



## The Importance of School Board Elections

By *Kirk Schneidawind, MSBA Executive Director*

“Why would anyone run for a school board?”

I was asked this question recently, and maybe it was rhetorical, but maybe it wasn't. I've been thinking about it seriously ever since. It is surely a question that many people are asking at the local coffee shop these days. After all, it's been a fraught couple of years – ones in which school board meetings and elections have moved to the forefront of American consciousness and media, after being overlooked for so long.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic kickstarted the newfound relevancy of school boards and all the decisions they make pertaining to public education. At that time, these decisions were based on facts and figures provided by the state health department on the virus. In the early days of this public health crisis, the nature and severity of COVID was still somewhat of a mystery. As the rate of positive cases skyrocketed, school boards and their districts across the state were faced with many difficult decisions. At the same time, the school boards that provided the stability, community voice, and important decision making to ensure that learning opportunities were an essential part of the equation. Staying focused on student learning opportunities has become a challenge due to COVID and other outside noise. We also must recognize that the

stress of the last two years has taken a toll on our school district leaders, which has resulted in several board member resignations and some retirements in the superintendent ranks.

With 90% of our school districts holding school board elections in November 2022, it is an important time for our incumbents to reflect on their “why,” while our prospective candidates must clearly communicate their “why.” Clarity of purpose is a pillar of any successful organization. Clarity of purpose among our school board candidates is also an important way to build trust with potential constituents as Minnesota communities select their next school board leaders.

Minnesotans will have a lot on their election plate in November. Candidates for the state House, Senate, and governorship, along with U.S. House members, will be on the ballot. While each election is important, I maintain that local school board elections are the most important. Local officials are closest to the action and oversee our most valuable resource, our public school students. We need leaders on our school boards who not only support the mission and vision of our public schools but who are also willing to make important and consequential choices rooted in the best interest of our school districts, as well as their students and staff.

With all the turbulence over the last two years, the questions may have changed, but the purpose, values, and beliefs of our school leaders have not. There remains a strong, important link between school board leadership and student achievement that cannot be understated.

School board candidates know (or should know) that, at present, running for a seat on their board means signing up for strife and discord. Though theirs can certainly be an underappreciated job, the significant role that they play in shaping local students' educations and futures unquestionably outweighs the more unpleasant tasks. Remember that school board members also work in their own careers. They come from all walks of life and deliberately choose to run for and proudly serve a higher cause, one that directly impacts and benefits the educators, students, and parents in their communities.

So, “why would anyone run for a school board?” The answer is this: because of the undeniable, meaningful difference school board members make in public education every day. Thanks for your leadership.

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