

A message from the Association of Alaska School Boards

What to look for in a School Board Candidate

It's summer. It seems like it was just the other day when last year's citizens were beginning their campaigns for local school board races. The wheels are turning in the minds of hundreds of citizens who think they may want to be local school board members. What should voters look for as they assess the qualifications of school board candidates? What skills and commitments are important to school board success? These are some of the things we believe to be important:

• Time

Serving on a local school board requires lots of it. No longer is it reasonable to expect board service to take one night per month. Public education has become far too complex and community expectations far too great, for the leisurely pace of yesteryear to be the rule today. Today's board members say they can easily spend 30 or more hours per month on school issues: negotiating contracts, planning, work sessions, community meetings-not to mention personal phone calls and other contacts made.

• Commitment to teamwork

Individual school board members, by themselves, are not empowered to make district wide changes, but, by working well with board colleagues, the superintendent and with other groups who are shaping public schools, virtually anything is possible. Occasionally a board will find itself embroiled in controversy and turmoil.

Reasonable adults should be able to disagree agreeably, then move to the next level without chewing up themselves-and the district-by creating lasting divisions that assure loss of public confidence.

• Strong interpersonal skills

School board members' ideas may be wonderful, but if they lack the skills to persuade their colleagues and the public of their value, they will be less effective. If only one set of skills were available for an effective school board member, I would choose solid interpersonal skills and attributes, including communication, trustworthiness, honesty, confidentiality, consistency, and other such traits that cause interpersonal relationships to blossom.

• Concern for the entire school district not for a special interest or a narrow philosophy.

Most of us have a "favorite" concern about schools. It may be sports, fine arts, "the basics," special education, or something else. And that's okay. However, an elected school board member must keep a broad view of the district and see a wide horizon. Every program offered by the district has value, or it should not be offered. Good board members recognize that, and try to build them all to their highest level of quality.



The other dimension of this point, philosophy, is more subtle. More and more, narrowly focused organizations are helping candidates get elected so that their commonly held philosophical views will influence board action. Of course, this is all very legal. In fact, such organizations are to be applauded for their commitment. However, a voter must take the time and make the effort to learn as much about school board candidates as possible in order to know the philosophy of the person they elect.

• Willingness to learn

State law requires few qualifications for service as a school board member. Some individuals are elected with more immediate knowledge and skills than others. But no one, regardless of occupation, intelligence or personal skills, comes in knowing all he or she needed upon election. Those who approach their jobs with a desire to be more knowledgeable and skilled become more effective school board members.

Serving on a local school board can be one of the most rewarding challenges any citizen could hope for. The system works best when able and committed people step forward and serve their communities. If ever there was a time when quality leadership was needed, it is now.

Adapted from Randy Quinn,
Colorado School Boards Association.

A Guide for School Board Candidates in Alaska

Published by the Association of Alaska School Boards, this brochure is available free of charge. It gives an overview of roles and responsibilities, board functions, policy making, planning, performance and interpreting school needs. Call AASB at (907) 463-1660 for your free brochure. Visit the AASB website (<http://www.aasb.org>) for more information about school boards and Alaska Education.

Election Dates

- REAA School Board elections: **October 5, 2021**
- Most Municipal School Board elections: **October 5, 2021**

Municipal election dates are determined locally. Contact your local municipality to find out the school board candidate filing deadline in your community!