



New Jersey School Boards Association

How to Become a School Board Member



December 18, 2008

Dear Prospective School Board Member,

I'd like to introduce you to the New Jersey School Boards Association. NJSBA is a service organization with a mission to train, assist and represent the state's local boards of education.

Serving on a school board has become increasingly complex. Rest assured, if you're elected or appointed to your school board, you won't "go it alone." NJSBA stands ready to provide you with the assistance, training and information that you

need to be an effective leader for your community's schools.

State law requires all new board members to attend NJSBA's New Board Member Orientation training program during their first year in office. Additional training is mandated each subsequent year of a board member's first term and again during the first year following re-election or reappointment. In addition, NJSBA provides dozens of training programs throughout the year on issues ranging from community relations to advanced bargaining.

NJSBA also provides school board members with expert information and assistance in print, online, over the phone and in person. We encourage school boards to fully utilize the expertise of our staff of attorneys, policy and labor specialists, and field service representatives.

A significant part of NJSBA's mission is serving as the voice of school boards. We advocate for local boards of education in Trenton, on Capitol Hill, in the courts, and in the court of public opinion. If an issue arises that may affect the governance and operations of our schools, you can be sure that NJSBA will be there, fighting for your interests.

I trust this kit will provide you with the tools you need to decide whether to run for your school board.

If you want to learn even more about the responsibilities of serving on a board of education, I invite you to attend any of the regional candidate briefings that NJSBA will hold throughout the state in March. Conducted by our expert member services staff, these free evening programs will give you a broader understanding of what you can expect if you are selected to serve as a school board member. For information about the candidate briefings, call NJSBA toll free at (888) 886-5722, ext. 5213, or check online at www.njsba.org.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Delgado
President

Legal Requirements

To become a member of a local board of education in New Jersey, you must—

- Be able to read and write
- Hold U.S. citizenship and one year's residency in the school district
- Have no interest in any contract with, or claim against, the board
- Not hold office as mayor or member of the municipal governing body or, in the case of county school districts, the county governing body; may not simultaneously hold two elective offices
- Be registered to vote in the district.

Membership By Election

In Type II school districts, school boards are elected by the district's voters at the annual school election for terms of three years. To be included on the ballot, you must—

- Obtain the signatures of at least 10 qualified voters living within the district, one of which may be your own
- File a petition at least 50 days prior to the election in your district.

You can gather support for your candidacy by communicating your goals and aims for the schools to the electorate.

Membership By Appointment

In Type I school districts, board members are appointed by the mayor during April or June. Members of county vocational school boards are appointed by the County Board of Chosen Freeholders in October. Most Type I districts have either five or seven members; some have nine members. Board members' terms of office depend on the size of the board.

Steps leading to appointment vary. For example—

- You may indicate your desire and ability to serve on the board to the mayor or to the county freeholders.
- Community organizations may recommend you to the mayor or freeholders.
- Your involvement in other community activities may demonstrate your willingness to assume a leadership role.

Campaigning for Election

Nominating Petitions

Each candidate for election, including an incumbent, must be nominated directly by petition, signed by at least ten people (one of whom may be the candidate).

Each nominating petition, addressed to the secretary of the board, must state the following:

- That the signers are qualified voters in the school district
- The name, residence and post office address of the candidate and the office for which the candidate is endorsed
- That the signers endorse the candidate and ask that his or her name be printed on the ballot
- That the candidate is legally qualified to be a school board member

One of the signers must make a sworn statement verifying that the petition is prepared in good faith, that he or she saw all of the signatures included in the petition and that he or she believes that the signers are duly qualified voters. The candidate, if he or she is one of the signatories to the petition, may also make the verification.

With the nominating petition, the candidate must include a signed statement certifying that he or she is qualified to be a school board member,

consents to be a candidate, and will accept the office if elected.

Nominating petitions must be filed with the board secretary on or before 4 p.m., Monday, March 2, 2009.

A candidate for a local school board may withdraw his or her name by filing a signed notice (in writing) with the board secretary on or before March 8, 2009. However, because March 8 is a Sunday, notice should be filed by Friday, March 6, 2009.

When a nominating petition is defective, except as to the number of signatures, the candidate has the right to remedy the defect no later than March 6, 2009. The candidate may amend the petition to remedy the defect at any time before that date, but may not add signatures. (The candidate however, may add his or her own signature if necessary to provide verification of the signatures on the petition, but only if the petition already contains ten valid signatures.)

Reporting of Expenditures

The New Jersey Campaign Contributions and Expenditures Reporting Act requires all school board candidates who receive any

FAQ

WHAT CANDIDATES WANT TO KNOW ABOUT BEING

What are the main responsibilities of board members?

The board of education adopts policies under which the school district operates; oversees the budget; approves the curriculum; hires and evaluates the superintendent; represents the public during contract negotiations; and serves as a communications link between the community and the school system. School board members must remember that they have no authority except that which results from participation in decisions of the board during an official meeting. Actions, promises or commitments made by individual board members are without legal basis and have no binding commitment upon the district. Board members should be aware that they are elected to represent the entire district in all matters pertaining to education, and not any one segment.

How much time does it take to be a school board member?

A survey by the National School Boards Association found 63 percent of board members spend 11 to 50 hours a month on board duties—with some dedicating even more time to the position. As a school board member, you will provide oversight of one of the largest operations in your community. By accepting this responsibility, you effectively agree to attend regular and special board meetings, to review the board packet in advance of meetings, and to keep yourself informed about the issues on which you will make decisions.

What is the relationship between the board and superintendent?

The function of the school board is not to run the schools, but to see that they are run effectively. The board establishes school district policy and goals and communicates those goals to the superintendent. The superintendent is accountable to the board, and all other staff members are accountable to the superintendent. Teamwork between the board and superintendent is essential. Board members

should look to the superintendent for leadership and guidance on educational procedures.

What is the relationship between board members and teachers?

The board is responsible for adopting the policies, rules and regulations that define the responsibilities of teachers (as well as other school employees), and for approving all employment contracts. Observation and evaluation of teachers is the job of the superintendent and those supervisors to whom he or she delegates the responsibility. The board's role is to set standards, or expectations, in the form of policies that detail the criteria the superintendent should use in recommending and evaluating staff members.

Board members should treat teachers and other staff members with respect, and must always observe the chain of command, recognizing that the appropriate channel for board/staff communications is through the superintendent. Board members should also keep in mind that the board can appoint, transfer or remove employees only upon the recommendation of the superintendent.

Who decides how district money is spent?

The school budget is the district's financial plan, and reflects all program needs. The board's budgeting responsibilities include discussing these needs and setting the parameters for budget development. The superintendent then works with other staff members to draft a budget that meets board goals and student needs, complies with state regulations, and stays within the district's financial resources. The board adopts the budget after a public hearing. After the budget is finalized, the superintendent is responsible for administering it. The board provides financial oversight by signing off on the bill list to approve expenditures throughout the year.

contribution (including their own funds), regardless of the amount, to file a Certificate of Organization and Designation of Campaign Treasurer and Depository form with the Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

Further, any candidate who intends to spend more than \$3,500 must make a full and detailed report to ELEC and comply with a number of other procedural requirements. Thresholds for a joint campaign are \$6,700 for two candidates and \$9,700 for three or more candidates.

A campaign which is to cost \$3,500 or less has fewer reporting requirements. However, even if expenditures do not exceed \$3,500, any contribution totaling more than \$300 from any one source must be reported to ELEC and the source must be identified.

Finally, ELEC must be notified in writing of any contribution totaling more than \$1,000 that is received from the 13th day prior to the election, up to and including the date of the election. A similar reporting obligation is applicable for certain expenditures of more than \$1,000 made in this timeframe. All cash contributions must be reported. No cash contribution may exceed \$200.

Board candidates may request the *Compliance Manual for Candidates* from the Election Law Enforcement Commission. The manual includes a summary of requirements, reporting forms and instructions.

Deadlines for filing campaign contribution forms are listed in the flier, "Important 2009 School Election Dates." The flier is enclosed in NJSBA's School Board Candidate Kit.

Boards are prohibited from voting to award contracts of more than \$17,500 to any business entity that made a reportable contribution to any board member during the previous year. A business entity may not make a contribution to any board member during the term of an existing contract if that contribution would have to be reported by the board member under the pay-to-play act.

Notice: This information is accurate as of November 18, 2008. All candidates are required by law to comply with the provisions of The New Jersey Campaign Contributions and Expenditures Reporting Act. **The state Election Law Enforcement Commission is the regulatory agency regarding campaign contributions. Questions and requests for information should be directed to ELEC at (609) 292-8700, or visit its Web site, www.elec.state.nj.us.**

A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER Below are frequently asked questions from school board candidates.

Who hires and evaluates a district's superintendent?

The selection of a superintendent is considered to be one of the most significant decisions a school board makes. A systematic procedure for selection should be used, requiring months of careful planning and well-organized steps in screening the most qualified candidates. In addition, state law requires that boards evaluate superintendents annually. An effective evaluation process is based on the achievement of specific, agreed-upon goals between the board and the superintendent.

When are executive sessions permitted?

All meetings of the school board are open to the public, except when specific notice is given for an executive session. Executive sessions are limited to matters deemed confidential, including matters that federal law says must remain private, such as student records; pending litigation; topics involving attorney-client privilege; discussion of land purchases; negotiations strategies; and personnel issues.

The purpose of an executive session must be announced prior to going into closed session. Only the specifically announced subject may be discussed. Minutes must be kept and approved at a subsequent meeting, and then released to the public when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

Will I have a say in deciding what is taught and which textbooks are used?

The board is required by state law to approve courses of study, including all textbooks and materials. The board should ask its administrators to demonstrate how these curriculum materials will help students achieve the state's Core Curriculum Content Standards. The board establishes what will be taught, when and where it will be taught, to whom it will be taught, and with what materials. Administrators and teachers manage and carry out the instructional tasks.

Since the decision-making authority is vested in the board and not

in the individual members, you will be successful in achieving your personal goals only if you can convince a majority of the members of the board that your proposals have merit. As a board member, you have an obligation to express your views and then to accept and support the board's final decisions.

Will I be involved in collective bargaining with employee unions?

Since 1968, school districts have been required to negotiate contracts with their employee unions. A board member may be directly involved in collective bargaining if he or she serves on the negotiations committee. The board sets the guidelines used by the district's bargaining representative (a committee of the board, or a professional negotiator), who regularly reports to and takes direction from the board. Board members vote on the final agreement, unless a conflict of interest prevents the board member from voting.

How can a board remove poor employees? What is tenure?

State laws, union contracts and local district policies spell out employment, discipline and release procedures for all employees. The administration and board follow these procedures.

One law, New Jersey's tenure statute, is particularly significant. Tenure is the right of certain employees to continuing employment after working in the district for three years and a day, and upon meeting certain criteria. Tenured employees may be dismissed for reasons such as inefficiency or unbecoming conduct, but that decision is made by the Commissioner of Education after state-level hearings, which take place only after the local board files "tenure charges" to remove the employee. (It is important to note that since September 1991, newly hired superintendents were no longer eligible for tenure, but work under a negotiated three-to-five-year contract. During the contract, superintendents have tenure protection.)

Campaign Materials

Candidates and committees subject to the New Jersey Campaign Contributions and Expenditures Reporting Act are required to include “Paid for by” language in all campaign materials. “Paid for by” language must include the name and address of the committee, individual or group, and clearly state that the entity financed the communication. Examples of “Paid for by” language may be found in ELEC’s Compliance Manual.

Serving on a School Board

As a member of the board of education, you will be expected to fulfill certain responsibilities, including—

1. Establishing goals for the public schools based on student educational needs, parent and community aspirations, state and federal standards and district financial resources.
2. Developing a philosophy of education that will become the basis for sound decisions that affect the governance of your community’s schools.
3. Developing policies to guide the administration in managing the schools; developing bylaws to direct the board in carrying out its governance responsibilities.
4. Developing a community understanding of educational issues and school policies through the maintenance of effective communications systems.
5. Providing adequate financing for the district’s present and future needs.
6. Ensuring quality education by providing adequate facilities and equipment.
7. Establishing conditions that enable the administration to recruit and effectively evaluate professional staff.
8. Engaging in board self-evaluation and inservice training programs for the purpose of providing well-informed leadership and sound decision-making.
9. Establishing a process for the board to negotiate in good faith with its employees, while representing community educational goals and financial interests.
10. Abide by the oath of office for school board members.

You Should Also:

1. Understand that your responsibility is not to administer the schools, but to work with the board to see that the schools are well run.
2. Understand that education today is extremely complex.
3. Listen to opposing views and be able to defend the board’s philosophy and goals.
4. Be willing to invest the many hours necessary to meet your responsibilities.
5. Serve out of a sincere desire to benefit the community rather than for personal glory or to carry out personal objectives.
6. Bear in mind that, as a state official, you have a responsibility to all the children in the state, not only to those in the local district.

The NJSBA

The New Jersey School Boards Association was established by the state Legislature in 1914 to promote and encourage the best possible public education for every child in New Jersey. Every public board of education is deemed to be a member of the NJSBA by statute.

Association policies are determined by NJSBA’s Delegate Assembly, which is made up of school board members selected by their local boards. The Delegate Assembly meets twice a year. Association policy is implemented by the executive director and staff under the guidance of the officers and board of directors. Association committees, composed of interested board members, study particular issues and recommend courses of action to the Delegate Assembly.

Services to boards of education and individual board members include—

- Comprehensive technical assistance and inservice training.
- Legislative information, action and liaison.
- Consultation, action and information on policy, legal matters, legislation, labor relations, public relations and other school district functions.
- A direct services program staffed by experts who offer on-site consultation, assistance and information.
- Policy assistance and information.
- Publications geared to the needs of school board members, including *School Leader*, NJSBA’s bi-monthly magazine, and *School Board Notes*, New Jersey’s up-to-the-minute weekly education news report.

For New Board Members

Orientation Conferences

New Jersey law requires that, during the first year of their first term in office, all board of education members complete training in the roles and responsibilities of school board membership. The NJSBA Board Member Academy offers a nationally acclaimed, intensive Orientation Conference that provides training on all areas of school board responsibility. (State law also requires board members to take additional NJSBA training in each of the subsequent two years of the first term in office, as well as within the first year after re-election or reappointment to an additional term.)

Information about these programs is provided through *School Board Notes*, online at www.njsba.org, and through direct mailings to members.

In addition to new and re-elected board member programs, the NJSBA Board Member Academy offers a full curriculum leading to basic and advanced certificates. Programs address topics such as labor relations, leadership skills, effective decision-making, policymaking, budgeting, community relations, school law and legislation.

For information on NJSBA services and training, visit the Association’s Web site at www.njsba.org.