

How Do I Decide Who Would Make The Best Board Member?

Attend candidate forums, read the local news, and analyze each candidate's literature. As you do, ask the following questions:

Candidate's Experience

- In what ways has the candidate been involved in public schools?
- What community involvement and leadership has prepared the candidate for school board membership?
- What is the educational background of the candidate?
- Has the candidate shown a commitment to and respect for public education?

Candidate's Qualities

Does the candidate show evidence of being... a team player, open-minded, well informed, confident, a good listener, a great communicator, a leader, a willing learner?

Does he or she have... sound judgment, a sense of fair play, respect for the needs and feelings of others, the desire to serve children and the community, the ability to disagree agreeably?

Candidate's Response to the Issues

How does the candidate stand on the major issues confronting the district? Board members should have a broad vision for the school district rather than a single issue agenda.

Do The Research

- Does the candidate participate in open forums and debates?
- Does the candidate accept speaking engagements before groups that might not be sympathetic?
- Does the candidate give thoughtful answers or does he or she offer vague solutions to voters' questions?
- Does this candidate use phrases intended to get a knee-jerk emotional reaction?
- Do campaign materials emphasize issues or just image?
- Who are the candidate's funding sources and backers?
- What individuals and groups have endorsed this candidate?
- Where do their supporters stand on the issues?

Ask Tough Questions

- What actions have you taken or would you take to improve student achievement?
- What is your vision for the district in five to ten years?
- What characteristics do you hope all district teachers have as they face a classroom?

What Do School Boards Do?

- Set the vision and goals for the district.
- Adopt policies to achieve those goals.
- Keep students first and foremost in decision making.
- Hire and evaluate a superintendent.
- Adopt and oversee the operating budget and management of facilities.
- Manage collective bargaining.
- Help build community support and understanding for quality public education.
- Make themselves accessible to the public and include the community's views in decisions.
- Act as the link between the public and the professional staff.

What Makes a School Board Effective?

The best school boards:

- Understand that student learning is their most important responsibility.
- Recognize that not all students come to class with the same needs, and allocate time, money and personnel accordingly.
- Determine from reliable data the benefits, costs, and drawbacks of programs and services.
- Involve the community in setting a vision for the district which represents the values of the community and identifies short- and long-term priorities.
- Are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more on policies to improve student achievement.
- Nurture a collaborative relationship with staff and community.

