

AVOIDING THE WRONG SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Critical Questions to Ask Candidates



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CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK CANDIDATES

School boards are the largest group of elected officials in the country, yet often receive the lowest voter turnout (often in the 10-15% range), especially in off-year election cycles. Could this be because voters do not have the information needed to cast an informed vote?

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR SCHOOL BOARD

Does your school board have the well-being of your whole community in mind when they make decisions?

They should — because the quality of education in your community has far-reaching impacts beyond the public-school classroom. Strong schools increase property values, attract businesses, and encourage a thriving economy.

Schools significantly shape the future of our nation by shaping the attitudes, abilities and outlook of our children today. And the School Board member plays a critical role. Consider how locally elected school boards have discretion over spending decisions in education, determine how resources are used (and not used), and these days, shape the direction of culture war issues within our schools, such as battles over CRT, gender policies, content in school libraries and more.

AVOIDING THE WRONG SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

My Faith Votes encourages you to spend some time getting to know each school board candidate. We recognize, however, that many school board candidates don't have a referenceable voting record or campaign website that reveals where they stand on the issues you care about.

This guide is your answer. It contains critical questions for you to ask the candidates in your local district, questions that will cut through the noise and help you cast the best vote. These questions will help you discern if a candidate has the skill, values, and understanding needed to navigate the complexity of running your local school district. You can meet with a candidate in person, attend their town halls or debates, or simply send them an email or speak with them via phone.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK CANDIDATES

PERSONAL INFORMATION AND VALUES

School Boards are responsible for the success of the district schools. Candidates with personal ties and longtime residency in the district are often more familiar with the values, priorities, and interests of the community, and have a greater stake in positive outcomes.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

- How long have you lived in the district?
- Do you personally have children who attend or have attended schools within the district?
- What previous experience do you have in the district (employment, volunteer, or other)?
- How often have you attended school board meetings?
- What particular issue motivates you to want to serve on the school board?
- What do you feel are essential attributes for a school board member?
- What core life values guide your decision making?

UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Education policies and funding structures directly impact the quality of the local learning environment. School board members will need a keen awareness of state and local education policies and districtwide funding streams to do their job well.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

- How do you feel about the average per-pupil spending in the district?
- What ideas do you have for additional funding sources to increase district revenues?
- Which if any grants do you feel have brought unintended consequences upon the district?
- What level of involvement should the district have in state and national education policy development and debate?
- What measures should be taken to ensure school safety?
- Should standardized tests be purely academic or also include social and mental health surveys?
- What measures should be used to include parents when mental health concerns arise at school?
- Should parents be informed of their students' identity or gender decisions while at school?
- How should personal privacy matters in bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers be handled for students?
- What options do you support for school vouchers that allow parents to use public funds to send their child to a school of their choice?

DISTRICT INFORMATION

School boards often set long-term goals and priorities. A school board member's awareness of district-specific information is vital to making informed decisions, setting district goals, and addressing the unique needs and challenges within the district.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

- What do you see as the district's strengths and weaknesses?
- Which district services should be improved or reduced?
- What school disciplinary measures are working or not working in the district?
- What accountability measures are lacking that would benefit the district?
- Are there any recent school board actions or decisions you would have handled differently?
- How will you personally work to engage parents as part of the solution for district concerns?
- What do you think are the most important qualities to look for when evaluating your district's superintendent?
- What measures will you use to ensure that political agendas of special interest groups are not driving student learning and outcomes?
- Do you have any concerns regarding the Teachers Union's goals and involvement in the district?

CURRICULUM AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

School board members play a crucial role in overseeing and making decisions about curriculum in the district. They should understand curriculum goals, state and national standards, assessments and evaluations, and textbooks and instructional materials used in the classrooms.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

- What metrics or questions will you use to ensure a thorough examination and evaluation of curriculum considered for adoption by the district?
- How would you improve curriculum transparency with parents?
- What measures will you promote to ensure merit, fairness, and equality policies do not exclude or negatively affect "white" and "cis gender" students?
- What are your views on how social studies and language arts are taught in our schools?
- Do you support comprehensive sexuality education, including LGBTQ health and relationship information in public schools K to 12? Why or why not?
- What will you do to ensure there is a robust opt-out option available to parents for curriculum decisions that go beyond sex-ed?
- What role should social and emotional learning play in the day-to-day classroom experience?
- With increasing news of parent distrust in the public education system, what measures will you take to ensure public/parent accessibility to you and other district officials?

Being a candidate for school board is more than just throwing your hat in the ring. Candidates who have the best interests of students and the community in mind will do their homework and have an awareness, vision, and plan for enhancing education in your local school district.

Locating candidate names and contact information of candidates is not uniform across each district.

Check out My Voter Hub, an online election resource from My Faith Votes, and explore information about your next school board race:

www.myfaithvotes.org/myvoterhub.

Are you confused about what a school board does? Explore My Faith Votes' comprehensive resource titled "[Superintendents and School Boards: Understanding Their Roles and Responsibilities](#)."