



What I Need to Know about Running for My Local School Board

If you're considering running for your local school board, there are a lot of things to think about.

You don't need a background in local government, public education, or public policy to run for the school board. You should have an interest in what is best for the children within the school district. And you should be able to answer a few basic questions for yourself.

Why am I running for my local school board?

It's best to start at the basics and determine what's motivating you. Answering this question will help you to determine:

- What your focus might be when campaigning
- If running for the school board is even the right step for you at this time

Is there a specific issue you want to change in your school district, or do you want to improve the overall quality of education in your district?

Perhaps you're thinking about running for the board because you want to "get rid of a coach," or "make sure the principal is held accountable." Or maybe you think the state has overstepped their bounds on school accountability.

Reasons like these don't line up well with the work you would do as a school board member, and you might find it unfulfilling. Understand exactly what [the roles and responsibilities of the school board](#) are before taking the plunge.

Remember: The school board is responsible for making decisions that will affect **all** students in the district. School boards in Maine are provided authority and responsibility through the Maine Legislature and statutes that can be found in [Title 20-A, §§1001-1004](#).

If you have an agenda, you'll likely be disappointed when you're elected to the board. You must be there for the students, and, as reported by a sitting school board member, if you're focused on one thing, you'll miss the big picture.

How do I run an ethical campaign for the school board?

How you campaign absolutely sets the tone for how you will serve. Campaigning on an idea that the current school board is messing up sets you at odds as to how you now work with them. In your campaign, you want to make sure you're focusing on service – what it is you can bring to the board.

Maintaining a high ethical standard while campaigning means more than just following the law. There are expectations to live up to. [Review the Code of Ethics for School Board Members](#), and understand [nepotism](#) and [conflicts of interest](#).

These are general practices to ensure you conduct your campaign ethically:

- Focus attention on issues and avoid attacking or finding fault in opponents and district employees.
- Get familiar with the specific issues in your district.
- Always share accurate information during your campaign.
- Keep your focus on what you would like to see happen in your district.
- Avoid making promises that you as an individual cannot keep without board support.

Running an ethical campaign demonstrates your leadership to the community. It helps you establish a positive foundation for working with the board and administrators if you do get elected.

What is the time commitment when serving 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 a bit busier because of the time needed to prepare for and attend board meetings, sub-committee meetings and other related obligations.

Be prepared to commit that time, if you want to be an effective board member. You'll be called on to do various things just because you're on the school board. You'll need to prepare for school board meetings. You'll need to be doing research on information in your board packets so that you are informed and educated as to what's going on in your school district, and not just coming in cold.

Nobody is born knowing how to be a board member. You need training. You should seek this out once you are elected. If you're elected, MSBA offers a variety of training opportunities throughout the year held around the state, in your district, and even online. Your district also should be providing an orientation for new school board members. All newly elected officials must complete Freedom of Access Act training within 120 days of being elected to office. This includes all school board members and superintendents.

The preparation and getting up to speed are a big part of the first year on the board. During your first year of board service you'll learn about:

- District priorities
- School Board policies
- District budgeting
- The difference between public and executive session meetings
- And so much more

What knowledge and skills do I bring to the school board?

It is useful to consider what you'll bring to the table that can benefit your local board. Take an honest assessment of the knowledge and skills you have that could be an asset to your board.

As a school board member, you'll need to:

- Attend meetings regularly
- Learn about new and sometimes complex issues
- Interact with a variety of community members
- Make decisions on issues that at times can be difficult

Remember, joining a board is like jumping on a train that's moving. The remaining board members have been working together. They have a vision. They have goals. You want to figure out how you can be part of that, what you can add to that, and how you can be of service.

There's no one type of person or background that makes for a good school board member, but all good school board members need to:

- Work as a team, including the superintendent, 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 at every level of government

While you are at it, think of some of your shortcomings that, if left unaddressed, could hinder your efforts to be an effective board member. Knowing your opportunities for growth is just as important as knowing your strengths.

Serving as a board member can be challenging. But making decisions that benefit your students and community can be very gratifying.

When Elected Whom Do I Represent?

School board members are elected from their municipality to serve on their municipal, MSAD, RSU, or CSD school board. Once elected, individual school board members become part of a governance team as a school board. A school board is a public governing board and is not a representative board. As a school board member this is different from being a legislator, or a selectman or a town councilor. The board as a unit is provided powers and responsibilities as noted previously in statute and policy. Individual school board members hold no authority. Within their governing board, they represent the school unit as a

whole, and not the individual municipality that elected them. While there is fiscal responsibility to the municipality of the school board member, the broader representation is to the needs of all the students within the full school administrative district.

Preparing to Serve: A Webinar for School Board Candidates

MSBA hosts a webinar twice a year (September and January) for school board candidates. This webinar is an opportunity to:

- Learn about the difference between the board's and staff's responsibilities
- How to campaign constructively
- Find more information and insights about being a candidate
- Ask your questions

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