

Recruiting New Board Members

By Timi Tullis, AASB Director of Membership Services
(originally posted in AASB Commentary, August 2014)

This summer while helping a board develop a **board self improvement plan** one of the members asked me if we had anything in writing to encourage citizens to become interested and ultimately run for their board. Our website, www.aasb.org, has some information for potential candidates, but I thought I could reach more members by writing about the process here.

The first step is to **let individuals know early** that there will be seats open in the fall election. It doesn't hurt to start sharing this information as early as May or June, if you know that soon. Looking for individuals that already are somewhat active in the work you do, individuals that support events at the schools, and people you know care about kids is a great place to start. It's a bonus if they are or have been active on other boards and know a bit about working on a team or board with others.

Make sure you remain open-minded and **don't discard anyone from consideration**. Younger candidates, who potentially graduated from the school recently, could bring a lot of first hand knowledge to the board. More mature candidates who may be active on other boards and have knowledge of how a board governs could also benefit your team. Parents or grandparents of students are not the only individuals who care about kids in your community; there are many 'non-parents' that make great board members.

To ensure that your board remains diverse, be sure to **encourage individuals from a variety of backgrounds**, experiences and occupations. We love that in Alaska we have grandmas, aunties, fishermen, whaling captains, doctors, lawyers, uncles and mushers serving as board members/ Regardless of the label, our school board members have one thing in common -- they care about ALL kids in their district and they are representative of our state.

Be sure to remember that **your excitement and enjoyment for your position on the board will be noticed by others**. As often as possible publically share your passion for that work as a board member. Speak

positively about being on the board rather than whine about how much “work” it is. No one will want the job if you are unable to highlight the positive aspects of being on the board and making a positive difference for the students in your district.

As current members it is great if you can **individually encourage others** to run for the board. However, you want to be careful not to publicly support or, on the flip side, bad mouth any particular candidate because depending on the outcome you may or may not be working with said individuals.

While encouraging individuals to run for open seats be sure that candidates understand what the work of the board involves and help them see that the most important aspects of good board members are to:

- Focus on improvement of ALL students,
- Care deeply about the work of the board and share it with different aspects of the community, other civic groups or simply in their circle of supporters,
- Work with the team including the administration to ensure the best educational programs for your district,
- Become an informed and professional board member, be willing to attend all meetings, trainings and board work retreats.

When encouraging community members to consider running for a seat **invite them to a board meeting** (if they have not been to one) and take time after the meeting to debrief with them about the work that the board accomplished. Honestly explain the time commitments as well as the rewards from being on the board.

So in the end, current board can play a role in encouraging potential candidates to run for open seats. Board members and superintendent might consider the following Ideas to help get the word out about open seats:

- Face to face discussions encouraging involvement
- Newspaper or newsletter ad or an informative article
- Radio interviews encouraging community members to consider running

- Give potential candidates information on the actual work of the board, possibly the yearly calendar and,
- Hold a work session to describe the work of the board.