



Advocacy Activities for School Board Members During Election Season

Being a school board member means being an advocate for your district. As important as it is to communicate with your state and federal legislators about issues of importance to your district, it is also important to ensure that candidates running for office understand your district and its challenges. Here are a few easy steps you and your fellow board members should try to accomplish during election season:

- (1) **Meet with *each* of the candidates in your area running for the state legislature.** The goal of these meetings should be to inform candidates about your district – the types of students in your district, what accomplishments your district is most proud of and the areas where your district is working to improve. Take printed material, such as a district profile or annual report, with facts about your district. Remember, the Open Meetings Act may apply if more than a quorum of your school board attends and you discuss school district business.
- (2) **Invite *all* of the candidates to a school board meeting.**
Invite the candidates to attend (but not campaign at) any of your school board meetings so that they can get a sense of the issues of greatest interest to your district. They will also have an opportunity to meet district personnel in charge of the various functions in the district. Candidates should not be invited to speak at or hand out campaign material on district property as this may violate the law prohibiting the use of district resources for political advertising or local policies prohibiting campaigning on district property.
- (3) **Using your *personal* resources (e.g., computer and e-mail account), invite *each or all* candidate(s) to a venue *off school property* to discuss or debate education issues.**
School trustees may not use district funds, resources or property to participate in election campaigns. However, you may use your own computer and e-mail account to invite the candidates to a breakfast or luncheon to discuss education issues. You may publicize the event using your own computer, e-mail system and personal time. You may even consider adding a short disclaimer on your e-mail stating that the e-mail is personal, rather than official school district business, and the e-mail was created using personally owned equipment and accounts. Remember, the Open Meetings Act may apply if more than a quorum of your school board attends and you discuss school district business. Therefore, it may be advisable to invite only a few board members from each surrounding school district to attend each event. You may choose to invite all candidates to one event or one candidate per event. The TASB elections toolkit provides more information on how trustees can get involved: tasb.org/legislative/documents/electkit.pdf.
- (4) **Using your *personal* resources, get active in campaigns and voter registration drives AND VOTE!**
The Texas Ethics Commission states, “Although you may not use political subdivision resources for political advertising, you are free to campaign for or against a proposition [or candidate] on your own time and with your own resources.” For example, a school board member may:
 - a. advocate for education-friendly candidates at a community meeting, like a Rotary Club meeting,
 - b. engage in voter registration drives to increase the number of voters,
 - c. encourage district personnel to post voter registration, polling location and other factual voter information on the district’s website,
 - d. write a letter to a newspaper editor in support of a candidate, and/or
 - e. contribute his or her own money to a candidate’s campaign or a political action committee (PAC).In fact, a school board member may speak, write or distribute political advertising of any sort as long as school funds are not used directly or indirectly.

Advocacy resources – including issue papers, a district profile template and advocacy guides – are available at www.gr.tasb.org. You may also call or e-mail Dax Gonzalez with TASB Governmental Relations (dax.gonzalez@tasb.org or 800-580-4885).