



**We**  
need  
**leaders**  
who **care** about  
and **children**  
**communities**

**2011 Guide for School  
Board Candidates**



Iowa Association of  
School Boards

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# the rewards of service

Serving on a school board is a challenging job that requires leadership, vision and dedication. A school board member is entrusted with one of the most important responsibilities that can be assigned to a citizen: ensuring that Iowa schools help students reach high levels of educational achievement.

Serving on a school board is a crucial aspect of grassroots democracy. The school board is a uniquely American institution that represents a continuing commitment to local citizen decision-making in education.

Experienced board members all across Iowa say that the rewards of service lie in meeting the needs of children and their communities.



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# school boards in Iowa

School board members in Iowa are locally elected public officials. School districts are subdivisions of the state and most general laws regarding conduct of public officials and handling of public funds apply to members of the local board of education.

The board of directors of a school district operates as a corporate body. Individual school board members have no authority to act independently, and cannot commit or bind the board by their individual actions. Powers and duties of the board must be exercised by the board as a whole.

More than 2,000 men and women serve on local school boards in Iowa, guiding the education of over 480,000 young people at an annual expenditure of over \$4.4 billion.

Local school boards may have five or seven members. They may be elected at-large, from director districts or in several combinations of at-large and districts, depending on the system locally adopted. The school board secretary can inform prospective candidates about the structure of the local board and which voters may cast ballots for each seat.

School board members serve four-year terms. Elections are held in odd-numbered years with parts of the board being elected every other year.

School board members receive no pay. Their reward is the satisfaction that comes from rendering an indispensable public service.

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## Responsibility

The effective school board member today recognizes an important responsibility in governing public schools that can be innovative and ensure high achievement for all students. Board members operate within their policy-making role to set expectations, ensure supports and hold the school system accountable for ongoing improvements. They are fiscal stewards, ensuring that the taxpayer investment in education is used well. Board members operate within the framework of state and federal law. They have a responsibility to connect with and engage the community, legislators and others in their work.

## Authority

Iowa school boards have the legal authority to:

- Develop a shared educational vision for the community.
- Determine major educational goals and objectives, and implement a means of attaining the goals.
- Fix the time and place of regular and special meetings.
- Fill, by appointment, vacancies occurring between elections.
- Employ a superintendent, teachers, principals and other licensed professional personnel, and determine their salaries.
- Act on the superintendent's recommendation to discharge any employee, subject to the provisions of any applicable law.
- Adopt board policy which establishes the rules governing the operations of the school district.
- Use funds received through gifts and bequests for selected school purposes, unless limited by the terms of the grant.
- Employ legal counsel and bear the costs of litigation.
- Allow all just claims against the school corporation.

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- Insure against loss of property.
  - Appoint a secretary and a treasurer.
  - Determine attendance centers for the district and the particular school each child will attend.
  - Provide transportation services.
  - Acquire, hold, convey, lease, rent and manage property, real and personal.
  - Incur indebtedness when authorized by the voters of the school corporation at an election.

Although this list is not exhaustive, it illustrates the authority vested in school boards.

## Traits of effective board members

While there is no “ideal” school board member, IASB suggests that these basic characteristics are shared by effective board members.

**They focus their efforts on serving all children.** They make sure every decision or action of the board considers the best interests of all the students they serve. They understand that board members are entrusted by all parents and the community to hold high expectations for the success of all children. Their first focus is on ensuring success for all children, no matter what other issues arise.

**They understand the board's roles and responsibilities.** They are committed to ensuring that a long-term vision is established for the school system and to being accountable to their community. They strive to be knowledgeable about district policies and programs. They have a strong grasp of state and national trends, current issues and efforts in the district and can explain them to the public.

**They work well as members of a team.** They understand that the board, rather than individuals on the board, establishes the policies and makes the decisions which provide direction for the school district. They work with staff, families and other agencies and businesses to build schools which encourage the best from

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all students. They work to improve schools by building public understanding, support and participation.

**They act with professionalism and integrity.** They understand that the way board members act as individuals and as a body impacts the climate of the school district. They are respectful, listening carefully to colleagues, staff, students, parents and the public. They are honest and open, acting with fairness and consistency so that long-term changes can be accomplished. They respect their fellow board members' right to hold differing views. They are committed to the democratic process, accept the will of the majority and support the decisions of the board.

**They commit the time and energy required to be effective.** They are willing to commit their time to public service, including many hours at meetings, taking phone calls, listening to constituents, visiting schools and learning about societal and educational trends. They take part in workshops and seminars to continually expand their ability to serve effectively.

## Code of ethics

The Iowa Association of School Boards recommends a set of ethical guidelines for school board members in fulfilling their roles. These guidelines include listening, respecting the opinion of others, adhering to public openness and accountability, abiding by majority decisions of the board, and others. The complete guidelines are available on the IASB Web site at [www.ia-sb.org](http://www.ia-sb.org).

## Meetings

The official work of school boards is carried out at regular monthly meetings. Most Iowa school boards hold at least one regular meeting per month; a growing number hold two meetings per month. Meetings may be held as determined by the board, or called by the president, or by the

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secretary of the board upon the written request of a majority of the members of the board or according to board policy.

School boards are required, by statute, to meet at least once a year. In even numbered years, the board meets for its annual meeting sometime after Aug. 31. Boards generally hold the annual meeting in even-numbered years at the Sept. or Oct. regular board meeting. In odd-numbered years, boards must hold an annual meeting sometime after Aug. 31 and prior to the board's organizational meeting. The organizational meeting is held at the first regular meeting following the canvass of votes. Most boards hold the annual meeting during the meeting of the retiring board just prior to the organizational meeting. Check with your school district for a local meeting schedule.

## Becoming a candidate for school board election

Iowa school board members are elected by the citizens of each school district.

Regular school board elections are held in odd-numbered years in each Iowa school district on the second Tuesday in September.

### 2011 School Board Election Dates

July 11—First day to file nomination papers

Aug. 4—Last day to file nomination papers

Aug. 9—Last day to withdraw as a candidate

Sept. 13—Regular school board election

Any person who is a United States citizen, 18 years of age or older, a resident of the school district (and director district, if applicable) and is eligible to be registered to vote may become a candidate for the school board.

Nomination petitions for the office of school board member must be filed with the school board secretary not more than 64 nor less than 40 days prior to the regular election (see dates above). The process for filing nomination petitions is as follows:

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- Request the original nomination petition from the school board secretary.
  - Obtain the nomination signatures from eligible electors of the school district equal to at least one percent of the registered voters of the district or 50 eligible electors of the district, whichever is less, but at least 10 signatures. (If board members are elected by director district, rather than at-large, signers of the nomination petitions must reside in the same district as the candidate.) A person may sign nomination petitions for more than one candidate for the same office.
  - Attach a notarized affidavit acknowledging the candidate's eligibility.
  - File the petition with the school board secretary prior to 5 p.m. on the 40th day preceding the election.

Each candidate is assured a place on the ballot by successfully filing the completed nomination petition. A candidate's name may be withdrawn from the ballot after the completed petition is filed by submitting a written statement to that effect with the school board secretary more than 35 days before the election.

An individual may be elected as a write-in candidate. Space must be provided on the ballot for write-in candidates. The write-in candidate is not required to file a nomination petition.

## **School board candidates and the Campaign Finance Disclosure Law**

School board candidates must comply with the Iowa Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws (Chap. 68A). Candidates should be aware that failure to comply with these laws can result in fines and other penalties. The laws also apply to write-in candidates.

Important provisions of which school board candidates should be aware include:

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- Candidates who receive contributions, make expenditures or incur debts in excess of \$750 (including personal funds) must form a committee and file reports. This holds true for such actions done by a committee on behalf of a candidate. The committee must file its statement of organization within 10 days of the \$750 threshold being crossed. Reports disclosing campaign transactions are due by 4:30 p.m. five days before the election (if minimum threshold is crossed), and on the 19th day of January. For committees that do not dissolve, they must also file reports on the 19th day of January of each year in which the candidate's name does not appear on the ballot. Contributions from relatives within the third degree of consanguinity and affinity must include a description of the relationship to the candidate.
  - Candidates are required to deposit all contributions within seven days of receipt in an account maintained by the candidate's committee in a financial institution. (Exception: a separate account need not be established if the candidate receives no funds from others and finances the campaign out of his or her own pocket; in this instance reports must still be filed to show expenditures from personal funds as in-kind contributions from the candidate to the committee.)
  - Candidates may spend campaign funds only for campaign purposes, constituency expenses or expenses of office and may transfer funds only as provided in Section 68A.303, *Iowa Code*.
  - Candidate committees that hire a consultant for services such as public relations, advertising, fund-raising or polling must provide information that identifies the consultant and the consultant's activities.
  - Any printed political material must include the words "paid for by" and identification of the individuals, committee or organization

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which paid for the ad (includes newspapers, brochures, posters, billboards, mailings and Web sites, but not items too small to include such credit, such as buttons or pens). Candidates who have not registered a committee must include their full names and addresses as part of the identification, or file form DR-SFA to use the shorter "paid for by" statement.

- ❑ School resources cannot be used to promote either candidates or ballot issues, including the use of school mail boxes for distribution of campaign advocacy materials or school e-mail for promotional or solicitation messages.

Forms for making reports are available from the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board and can be downloaded from [www.iowa.gov/ethics](http://www.iowa.gov/ethics). Questions about the law may be addressed to the Board at (515) 281-4028.

## Definitions:

*Candidate*—any individual who has taken affirmative action to seek nomination or election to public office.

*Candidate's committee*—the committee designated by the candidate to receive contributions, expend funds or incur debts in excess of \$750 in any calendar year on behalf of the candidate.

*Committee*—any campaign committee.

*Consultant*—a person who provides or procures services for a candidate including consulting, public relations, advertising, fundraising, polling, managing or organizing services.

*Contribution*—(a) a gift, loan advance, deposit, rebate, refund or transfer of money or a gift in kind; (b) the payment, by a person other than a candidate or political committee, of compensation for the personal services of another person which are rendered to a candidate or

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political committee for any such purpose. **Note: Corporate contributions are prohibited, including both monetary and nonmonetary contributions.(?)**

Contributions don't include: services provided without compensation by individuals volunteering their time on behalf of a candidate's committee or political committee, except when organized or provided on a collective basis by a business, trade association, labor union or any other organized group or association.

Contributions also don't include refreshments served at a campaign function, as long as the refreshments don't exceed \$50 in value; transportation provided to a candidate, as long as its value (computed at the IRS reimbursement rate) does not exceed \$100 during any one reporting period; and items provided for a candidate's personal consumption or use.

*Disclosure report*—a statement of contributions received, expenditures made, debts incurred, etc. on forms prescribed by the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board.

## Oath of office

Each new board member must qualify to serve by taking the oath of office.

"I, (name), do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of Iowa and that I will faithfully and impartially to the best of my ability discharge the duties of the office of (director) in (district) as now or hereafter required by law."

## Conflict of interest and gifts

Board members, as elected officials, are duty-bound to serve the public interest. Yet, as private citizens, they are members of the business community. The most critical conflict of public versus private interest in decision making arises in financial transactions—the spending of public funds. School board members must comply with

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the conflict of interest laws in both *Iowa Code* sections 279.7A and 68B.2A.

Statutes remove certain potential conflicts of interest by excluding a board member from:

- Receiving direct compensation from the school district unless the board member receives less than \$2,500 per fiscal year or receives the compensation through a contract competitively bid in writing, publicly invited and opened.
- Appointing a relative within the third degree to a paying position, except a teaching position, unless it was first approved by the board.
- Being an agent for a textbook or school supply company involved in a transaction with a staff or board member of your own school district.
- Being a statewide elected official or a state legislator.

The law does not prohibit a spouse or other family member of a school district employee from running for the board.

Generally, Iowa law prohibits school board members and candidates from accepting gifts and honoraria from people who may be financially affected by actions of the school board. This is subject to interpretation and change. Candidates are advised to inquire about the current status of restrictions or reporting requirements at the time of the election by contacting the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board. (See 68B.22, *Iowa Code*.)

## Vacancies

School board members may be elected or appointed at other times of the year when a vacancy on the school board exists. A vacancy occurs when a board member moves from the school district (or director district), fails to qualify, dies or resigns. The vacant position must be filled by board appointment within 30 days of the vacancy. A person appointed to fill a

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vacancy holds office until a successor is elected and qualifies at the next school election of any type. If the board fails to appoint a person to fill a vacancy within 30 days, a special election is held. The person elected to fill the vacancy serves the remainder of the unexpired term.

## Tips for campaigning

In addition to the financial reporting requirements described on p. 8-10, IASB recommends these tips for all candidates for school board as they campaign for election:

- Attend school board meetings. Watching the current board in action will help you begin to understand the practicalities of school board operations and learn more about issues in your district. Board agendas and virtually all materials before the board are public documents; reviewing them can build your understanding.
- Ask questions. The district superintendent, board secretary, business manager and current board members can help you understand district issues.
- Be proactive in helping the community understand your views. Help citizens understand what you stand for by speaking at candidate forums, talking with reporters, stating your views in campaign materials, and using other forums.
- Carefully consider your campaign promises. As an individual, a board member has no authority. It's only when a majority of the board takes action through a vote that the board's authority is exercised.
- When campaigning for the board, state your position on issues but avoid making promises that you alone cannot keep.
- Encourage voter participation. Strong voter turnout is more than a grassroots campaign strategy. Voter participation in school board elections helps to engage citizens and create a stronger bond between the public and the

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public schools.

## Notes



IASB thanks the Iowa Secretary of State's Office and the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board for their cooperation in making this information available. More resources are available through the Secretary of State's Office at [www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/electioninfo/SchoolElections.html](http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/electioninfo/SchoolElections.html) or the IECDB at [www.iowa.gov/ethics/](http://www.iowa.gov/ethics/).

Other brochures of interest to school board candidates are available from the IECDB. Subjects covered include:

*Political Advertising Disclaimers*  
*Permitted & Prohibited Corporate Activity*  
*Independent Expenditures / In-Kind Contributions*  
*Duties of a Committee Treasurer*  
*Civil Penalties*  
*Out-of-State Contributions*  
*Prohibitions in Use of Public Funds for Political Purposes*  
*Guidelines for Campaign Fundraising*

Contact the board at: 510 E. 12th, Ste. 1A, Des Moines, IA 50319; phone (515) 281-4028 or (515) 281-4104; fax (515) 281-4073.



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