

Do you want to run for the school board?

Board candidate information sheet

You think you'd like to serve on a school board. Perhaps you've already filed with your local election commission. Maybe you are trying to decide if this kind of public service is right for you.

These frequently asked questions and their answers give you only part of the picture. New board members also suggest visiting board meetings, getting information from the school district and talking with the superintendent and current board members.

Who can run for a school board?

Local laws in most districts govern a board's election procedures.

If you're a registered voter, you can run if you live in the district you want to represent.

A few restrictions apply.

- If elected, you cannot serve on the board and receive pay as a teacher in the same school district. Similar restrictions may apply to other employees.
- You must live in a specific geographic area if your district's board seats are classified as single-member or if geographic provisions apply.
- You must not violate the South Carolina Constitution's restrictions on dual office holding.

When do I run?

Even though board candidates run in November elections in most of the state's 85 school districts,

exact filing dates vary. Some districts hold school board elections in other months. In a few counties, school board candidates file by petition with a specified number of signatures required.

Your county election commission can provide information on filing dates and other specifics for your school district. District office staff has information on current board members' terms.

What does a board member do?

Individually, you as a board member have no authority. You have legal power only when you sit with the board in a public meeting.

The board has four principal roles:

- to set the vision by looking ahead and planning for the district's future
- to assure a basic structure so that the district operates according to sound policies and budgeting procedures
- to ensure accountability for student and staff performance and for district resources
- to serve as an advocate for the children in your schools

The board also hires a superintendent who serves as the district's chief executive officer, responsible to the board for the day-to-day operations.

Federal and state statutes, court decisions and governmental mandates further clarify your role.

How much time does it take?

Most board's meet at least once a month; yours may meet more often.

Outside of the meetings, you will want to invest time reading and learning as much as you can about public education not only in your district but also in South Carolina and in the nation.

State law now requires all trustees to complete an orientation within a year of taking office. The 2003 report card will provide information on the average hours of training received by board members.

What about ethics requirements?

As a candidate for public office, you must provide certain information to the South Carolina Ethics Commission. This information includes a statement of economic interest when you file to run for the school board. A candidate must file a campaign disclosure form within 10 days of spending or receiving \$501 and quarterly thereafter. A 15-day pre-election filing is required of all candidates even if no money was spent or received.

If elected, you must file a statement of economic interest by April 15 of each year or pay a penalty. Effective July 1, 2003, a legislative amendment to the Ethics, Government Accountability and Campaign Finance Act of 1991 increased the late filing penalty for all Statement of Economic Interests Forms and all Campaign Disclosure Forms. If a required form is not filed within five days of the established deadline, an initial fine of \$100 is required. After notice has been given by certified mail that the form has not been filed, the fine increases at \$10 per day for the first 10 days, and \$100 per day for each additional day the form is not filed.

State ethics legislation prohibits you from taking part in a board discussion or voting on certain matters involving immediate family members and other covered relationships. Board minutes must reflect your abstention.

The ethics law further spells out conditions under which you as a board member may not enter into a business contract with your district.

As a candidate, you must comply with election day procedures set by your local county election commission and with state laws.

What if I need more information?

You may get the answers you need from your county election commission or district superintendent.

The office of the South Carolina Attorney General, 803.734.3970, issues opinions on dual office holding. www.scattorneygeneral.org.

The South Carolina Ethics Commission, 803.253.4192, also issues opinions. www.state.sc.us/ethics.

Your school district's policy manual, containing approved board policies and regulations, is available in school libraries and at the district office. Some districts also post their policies on district web sites.

Title 59 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Annotated, contains the majority of laws applying to school districts. Your county courthouse or county library should have these volumes, also available at www.scstatehouse.net.

You can find the South Carolina State Board of Education's regulations in the South Carolina Code of Laws.

About the South Carolina School Boards Association

The South Carolina School Boards Association (SCSBA) will send you information regularly. SCSBA's year-round training program, the Boardmanship Institute, addresses critical issues in public education and affords you the chance to talk with fellow board members from throughout the state. More information is available at www.scsba.org.

A strong statewide voice, SCSBA provides training, information and other services for the state's 85 school boards.

The mission of the SCSBA, the champion for progress in the governance of public education, is *to ensure excellence in school board performance through advocacy, training and service as a catalyst for positive change.*

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