



A Guide for  
Candidates

# So you want to be a **School Board Member?**

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## What are the qualifications of a good school board member?

The legal requirements to become a school board member are found in Idaho Code 33-501. The requirements include being an elector of the district (age 18 and able to vote) and a resident of the trustee zone from which nominated, elected or appointed. Although the legal requirements for board membership are few, the qualifications needed for effective service on a board are many.

- The board member should have a broad background of experience and knowledge — or be ready, willing, and able to learn quickly. The complexity of every area of school operation — whether finance, student-employee-community relationships, or curriculum — demand intelligence, awareness, and sensitivity.
- The board member should be able to look beyond yesterday's solutions and yesterday's education, and be willing to provide today's education for today's children.
- The board member should be visionary — able to understand the forces of change and to foresee, at least to some extent, the shape of the future in order to plan wisely.
- The board member should be tolerant and avoid prejudice. The diversity in the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic composition of the student populations in many of our schools; as well as the changing mores of our society, make it imperative that the board member be understanding of all children and patrons.
- The board member should understand that education today is extremely complex, and that simplistic approaches will not meet today's challenges.
- The board member should be able to defend the board's philosophy and goals and withstand criticisms from people with opposing views.
- The board member should be willing to invest the many hours necessary to discharge their responsibilities.
- The board member should serve out of sincere desire to serve the community and its children, rather than for personal glory or to carry out personal objectives or a hidden agenda.
- The board member should bear in mind that their responsibility is to all the children in the State, not solely to those in their own district.

# What does a board member do?

One of the most important jobs a school board member has is to join in setting goals and establishing policy for the school system. All board decisions should logically follow these objectives.

A look at an agenda for a board meeting confirms the fact that the board member is expected to make decisions on a wide range of problems. Some decisions are strictly routine (such as approving the minutes of the last meeting). Others are somewhat more complex (for instance, prepare for the implementation of Common Core State Standards). Some decisions are the result of numerous sub-decisions (should the board adopt the proposed budget for the coming school year?).

A board member should be a skilled decision-maker but must also remember that decisions are made only by the board acting as a whole. Individual opinions on board matters can and should be defended vigorously but once the board as a team has made a decision it should be accepted gracefully and implemented whole-heartedly.

Another essential duty is the selection and evaluation of the superintendent. The right superintendent can mean a school system where children learn, where administration and

teaching staff work together harmoniously, where parents are satisfied and supportive and where student achievement soars. The wrong superintendent can spell disaster.

Effective board members establish good working relationships with the superintendent. Although it has been frequently said that the board makes policy and the superintendent carries out policy, it is difficult to draw an exact line between policy and administration. Often a superintendent will recommend policy which the board, after consideration, may accept or reject. Once a policy is adopted, the superintendent is responsible for its administration.

The board should refrain from becoming involved with the day-to-day operation of the schools. However, it should oversee the administration and operation of the schools and require periodic reports for purposes of evaluation.

A board member must help build public support and understanding of public education and to lead the public in demanding better education. This means communication, serving as a link between the school system and the public, interpreting the schools to the public and the public to the schools, and helping to establish a climate for change when necessary.

## The Board Member and the State Association

The Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA) was established in 1942 to serve the state's local district boards of education. More than 100 school boards are members and pay dues to support the Association.

The ISBA mission statement states, "The Idaho School Boards Association provides leadership and services to local boards for the benefit of students and the advocacy of public education." Within this mission the ISBA strives to 1) keep its members informed and up-to-date on educational practices in school districts throughout the state and nation; 2) fulfill its self-imposed mandate "to encourage and aid all movements for the improvements of the educational affairs in this state; and 3) help develop public support of education.

The ISBA works tirelessly to support education and enact legislation that favors the interests of public schools. Its communications program is designed not only to build support for public education on the state and national levels, but also to help local school districts create support in their communities.

The programs of the ISBA include training, and continuing education services; consultation with school districts; negotiation services; legislative services; legal services; research services; policy services; public relations; publications, and information services; inter-group cooperation; studies and reports on particular school problems; and representation at legislative hearings, conferences, and local, state, and national meetings.

The ISBA exerts influence on education nationally through its affiliation with the National School Boards Association, a confederation of state school board associations.

The ISBA maintains headquarters in Boise where liaises with the State Department of Education and other state agencies. The Association's official publication, the SLATE, is sent to all school board members and distributed widely throughout the State.

Participation in ISBA is the most effective way a new board member can learn best practices and the full governance role of a School Board Trustee. *continued on next page...*

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ISBA also holds an annual three-day convention at which experts analyze, discuss, and debate problems and issues in education. The convention, which attracts over 500 attendees, also features exhibits of commercially supplied goods and services.

The ISBA sponsors workshops on various issues in education when it sees a need to explore them with board members.

The ISBA invites all board members to avail themselves of Association programs and services.

## Questions & Answers for School Board Candidates

**Q:** What are the legal qualifications for being a school board member?

**A:** A member of any board of education must be a citizen and resident of the zone they are to represent; except in a charter district.

**Q:** Do school board members get paid for their services?

**A:** A board member does not receive compensation for services nor may they be interested directly in any contract with or claim against the board.

**Q:** How many people serve on a board? What is their term of office?

**A:** In most districts the board consists of five members. A law passed in 1973, makes it possible for any district that changes its boundaries to increase its membership up to nine, at local option. Charter districts have either six or seven members while elementary districts (those without a high school) have three members. The term of office is four years on a staggered basis. Charter districts' terms may differ.

**Q:** Who votes for a school board member?

**A:** Any person of voting age residing in the same trustee zone as the person running for the board may vote in that school board election. There are three independent charter districts that use different methods. Boise and Lewiston both nominate and elect through a district-wide basis. Emmett nominates and elects by zone.

**Q:** Are board members protected from civil suits?

**A:** Generally a district carries insurance which entitles a board member to be indemnified against the cost of defending any civil or criminal action arising out of the performance of his or her duties. Such protection extends to criminal actions only if the final disposition favors the member.

**Q:** What happens when a school board member moves to another community?

**A:** Whenever a board member ceases to be a bona fide resident of the zone they represent, their membership on the board shall cease. The board then appoints someone to serve until the next election.

**Q:** When are school board elections held?

**A:** A law passed by the 1973 Legislature, mandates a uniform election date, the third Tuesday of May. In 2010 Legislation specifying that school board elections must be held only in the odd numbered years. Again, charter districts may differ. (IC Sec 34-102) (IC Sec 34-1101)

**Q:** Is attendance at board meetings mandatory?

**A:** The board member has been elected to bring their voice to the governance of the school district. It is important for all the trustees to take an active role in the board meetings. As such, while there is no mandatory requirement, any board member who fails to attend four consecutive public meetings without good cause may be removed by the board.

**Q: Who serves as chair of the board?**

**A:** The board is required to reorganize every year at the annual meeting, which is the regular meeting in July. At that time the board selects a chair, vice chair, clerk, and treasurer. Some boards keep the same chair for several years, others change periodically, and some rotate it so that everyone has an opportunity to serve; all are acceptable methods.

**Q: May an employee of a school district serve as a board member?**

**A:** Only under certain circumstances. The 2014 Legislative Session resulted in some exceptions to the strict prohibition of school board member spouses being employed in the district. For school districts with a fall student enrollment of twelve hundred (1,200) or less in the prior school year, the spouse of a school board member may be employed in a non-administrative position under certain conditions; the position must have been listed as open for application on the school district's website or a local newspaper for at least sixty (60) days. However, if the opening occurs during the school year the position must only have been listed as open for fifteen (15) days. At that time, if no applications were received by the district that met the minimum certification, endorsement, education, or experience requirements of the position other than that of the spouse of the board member, the district can consider hiring the spouse. To actually hire the spouse, the board member must abstain from voting on the employment the spouse and be absent from the meeting while such employment is being considered. The board member also has to abstain from voting on any decisions affecting compensation, benefits, individual performance evaluation, or disciplinary action related to the spouse and be absent when

such decisions are made. The board member is also prohibited from participating in negotiations. Additionally, a certificated spouse must be employed on a Category 1 contract only. The school district may employ the spouse for further school years provided these same conditions are met for each school year in which the spouse is employed.

## Idaho School Boards Association

P.O. Box 9797  
Boise, ID 83707-9797

222 N. 13th St.  
Boise, ID 83702

Toll-Free: (866) 799-4722  
Phone: (208) 854-1476  
Fax: (208) 854-1480  
Web: [www.idsba.org](http://www.idsba.org)

