adopted in 1999, the Code of Ethics of the National School Boards Association provides:

As a member of my local board of education, I will strive to improve public education, and to that end I will:

- *Attend all regularly scheduled board meetings insofar as possible and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings.*
- *Recognize that I should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings.*
- *Render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.*



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- *Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members and seek systemic communications between the board and students, staff and all elements of the community.*
- *Work with other board members to establish effective board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent.*
- *Communicate to other board members and the superintendent expressions of public reactions to board policies and school programs.*
- *Inform myself about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school boards associations.*
- *Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.*
- *Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest and refrain from using my board position for personal or partisan gain.*
- *Take no private action that will compromise the board or administration and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.*
- *Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools.*

How do I prepare to serve on my school board?

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

- purpose (what are the schools trying to accomplish?)
- organization (who does what?)
- finance (income and expenses)
- government (state laws and regulations and local school board policies)
- board procedures (how business is conducted)

A great board candidate understands 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. In preparation for board candidacy, he or she will:

- attend board meetings to learn how the board functions
- make an appointment with the district superintendent to learn more about the district and to discuss challenges and problems facing the board
- visit www.casb.org and the school district office to read as much as possible about the nature of school board work and the laws affecting schools

Elections

School board members are elected at regular biennial school elections, which are held on the first Tuesday in November of each odd-numbered year.

Some school districts have a director district plan of representation, which means that school board members must reside in certain geographical areas. Others have an at-large or a combined at-large and director district plan of representation. However, all school board members,

including those in districts with a director district plan, are elected by a vote of the electors of the entire school district, except Denver Public Schools.

Most Colorado school board members are elected to four-year staggered terms. Board members may serve two consecutive terms unless the board has locally extended or removed term limits. Vacancies are filled by appointment until the next election. The county clerk is mostly responsible for conducting school elections; however, school officials also have election duties.



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Eligibility

A candidate for the school board must be a registered voter and a resident of the school district for at least 12 consecutive months prior to the election. If the school district has director districts in its plan of representation, the

person must be a resident of the director district in which he or she is a candidate. No person who has been convicted of a sexual offense against a child is eligible to serve on the school board. Because school director elections are nonpartisan, candidates may not campaign as members of a political party

Nomination procedures

A person who desires to be a candidate for school director must file a nomination petition signed by 25 eligible electors of the school district in districts with fewer than 1,000 students, or 50 eligible electors in larger districts. Your school district can provide more information about the number of signatures required on the petition.

The nomination petition must be filed with the designated election official of the school district no later than 67 days before the election. The candidate would be wise

to obtain extra signatures in case some of the signatures are invalidated. A candidate can always check the county clerk's voter registration records to verify that persons signing the petition are registered voters.

In most communities, nomination petitions are available at the local school district offices and must be filed at the school district. However, in some communities, the county clerk handles this. Call your school district office to find out where to pick up petitions.

Campaign filing requirements

School board candidates must meet filing requirements under Colorado's Fair Campaign Practices Act (FCPA). One of the first steps is to file a candidate's affidavit with the secretary of state within 10 days of becoming a candidate. Also, candidates are required to report contributions and expenditures on the secretary of state's new online

TRACER program. Reports on a school board candidate's contributions and expenditures must be filed 21 days before the election, the Friday before the election, and 30 days after the election.

For more information about reporting requirements, please visit CASB's election page at www.casb.org.

Important dates

- Aug. 7 – Nomination petitions must be made available by this date. No petition shall be circulated prior to 90 days before the election.
- Aug. 30 – Nomination petitions must be filed by this date at a location specified by a designated election official.

- Sept. 3 – Last day to file as a write-in candidate and date on which a school district may cancel an election if there is no contest.
- Nov. 5 – Election Day.

Also note the dates related to the Fair Campaign Practices Act. Reports must be filed on the following dates: Oct. 15, Nov. 1 and Dec. 5.



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About CASB

The Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) was established in 1940 to provide a structure through which school board members could unite in their efforts to promote the interests and welfare of Colorado's 178 school districts. CASB represents and advocates for more than 1,000 school board members and superintendents statewide to groups both within and outside the K–12 education community.

CASB provides services, information and training programs to support school board members as they govern their local districts. Membership benefits and solutions are designed to enhance school board effectiveness and help board members increase their knowledge, boost their efficiency and connect with their communities.

CASB also cultivates relationships with dozens of governing bodies and other education stakeholders — at both the state and national level — to ensure a unified and effective voice and presence on behalf of its members. The association is guided and governed by a 22-member board of directors comprised of school board members representing 12 CASB regions across the state.

CASB offers a diverse range of benefits and services that are included in membership dues, as well as additional fee-based customized solutions.

Membership benefits & services included with CASB dues:

- phone and email support
- policy leadership and support
- policy updates based on legislation
- legal consultation and updates
- advocacy and lobbying
- communications updates and support
- peer learning and networking
- board governance support
- engagement and partnership with education stakeholders

Fee-based solutions & special projects:

- policy projects
- Legal Services Program
- annual convention
- fall and winter conferences, regional meetings, online learning
- superintendent search
- communication audits, community engagement, focus groups
- board effectiveness workshops and retreats
- BEST Health Plan

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