



# School Board Candidate Guide

**What you need to know when running for a seat on your school board.**

## Serving on the school board

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 non-profit institutions, public schools depend on highly qualified 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 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.

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. These school boards have control of instruction in the public schools in their respective districts.

School board members in Colorado 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 board members 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 are critical to the smooth operation of the school system and to setting a direction for staff. Today’s board members say they spend at least 45 hours a month on board work. The figure will undoubtedly increase each year because of the changing nature of our society and its schools.

Perhaps the single most important job 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 schools—based upon state laws and community values. Board 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 systematic 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.



## 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 complex problems 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 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. The 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!

## 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 age, sex, occupation, race or income. Effective school board members, however, share the following characteristics:

- A desire to serve children and the community, and a strong belief in the value of the public schools.
- The ability to work as a member of a team, including an open mind and an ability to engage in give-and-take.
- The 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.

## Essential qualities

The 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
- The ability to listen to all sides of the story before making an informed decision
- Sound judgment
- Confidence
- The ability to disagree agreeably
- A strong sense of fairness and justice
- A 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.

## Preparing to serve on a school board

A person 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)

The board candidate also must 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.

Start preparing for school board candidacy by attending board meetings. Learn how the board functions.



Make an appointment with the district superintendent to acquire factual information about the district and to discuss challenges and problems facing the board.

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 Colorado Association of School Boards.

## 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 terms. Terms are staggered. 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.

## 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 a director district plan of representation, the person must be a resident of the director district in which he or she is a candidate.

Some districts have a combined director district and an at-large plan of representation, which will involve residency requirements for those running for any director district

seat. School board elections are nonpartisan. No person who has been convicted of a sexual offense against a child is eligible to serve on the school board.

## 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 see CASB's publication, "Campaign Activities and Compliance with the FCPA" or contact the secretary of state.



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### Important dates

- August 3 – Nomination petitions must be made available by this date. No petition shall be circulated prior to 90 days before the election.
- August 26 – Nomination petitions must be filed by this date at a location specified by a designated election official.
- August 29 – Last day to file as a write-in candidate.
- August 30 – Cancellation deadline – School districts may cancel election if there is no contest.
- October 3 – Last day to register to vote.
- October 11 - October 14 – Ballots to be mailed to voters (where applicable).
- November 1 – Election Day.

Also note the dates related to the Fair Campaign Practices Act. Reports must be filed on the following dates: October 11, October 28 and December 1.

### Colorado school board facts

- Number of school boards in Colorado: 178
- Number of directors on each school board: 5, 6 or 7
- Term of office: 4 years for most districts
- Number of consecutive terms a board member may serve: 2 (unless they have locally extended or removed term limits)
- Elections held first Tuesday in November of each odd-numbered year
- Because school director elections are nonpartisan, candidates may not campaign as members of a political party.
- School board members serve without pay
- Qualifications: Must be a registered voter and a resident of the school district for at least 12 consecutive months prior to the election. Must be resident of director district if that plan of representation is in effect. Must not have been convicted of committing a sexual offense against a child.

### Code of ethics for board members

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.
- Encourage the free expression of opinion by all board members and seek systematic 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.



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### Colorado Association of School Boards

The Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) is the membership organization for school boards in the state. It was organized in 1940 to provide the structure through which school board members could unite in efforts to promote the interests and welfare of Colorado school districts.

Today, CASB advocates the interests of boards of education to groups both within and outside the education community. CASB also provides information, services and training programs to support school board members as they govern their local school districts.

Some of the services provided by CASB include:

- Legislative Advocacy – CASB uses the power of association to lobby on behalf of school boards at the state and national levels based on direction provided by its members.
- Legal Services – Attorneys experienced in school law are available to provide legal information and counsel to member boards through our Member Legal Resources program. In addition, through CASB's Legal Services Program, attorneys provide direct legal advice on a wide range of issues, including special education, employment, discrimination, and student discipline issues at competitive prices.
- Policy Services – CASB's policy experts and attorneys provide continual policy updates based on new laws and regulations. Members may call for sample policies or policy counsel any time.
- Member Relations – CASB facilitates discussions on topics of concern to individual boards or groups of boards within a region of the state. CASB also consults with individual school boards on communication, conflict and a number of other board issues.
- Information – Members stay up to date on issues that affect public education through a number of CASB conferences, publications and the website, [www.casb.org](http://www.casb.org).

- Custom Services – Tailored to the specific needs of school districts: Superintendent Search, Strategic Planning, Policy Governance®, School Board Policy, Communications Audit, and Community Engagement are examples.
- Plus . . . CASB offers a variety of school board training opportunities each year through regional meetings, webinars, conferences and an annual convention.

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