# Guide for Candidates

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e WASB Guide for Candidates is designed to provide general information and commentary as a service to WASB members based on state law and agency guidanc existed at the time of publication. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If legal a is needed, the services of the school district's designated legal counsel should be obta

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WASB.org

# Contents

## School Board Member
# Election Dates

Clerks Publish the “Type A” Notice of Election (this notice identi es the school board seats that will be contested in the district at the Spring Election and includes other information about the election and candidacy proc~~e~~ss)
e fourth Tuesday in November (November 28, 2023)

Deadline for Candidates to File to Appear on the Spring Election B~~all~~ot
e standard deadline for declaring candidacy is 5:00 p.m. on the rst Tuesday in January (January 2, 2024).

In order to be eligible to appear on the o cial ballot at the Spring Election, a candidate needs to le a declaration of candidacy and a campaign nance registration statement with the ling o ce identi ed in the district’s Notice of Election by no later than the applicable deadline. In some school districts, candidates must also le nomination papers with a su cient number of signatures in order to qualify for the ballot. Nomination papers may not be circulated or led prior to Dec. 1, 2023.

e appropriate forms can be obtained from the websites of the Wisconsin Elections Commission and the Wisconsin Ethics Commission, or from the school district’s main administrative o ce.

Spring Primary (if a primary election is neede~~d~~)
ird Tuesday in February (February 20, 2024)

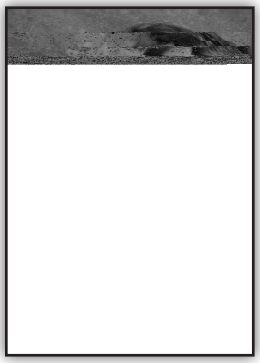
Spring Election—
First Tuesday in April (April 2, 2024)

WASB New School Board Member Gatherin~~g~~s
Held regionally around the state, usually in mid to late April. Please refer to the schedule on the WASB website (wasb.org) once it is available.

Persons Elected (or Re-Elected) to the School Board at the Spring Election Must Take and File the O cial Oath of O ce —
On or before the fourth Monday in April (no later than April 22, 2024)

Persons Elected (or Re-Elected) to the School Board Take ~~O~~ce
Fourth Monday in April (April 22, 2024)

NOTICE: is pamphlet provides general information and is not intended as legal advice. e dates shown on this page re ect the standard dates established in state of the date of publication, but certain exceptions can sometimes apply. Please mo WASB website and other WASB communications for any changes, updates, or co to the information presented herein.



# A Message from the WASB President

Congratulations! You have made the important decision to run for your local board of education. Whatever the outcome of your election, your community is grateful that you made the decision to step up and get involved to make your local school district even better.

Wisconsin has 421 public school districts, each one governed by locally elected school board members.  eir job is to make the policy decisions that will provide all of their students with the best education possible and to hire, supervise, and evaluate the superintendent.  ere are numerous state and federal laws that must be observed, and many of them need community decision makers to  ne-tune the requirements to ful ll the spirit of the law, as well as the letter, for each district. Working with superintendents, administrators, and teachers, school board membe go about building e ective educational systems to bene t their students and their communities.

As a community member, you have always had the opportunity to voice your thoughts, concerns, goals and desires to enhance your school district. As an elected board member, you have the added responsibility to be involved in the full decision-making process. Working with the other members of your board, you will have the responsibility of approving policy for administration and sta  to follow, evaluating the superintendent, setting annual budgets, and advocating for your students and your district.

As a member of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, your district has the opportunity to utilize the many tools developed by the WASB to follow good governance guidelines including webinars, podcasts, workshops, conferences, an the annual State Education Convention held every January.

Best wishes to you in your election journey, and thank you for stepping up to make your local district a great one.

Rosanne Hahn, WASB President
Burlington Area

# Qualities of a School Board Member

ere are many quali cations and qualities that experienced school board members have indicated are important to school board membership. ese include:

- A commitment to the belief that all children of the school district are entitled to have available to them a bene cial educational program.
- An open mind and readiness to learn.
- A willingness to attend seminars and workshops which can help them make intelligent decisions in school a airs.

  [ e rst WASB events for newly elected school board members are the New School Board Member Gatherings held in mid to late April in 15 regions throughout the state to brie y review school board member responsibilities and introduce the new members to the services and information provided by the WASB.]

- A vision and an ability to understand changes in our society.
- e ability to act with other school board members to advance the best interests of the school district.
- e capability to articulate the philosophy and goals of the school and to listen carefully to the criticisms o ered by people with di ering views.
- A willingness to invest the hours that will be necessary to faithfully discharge the duties.
- Freedom from con icts of interest.

# What Does the School Board Do?

School boards lead and govern the schools and educational programs of our local public school districts. at leadership role is performed as part of a team that includes the district administrator (also sometimes called the superintendent). e leadership team, in turn, operates within a unique framework of authority, duties, and powers that is established by a variety of state and federal laws and that is supplemented by local policy decisions.

ere are several di erent types of public school districts in Wisconsin, including K-12 common school districts, K-8 common school districts, union high school districts, uni ed school districts, and the Milwaukee Public Schools. While the di erent types of school districts and their boards share many general characteristi there are also some di erences in the speci c powers and responsibilities that are assigned to them. All school districts and school boards are alike, however, in that student learning and student achievement constitute the centerpiece of their mission.

## Major Responsibilities:

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: e school board adopts academic standards for pupils and establishes expectations for education in the district. e school board monitors student achievement and exercises general supervision over the schools

POLICYMAKING: Policymaking covers the broad range of goals, expectations, rules and regulations that school boards enact, alter or repeal. Board policies are t basis of school district operations. It is through policy-making that the board takes action, directing the district administrator and sta regarding district priorities. To have a well-organized school system, the board needs a sound philosophy of education as a basis for policymaking.

BOARD-ADMINISTRATOR RELATIONS: Research has shown that the board-administrator relationship is central to the success of the district. E ective board members are aware of the di erences between their role and that of school administrators. In essence, the school board determines what needs to happen and

EVALUATION: Evaluation is a continuous function that applies to policies, people and programs. Regular evaluation of all facets of school operations uncovers areas of success and opportunities in the school system and establishes a basis for futur action.

BUDGET RESPONSIBILITY:Nothing conveys what is important to a school board more than the budget it adopts.  e board uses public input to align resources with the school system's vision and goals. After that, the board supervises the execution of the budget, reviews school district accounts and business procedures and provides for an annual audit of the accounts as required by law.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC:  ere are times when school board members need to take the story of the district's success to the public, building support of public education. At other times, listening becomes the key communication strategy, understanding the values and concerns of the community so that appropriate priorities can be established. E ective board members utilize both types of communication strategies to build support and establish relationships with their stakeholders.

ADVOCACY: e board serves as the key advocate in the community for students and their schools—encouraging progress, energizing systemic change and dealing with children as whole persons in a diversi ed society. In addition, e ective school board members engage with state and federal policy makers to ensure that those

# Questions and Answers

Q. What are the legal quali cations for being a school board member?
A board member must be an eligible elector of the school district. According to the Wisconsin Elections Commission, in order to qualify for placement on the ballot as a candidate in a school board election, a person must:

(a) Be a citizen of the United States;
(b) Be 18 years of age or older;
(c) Have no disqualifying prior criminal convictions; and
(d) Be a resident of the school district for at least 28 consecutive days at the time of ling a declaration of candidacy.

In some school districts, school board members are elected to numbered seats, to designated and apportioned election districts, or according to a plan of apportionment of board seats among the cities, towns and villages in the district. Where a plan of apportionment is in place, the person elected to an apportioned se must reside in the designated geographic area at the time he or she takes the oath o ce. In all school board elections other than in Milwaukee and Racine, each board member is ultimately elected by the votes of the electors of the entire school distric

ere are at least three di erent potential con ict of interest situations that a candidate should consider before ling his or her declaration of candidacy:

Private interest in public contracts. School board members are prohibited by a felony criminal statute from having private, pecuniary interests, either direct or indirect, in school district contracts that involve aggregate receipts or disbursements by the school district of more than $15,000 in any year. Some limited exceptions

It should be noted that the Wisconsin Ethics Commission and its predecessors (the former Government Accountability Board and former State Ethics Board) have consistently interpreted the phrase “anything of substantial value” to mean anything of more than nominal, token, or inconsequential value in light of the totality of the circumstances. Although the Ethics Commission has not identi ed a speci c gure, previous opinions suggest that anything worth more than several dollars may be suspect. Further, the Code of Ethics does not de ne “substantial nancial interest” and fails to contain a safe harbor like the $15,000 annual threshold found in s. 946.13. us, unlike s. 946.13, it is likely that nancial interests in matters involving far less than $15,000 will trigger the application of the Code. Finally, whereas s. 946.13 restricts an individual’s conduct in both the person’s private and public capacities, the Code of Ethics is primarily concerned with actions that a local public o cial takes in his or her public (i.e., o cial) capacity.

Incompatibility of O cee common law doctrine of incompatibility of o ce is generally understood to prohibit a school board member from being simultaneously employed by the same school district where he or she is on the school board, and may restrict school board members from serving the district in other capacities as well (e.g., in certain volunteer roles).

Before seeking a school board seat, a potential school board candidate who already holds some other public o ce should also determine if there may be a legal incompatibility between the currently held o ce and the o ce of school board member.

Q. What are the election procedures for the o ce of school board member?
In Wisconsin school districts, school board members are elected in April in connection with the spring election of various municipal and judicial o cers. A regular term of o ce for a school board member is 3 years.

In common, union high and uni ed school districts, candidates who wish to appear on the election ballot must le a campaign nance registration statement, a declaration of candidacy, and, if required, nomination papers, with the school district clerk on or before 5 p.m. on the rst Tuesday in January (or on the next day if Tuesday is a holiday). is deadline may be extended by 72 hours where an incumbent, without giving prior written noti cation of noncandidacy, fails to le as a candidate for re-election.

If required, nomination papers may not be circulated for signatures or led before December 1. Sta in the o ce of the district administrator (superintendent) should be able to identify whether candidates in the district are required to solicit and le nomination signatures, as well as how many signatures are required.

Notwithstanding the final January deadline for filing the forms that qualify a candidate to appear on the ballot, a candidate must also separately comply with the campaign finance registration requirement by no later than the time that he or she becomes a "candidate" as that term is defined by the campaign finance laws in Chapter 11 of the Wisconsin statutes. A person can become a "candidate" under Chapter 11 prior to the January ballot-access deadline.

The candidate(s) who are elected to the school board at the spring election must take and file the official, written oath of office on or before the 4th Monday in April. The oath of office does not have to be administered at or in connection with a school board meeting. Failure to take and file the oath by the deadline gives rise to a vacancy. The term of office begins on the 4th Monday in April.

Q. What are some of the basic campaign finance requirements for candidates?
As mentioned above, the campaign finance laws found in Chapter 11 of the Wisconsin statutes include the requirement that every person who meets the definition of a "candidate" must file a campaign finance registration statement with the school district clerk. Each candidate registers as a "candidate committee." Requirements for designating a candidate committee treasurer and a depository (checking account) for campaign funds are also set out in Chapter 11.

While every school board candidate (defined to also include every actively serving school board member) must be registered, a candidate may claim an exemption from filing periodic financial reports. If a candidate declares on his or her current registration statement that he or she does not anticipate accepting contributions, making disbursements, or incurring obligations in an aggregate (i.e., combined total) amount exceeding $2,500 in a calendar year, and if he or she does not actually exceed that dollar threshold, then the candidate's committee is exempt from filing periodic financial reports. The reporting exemption does not encompass what is known as a termination report. See s. 11.0104 or visit the Ethics Commission website for more information (https://ethics.wi.gov).

Q. Do school board members get paid for their service?
In common and union high school districts, the annual meeting of district electors may vote annual salaries for board members or an amount for each school board meeting that the board member actually attends.