

PTA and School Board Elections

PTA is a not-for-profit corporation with a tax exemption under IRS rules, which states that such organizations **may not make written or oral statements for or against candidates for public office.**

According to PTA bylaws, “The organization shall not- directly or indirectly-participate or intervene (in any way, including the publishing or distribution of statements) in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.”

PTA is nonpartisan, which means **PTA cannot support or oppose candidates, including those running for school boards.** Any group activity in support of a specific candidate on the part of a unit, council, district, or state PTA is a violation of this nonpartisan policy.

PTA can take a stand on issues. Although PTA cannot support individuals, it can be concerned with issues, proposals, or plans of action. **A PTA not only may, but perhaps should, adopt positions expressing support for, or opposition to, issues dealing with the health, safety, education, or general well-being of children and youth.**

In order to retain federal tax-exempt status, PTA cannot concern itself with parties or persons, and, if necessary, should make a public statement explaining the reasons for not endorsing candidates.

Although PTA cannot endorse a candidate, individuals may do so on an individual basis without using their PTA titles or affiliation. Officers should realize, however, that active campaigning for or against a candidate for public office would probably be viewed as a PTA endorsement.

PTA leaders and active, visible PTA members would be well-advised to postpone partisan political activity while serving in positions of PTA leadership.

However, PTA leaders who choose to run for public office may list their PTA service but may not imply PTA endorsement in any advertising. Similarly, PTA leaders supporting candidates may not use their PTA titles or affiliation in any ads or fliers on behalf of a candidate.

What PTAs Can Do

- Publish and distribute a list of qualifications for school board members.
- Publicize the filing date for candidate petitions.
- Compile and distribute a brochure or flier with candidates’ biographies. Include verbatim responses to questions asked of all candidates.
- Sponsor a well-publicized district-wide meeting to which all candidates are invited to present their views and to respond to questions. (A Candidates’ Forum is an ideal PTA council project.)

- Organize a campaign to get everyone registered and voting. Use newsletters, fliers, telephone calls, car pools, etc.
- Instruct volunteers to avoid voicing personal preferences when working in the name of PTA.

Suggested Qualifications For School Board Candidates

Membership on the board of education should be broad and diverse, reflecting various points of view within the community. Only citizens deeply concerned with educational standards and school needs should be elected or appointed to school boards.

A school board member should:

- Be a supporter of public education.
- Have a broad background of knowledge and experience; be willing to learn.
- Represent the interests of the community at large.
- Make the welfare of children and community the basis of decisions; be free from partisan politics.
- Accept the will of the majority; be tolerant, free from prejudice.
- Understand that education today, like the world it reflects, is extremely complex.
- Be familiar with the schools in the district and with current educational issues.
- Understand the functions, policies, and responsibilities of board members and the administrators.
- Communicate effectively with professional staff, community groups, and others.
- Realize that an inordinate amount of time, effort, study, and workshop attendance is essential for a successful performance.
- Be able to defend the philosophy and goals of the board and withstand criticism that will inevitably come from people of opposing views.
- Listen for real consensus and not to confuse a few noisy voices with a majority feeling.
- Above all, board members should be able to learn and grow in competence as they become more aware of the nature of their responsibilities as members of one of the most important elective bodies in our society.



Sample Questions For School Board

Candidates

- What is your educational philosophy?
- What are your educational priorities for the school district/library?
- Do you approve of public funds being used for private education K-12? Explain.

During the times of fiscal constraint:

- What programs would you consider essential to keep in order to maintain the current level of education in your district?
- Where might you consolidate?
- What do you feel you can contribute as a member of the school board?
- How do you feel about involvement in areas such as shared decision-making, volunteering in the classroom, communication between the home and school?
- Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary?
- Do you feel that subjects such as music, art, physical, education, technology, and foreign languages play an important part in a child's education? Explain.
- Do you support the district's proposed school budget? Explain.

Candidates' Forums

PTAs can perform a vital service by arranging and conducting candidates' forums to assist the community in making an informed judgment in the election of its board of education. Forums are usually held one to two weeks before election date.

Suggested Guidelines

Publicize the date as early in the school year as possible (school district calendar, PTA calendar and newsletter).

Immediately after the filing date, send all board of education candidates who have filed a valid petition and met the legal requirements to be placed on the school ballot, an invitation to participate in the forum.

List date, place, and time of forum.

Request a reply or include a response form on which the candidate can indicate if he/she plans to attend the forum.

Send by certified mail with return receipt requested.

Include a copy of the format to be used that evening.

Indicate that candidates are expected to meet with the moderator fifteen (15) minutes before the forum to review the format.

Inform candidates that written statements by candidates who cannot attend the forum will not be read.

Inform candidates that no campaign literature can be distributed at the forum.

If a candidate has not responded by a specific date, make a follow-up call to be sure the candidate received the invitation.

The Moderator

Some Region PTAs provide board members to serve as moderators and timekeepers. Contact your Region VP or State President to arrange for this service and assist you with the format if desired.

However, if a PTA board member is a candidate, it is advisable to contact another group such as the League of Women Voters or the American Association of University Women.

Suggested Format For Candidates' Forums

(Adapt to the needs of your community)

Moderator meets with all candidates 15 minutes before forum to:

- Introduce the timekeeper who will use a stopwatch and signal at specific intervals.
- Agree upon the order of the candidates' presentations and summation (by lot or alphabetical).

Review time frame:

- Opening statement should not exceed _____ minutes. (Suggested time: three-five minutes, depending on the number of candidates.)
- Response to each question should not exceed _____ minutes. (Suggested time: one minute)
- Summation should not exceed _____ minutes. (Suggested time: two minutes)
- Time for last question _____ (Suggested time: 10:00 p.m.)

Review method of questioning:

- If written, indicate that cards will be distributed and collected by ushers.
- Written questions will be screened by _____.
- If oral, questioner must be recognized by moderator before speaking.
- Inform candidates that no debating will be allowed by candidates or audience.

The moderator shall:

- Have sole jurisdiction over the proceedings.
- Introduce candidates and timekeeper to the audience.
- Explain the rules and format agreed upon by all candidates.

Indicate that:

- Written statements by absent candidates will not be read.
- Each candidate will have an opportunity to respond to each question if desired.
- No campaign material will be distributed at the forum.
- Adjourn the forum at the agreed upon time.



CANDIDATE FOR SCHOOL BOARD BIOGRAPHY
(Adapt to the needs of your community)

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

Resident in district _____ years.

Number of children currently attending public school: _____ Elementary _____ Middle/Junior

_____ High School _____ Number of Pre-schoolers _____ High School Graduates

Education: List names of schools attended as well as degree(s) received.

Professional/Business/Personal experience and/or expertise: (Include at least the past five years.)

Community Activities:

NOTE: Please type answers, single-spaced directly under the question, using the space provided.

SAMPLE CANDIDATES' FORUM INVITATION
Type on PTA Letterhead

Date

Dear _____:

You are cordially invited to participate in a Candidates' Forum on _____ **(date)** at _____ **(place)** at _____ **(time)**. Enclosed is a copy of the format for the evening.

Each year _____ PTA holds a Candidates' Forum and prints information submitted by school board candidates. The PTA does this as a public service to the community because it believes that informed citizens are responsive citizens who will strive for better schools and a better community.

Complete the enclosed form and return by _____ **(date)** to _____ **(name and address)**. Your answers to the questions will be printed verbatim. Brief answers would be appreciated.

The information received will be distributed to the community through _____ **(mailed to residents, mailed to parents, copies available at PTA meetings, the library, or distributed at the Candidates' Forum)**.

Candidates are expected to meet with the moderator 15 minutes before the forum begins to review the format. Written statements by candidates who cannot attend the forum will not be read. No campaign literature can be distributed at the forum.

Sincerely,

Name
PTA President

RSVP by _____

Enclosure

(Letter to be sent certified mail to all candidates who have filed for a school board or library board seat.)