

# Serving on your local school board

## Information for candidates



There are 295 school districts in Washington, each with a locally elected board of directors. While school boards have many responsibilities, their fundamental role is always the same—to govern their districts.

This governance role is all about the “big picture”—setting the direction of the district, allocating resources, monitoring performance and holding the district accountable for progress. For effective school boards, these activities are driven by the core mission of promoting learning and success for all students.

Serving on a local school board has been called “the toughest volunteer job in America.” While it can be challenging at times, most school directors will tell you there are great rewards in helping students and giving back to your community.

The contributions of each school director are critical to the board’s overall effectiveness.

Thank you for considering school board service. For more information, visit [www.wssda.org/serving](http://www.wssda.org/serving).

As elected officials, school boards provide a vital link between their communities and their schools. School boards both represent and engage their communities in education and serve as advocates for their students and schools.

There is a definite line between governing the district and administering its daily activities. While boards are ultimately responsible, they employ a superintendent to manage the day-to-day operations of the district. Effective hiring and evaluation of the superintendent is one of the most important functions of a school board.

Other key responsibilities include strategic planning, policy adoption and budget approval. The school board also makes decisions on matters such as bond and levy elections, facilities, curriculum adoption, employee contracts and transportation.

As you contemplate school board service, please be sure to review the Washington School Board Standards (available at [wssda.org/serving](http://wssda.org/serving)). These standards describe board roles and responsibilities and the skills, knowledge and behaviors that contribute to effective governance.

### Effective school boards

- Focus on student achievement
- Allocate resources to needs
- Use data to plan and evaluate
- Engage the communities they serve

### Being an effective school director

While there is no “ideal” style of leadership, there are certain characteristics that contribute to successful school board service. Effective school directors:

- Have a sincere interest in public education and a commitment to improving student learning
- Understand the important contribution of public education to a democratic society
- Are advocates for the education of all children in the state
- Honor and respect diverse cultures, abilities, learning styles and human needs
- Are forward thinking and bring creative solutions and approaches to education
- Understand that education is a complex endeavor
- Are respected and involved in their communities
- Listen and consider opposing views before making decisions
- Respect fellow board members and decisions of the board
- Understand and abide within their authority and responsibility
- Are willing to invest the many hours involved in board service
- Serve unselfishly to benefit the whole community
- Engage in ongoing learning that strengthens their governance and leadership skills



## About WSSDA

Founded in 1922, the Washington State School Directors' Association is comprised of all 1,477 school board members from Washington's 295 school districts. The districts they oversee serve more than one million students, have a combined annual budget of \$6 billion, and employ nearly 100,000 people.

WSSDA's mission is "to provide leadership, advocacy and services to support public school directors' efforts to improve student learning."

### WSSDA

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## Key information about school board elections in Washington

### Election and Term of Office

All school directors in Washington are publicly elected (except when a person is appointed to fill a vacancy).

In some districts, all or some directors are elected at large and may live anywhere in the district. In other districts, board members must live within certain areas called director districts. In either case, candidates are voted on by all voters in the school district (except in primary elections in Seattle). Ask the superintendent or the county elections office for the election plan in your district.

School board elections are held in odd-numbered years and are "staggered," meaning only part of the board is up for election at any one time.

The filing period for school board elections is the first Monday in June through the following Friday. Candidates file with the county auditor's elections office, and there is no filing fee. If a district is located in more than one county, candidates file in the county where the majority of the district's residents live.

The primary is held the third Tuesday in August and the general election is on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. If no more than two people file for a position, there is no primary election for that position. Newly elected directors take office at the first official board meeting following the certification of election results by the county.

All Washington school boards have five members except Seattle, which has seven. School directors in Spokane, Tacoma and Everett serve six-year terms; all others serve four-year terms.

### Legal qualifications

To be legally eligible for the office of school director, a person must be:

- A registered voter in the school district. To register to vote, you must be a citizen of the United States, a legal resident of Washington, and at least 18 years old by election day.
- A registered voter in the director district within the school district, if applicable.

### Conflict of interest

Neither a school director nor his/her spouse or interdependent family members may be employed by the school district except in the following cases:

- In districts with fewer than 200 students, a director's spouse may be employed as certificated or classified staff;
- If a director's spouse was employed by the district before the director's election or appointment to the board, he or she may continue employment with the district
- A director's spouse may be employed as a substitute teacher if there is a shortage of substitutes;
- In districts under 2,000 students, a director, his/her spouse or interdependent family members may be employed as a bus driver at the same rate of pay as other such employees; or
- In districts under 2,000 students, a director, his/her spouse or his/her dependents may work as unskilled, day laborers for not more than \$100 per month.

A school director may not have any direct or indirect financial interest in any contract, purchase of materials or activity paid from school funds that exceeds \$1500 per month.

### Financial Reporting

Most school directors and school board candidates are required to file financial disclosure statements with the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC). These reports begin with candidacy and continue throughout the term of office. Candidates must also file campaign financial reports. For detailed information regarding requirements, deadlines and forms for reports, contact your county auditor's elections office or visit the PDC website at [www.pdc.wa.gov](http://www.pdc.wa.gov).

### Campaigning

It is important to remember that state law prohibits the use of facilities of any public agency to directly or indirectly assist any campaign for or against a candidate or ballot proposition. Thus, school board candidates must make a complete separation between campaign activities and the school district.

Local ordinances may also contain specific requirements, such as the placement of campaign signs, so be sure to check with the city or county regarding the rules in your area.

