

# So, You Want To Be A School Board Member?

Kansas Association of School Boards  
Candidate Guide



# So, You Want To Be A School Board Member?

There are few roles more important in local communities than that of a school board member. Elected by their neighbors and peers, board members play a critical role in the success of a school district, its students, and staff. The Kansas Association of School Boards hopes you will find this guide useful as you consider running for your local school board. During your potential campaign and throughout your possible tenure on the board, we are here to help you navigate the complicated waters of educational leadership in Kansas.

We believe three primary tenets inform effective educational leadership. These tenets guide our day-to-day operations and decision-making, and we hope you will share our commitment to them. An educational leader's primary role is to [Lead](#), [Serve](#), and [Advocate](#) on behalf of their district, students, and staff.

## Lead

School board members are elected to lead. From hiring superintendents to setting district-wide policy, the decisions school board members make impact the daily and long-term success of students, staff, and community members within their districts. Board members are also seen as leaders in their communities and across the state. Those who have a passion for public education and want to make schools better for all people make the most effective and fulfilled leaders.

## Serve

School boards oversee every public school district in Kansas. That means they manage over 70,000 staff members and support almost 500,000 students across the state. Board members do this with no compensation. Instead, it is a devotion to service that drives the most successful and impactful school board members. This same dedication to public service should foster an environment of collaboration, coordination, and communication.

## Advocate

School board members are among the best and most respected voices for public education in the nation. At the local level, members are expected to advocate for the various stakeholders in the district (students, staff, community members) in pursuit of policies and direction that make the system better for all involved. At the state level, school board members are critical voices in the fight for a strong state-wide public education system.

# Some Questions To Consider

There is more to serving on your local school board than might meet the eye. If you're considering running for your local school board, there are many things to think about.

You don't need a background in local government, education, or public policy to run for your school board. You don't have to have children attending school in the district either. Still, there are some questions you should ask yourself before filing for election.

## Why am I running for the local school board?

There are many good reasons someone might run for the school board. Good reasons include:

- A desire to make your district more successful in serving and supporting all students in your district;
- A passion for public education;
- To use your skills, knowledge, and insight in collaboration with others to make your schools stronger.

There are also some reasons for running that might not make a good foundation for long-term success. These reasons include:

- There is a specific issue you want to change;
- To "get rid of" a specific employee or policy.

Reasons such as these don't line up with a school board member's role. Board members are elected to look at the "big picture" for the entire district. If you're looking to focus on a specific program, person, or platform, you'll likely be frustrated and unfulfilled once you take office.

Board members have a great deal of responsibility for leading the entire school district: your leadership impacts every building, staff member, and student. Fulfilled and successful board members understand this before running for office. If you are not sure you are ready to take on the mantle of leadership, consider processing your choice in more detail with existing or prior board members and your local district staff.

## What does it take to be a school board member?

### The short answer? It takes commitment!

- Commitment to serving the public with time and energy committed to meetings, phone calls, conversations, visits to schools and professional development seminars and workshops;
- Commitment to public education with a belief in the importance of public education and a commitment that every child is deserving of an outstanding education.

Boards of education guide the vision for the local school district keeping student success as the primary focus of each decision. The decisions you make as a member of the school board impact both the future of the children in your community and the economic future of our state and nation. The direction you set for your district will likely impact the students in your community for years.

The board must create an environment and organizational framework that encourages innovation and supports staff members in a process of continuous improvement of education. This happens best when members facilitate an environment of collaboration, coordination, and communication.

### It also takes an election!

Every school district in Kansas is governed by a locally-elected board of education. They are unpaid public servants. In fact, school board members as a whole comprise the largest body of elected officials in our country. The qualifications for effective service as a board member are many, even though the actual legal requirements are few.

School board elections are nonpartisan. Terms of office for a school board are staggered so seats don't become open all at once. A school board member must be a registered voter in their school district and cannot be an employee of the board on which they become a member. If board members are elected from certain areas of the district rather than at-large, they must live in the area of the district from which they are seeking office.

School board elections are held the first Tuesday in November of each odd-numbered year. A primary election must be conducted if more than three people file for the same school board position. Newly elected board members take office the second Monday in January following the election.





## **Can I make the time commitment to serve on the school board?**

Before you run, you'll want to know what it takes to be a successful board member. Election to the board comes with a whole new time commitment.

You'll definitely be busier because of the time needed to prepare for and attend board meetings and other related obligations.

Becoming an effective board member requires training. KASB offers a variety of training opportunities throughout the year held around the state, in your district, and even online.

During your first year of board service you'll learn about:

- District priorities;
- The state accountability system;
- District budgeting;
- Legal requirements of the Kansas Open Meetings Act, and much more!

## **What knowledge and skills do I bring to the board?**

No one type of person or background makes for a good school board member, but all good school board members need to:

- Work as a team to create a vision for the district and set measurable goals to achieve that vision;
- Understand finances and budgets and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district;
- Focus on the true bottom line - student achievement and implementing policies that ensure success for all students;
- Inform the public regularly on the district's progress and challenges;
- Collaborate with others and be respectful of the full leadership team;
- Advocate for the value of a strong public education system at every chance and every level of government.

School board members make important decisions with long-lasting implications for their communities and their citizens.

**"Election to a school board is a big commitment, but it comes with big rewards"**

## How do I succeed as a school board member?

### It takes teamwork!

To accomplish the school district's mission and goals, board members must work as a team and cooperate with other board members.

Decision-making authority is vested in the board of education, not in individual members.

A board member should:

- Have a broad background of experience and knowledge and a sincere desire to serve the community;
- Be visionary, able to understand the forces of societal change and plan for the future;
- Be tolerant and without prejudice, respecting diverse points of view;
- Understand education today is complex and simplistic approaches will not meet today's challenges;
- Be willing to invest the time and energy required for meetings, phone calls, conversations, visits to schools, professional development seminars, and workshops;
- Be responsive to the human needs of individuals and groups;
- Be willing to be part of a team, supporting group decisions;
- Listen for real consensus and not confuse a few vocal constituents with a majority opinion;
- Remember the responsibility is to all the children in the state, not solely to those in the local district;
- Learn and grow as you become more aware of your responsibilities.

### It takes vision!

Creating a clear vision with high expectations for teaching and learning involves making choices about where the district is headed and how it will get there. For this reason, establishing a vision may be the most difficult responsibility any school board faces.

This involves:

- Keeping students as the focus of the work of schools;
- Adopting a shared vision based on community beliefs to guide local education;
- Demonstrating a strong commitment to the shared vision and mission by using them to guide decision-making and communicating them to others.

"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

-Henry Ford

## What are some primary functions of the board?

### Hiring the Superintendent of Schools

Because the district's day-to-day operation is the superintendent's responsibility, selecting and retaining the right superintendent of schools for the district is a critical board decision. Hiring the right superintendent can lead to having a school system in which children learn, administrators and teachers work together, and parents are satisfied and supportive.

Perhaps no single decision a board makes has more impact than the selection of the superintendent.

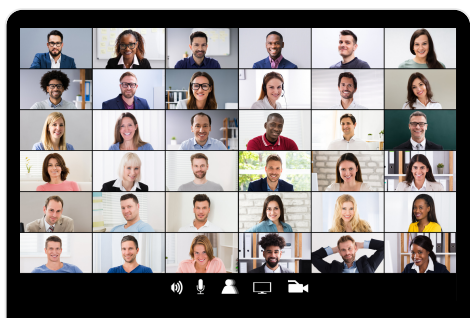
### Setting policy

Boards of education adopt policies that support the work of the district by setting guidelines that transform vision into reality. Board policies ensure compliance with the most current case law, rules, and regulations. Once the board adopts a policy, the superintendent is responsible for implementing the policy.

Kansas law states the superintendent manages the district on a day-to-day basis, subject to the board of education's rules and regulations. The board and individual board members should refrain from becoming involved in the day-to-day operation of the schools.

### Keeping education accountable to the public

The genius of America's education system is that local boards are directly accountable to the communities they serve. Board members share the responsibility with educators for the success of their students. Still, the board is ultimately accountable to the local community to set high academic standards, operate with transparency and integrity, and hold the system accountable for student success.



Effective boards engage in continuous assessment of all conditions affecting education. These should include:

- Monitoring student achievement;
- Using student achievement data and all other available information as a basis for making program corrections and modifications as needed;
- Keeping the public informed on the status of the district's programs and students' progress;
- Ensuring all functions of schools as institutions of teaching and learning fit together harmoniously;
- Providing appropriate staff and board training opportunities;
- Encouraging curriculum and assessment innovation;
- Fulfilling governance responsibilities as required by state and federal law.

A comprehensive accountability system can improve the effectiveness of schools by keeping the primary focus on student achievement and on what can and should be done to improve that achievement.

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."  
-Margaret Mead**

Specific accountability responsibilities for school boards include:

- Receiving regular reports on student progress and needs based on a variety of assessments to evaluate the quality and equity of education in the district;
- Evaluating both superintendent and board performance;
- Reporting district progress to the community and parents regularly;
- Evaluating progress toward the achievement of district long and short-term goals and ensuring policies and allocation of resources effectively supports the district vision.

### **Leading as an education advocate!**

School board members serve as the leading advocates on behalf of students and their schools in their communities. Both individually and collectively, school board members need to remain informed of issues at the local, state, and national levels. In a time when children come to school with more challenges than ever before, schools acknowledge they cannot meet all these needs alone. Instead, they collaborate with families, community organizations, and other public and private agencies to benefit both the children and the communities they serve.

As a result, the advocacy role is increasingly important for school board members. Informing citizens about the schools' accomplishments, challenges, and needs is an essential part of school board leadership. Through their actions, board members represent the community and help foster understanding and support for the schools.

Specific advocacy responsibilities for school boards include:

- Seeking others who can help expand educational opportunities to meet the needs of the whole child;
- Advocating for children and families and establishing strong relationships with parents and other mentors to help support students;
- Promoting the schools' instructional and other programs;
- Leading in celebrating the achievements of students and others in education;
- Communicating with elected officials about important issues and policies impacting schools;
- Promoting school board service as a meaningful way to make long-term contributions to society.

These responsibilities mean school boards cannot work in isolation. They must bring together the entire community (parents, community groups, and others concerned about education) in effective and responsible ways to initiate and sustain lasting school improvement.

## **Boards need good leaders!**

### **Do you have what it takes?**

The Kansas Constitution makes public education a state responsibility while at the same time providing for the operation of public schools by locally-elected school boards. Each board consists of seven members. The only exception is Fort Leavenworth USD 207. As a military base school system, USD 207 serves only kindergarten through ninth-grade students, and the governing board is composed of three residents of the base appointed by the commanding officer of Fort Leavenworth.

The mission of the public school is to educate each child to their fullest potential. The local school board, an integral part of the American institution of representative government, acts on behalf of community patrons to translate that education mission into reality.

So, if you are ready to [Lead](#), [Serve](#), and [Advocate](#) on behalf of your schools in your community and across Kansas, you are exactly what your district needs!

If you're ready to learn more about the next steps, contact your local school district to learn more about what it takes to become a member of the board of education.

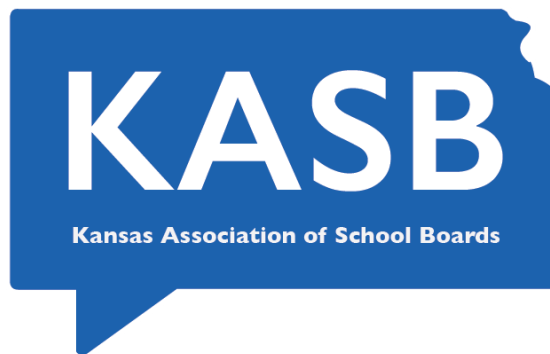
Other resources to explore include the Kansas Association of School Boards board election website at <https://www.kasb.org/schoolboardelections> and the National School Board Association website <https://www.nsba.org>.

## **And remember, we're here to help!**

At the Kansas Association of School Boards, we are dedicated to helping you succeed as a board member both before and during your tenure on the board. As you consider running for your local board of education, don't hesitate to reach out. If you are successful in your election bid, you'll become a member of KASB and have full access to the resources, training, and support we offer. You'll have special access to a series of new board member workshops throughout the Fall and early Winter. Be sure to ask your board clerk about signing up for these opportunities and watch for special communication from your new professional association.

We are so glad you're considering service on one of the most important elected bodies in the nation.





@KASBPublicEd

1420 SW Arrowhead Road, Topeka KS 66604-4024

785-273-3600 | [www.kasb.org](http://www.kasb.org)