



Washington State
School Directors' Association



Serving on a local school board has often 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. This guide provides an overview the requirements and responsibilities of school board service to help you understand the important role each board member plays in school governance.

Thank you for considering school board service. For more information, visit www.wssda.org/serving.

Serving on Your Local School Board

A Guide for Candidates

What does a school director do?

In Washington, members of the local school board are called school directors. They are the “governors” of the school district who work together with their administrative team to set the district’s direction. The school board’s governance responsibilities fall in four major areas:

- **Vision** – The board focuses the work of the district and community on student achievement through a comprehensive strategic planning process.
- **Structure** – The board governs the district through prudent financial planning and oversight, and diligent and innovative policy making.
- **Accountability** – The board infuses district programs and policies with specific goals and a process for measuring results and recommending improvements.
- **Advocacy** – The board champions public education at the community, state and federal levels.

There is a definite line between governing the district and administering its daily activities. While boards are ultimately responsible, they employ a professional staff of administrators (led by a superintendent) to manage the day-to-day functions of the district.

In governing their districts, school boards work with their administrators to make decisions and set policy regarding many matters, including bond and levy elections, budget adoption, facilities, curriculum adoption, fiscal planning and oversight, employee relations, and transportation.

Cooperation is the key to successful school board governance. Directors work with each other and with the superintendent, who carries out the board’s vision and direction. Decision-making authority is vested in the school board as a whole—individual proposals are adopted only when a majority of the board approves them.

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 our 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 associates and group decisions of the board
- Understand and abide by their authority and responsibility
- Are willing to invest the many hours involved in board service
- Serve unselfishly to benefit the whole community
- Engage in professional development to strengthen their governance and leadership skills

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; and
- A registered voter in the director district within the school district, if applicable.

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.

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 Web site at 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.

About Us

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 lead serve more than one million students, have a combined annual budget of \$6 billion, and employ nearly 100,000 people.

WSSDA’s core mission is “to provide leadership, advocacy and services to support public school directors’ efforts to improve student learning.”

WSSDA

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