



RESOURCES FOR CANDIDATES

FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARDS OF EDUCATION OR
EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTER (ESC) GOVERNING BOARDS



OHIO SCHOOL BOARDS
ASSOCIATION

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This guide provides an overview for individuals running for positions on school district boards of education or educational service center (ESC) governing boards. Its purpose is to answer commonly asked questions about being a candidate and provide links to more in-depth information.

School boards: Composition, positions and elections

There are four kinds of school boards whose members are elected: local school boards, exempted village school boards, city school boards and ESC governing boards.

The number of positions on a school board or ESC governing board varies. Local and exempted village boards of education have five members, all of whom are elected “at large.” This means they are elected by all the registered electors in the school district’s territory (Ohio Revised Code (RC) 3313.01). In city school districts, the number of members to be elected is governed by the population of the school district (RC 3313.02).

ESC governing boards have five elected members unless two or more ESCs have merged to form a joint ESC (RC 3313.01). A joint ESC governing board may increase the number of elected board members to seven or nine (RC 3311.054). They may also have appointed members (RC 3311.056 or members who are elected from subdistricts (RC 3311.054).

School board candidates run in nonpartisan elections and are not required to declare any party affiliation. Elections are held in the November general election in odd-numbered years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of the month. In 2025, the general election will be on Tuesday, Nov. 4. More information about election-related deadlines is available in the [Ohio Secretary of State’s \(SOS\) 2025 Election Calendar](#).

Board members serve four-year terms. Board elections are staggered, meaning that some of the board positions will be on the ballot every two years. The term of office for a board member elected in November 2025 will begin on Jan. 1, 2026, and end on Dec. 31, 2029.

In a very few school districts, the board members have voted to hold a primary for the positions on the board. Contact your board of elections to determine whether your board is having a primary. The primary election day in 2025 is [Tuesday, May 6](#).

Running for school board

Any person who is 18 or older, as of the date of the general election, can run for a position on a board of education or ESC governing board if they have been a resident of and registered to vote in the school district’s territory for at least 30 days before they register as a candidate.

To become a candidate, a person must complete and file a [declaration of candidacy and nominating petition](#) that has been signed by the required number of registered voters in the district’s territory (RC 3513.254).

There are specific rules regarding how petitions should be completed, who can circulate them, and who can sign them. The SOS has prepared the [Ohio Candidate Requirement Guide](#) (CRG) for individuals running for office in Ohio. More information about petitions is available in the CRG on pages 4-6.

The completed declaration of candidacy and petition should be filed with the county board of elections in the county where the school district is located. Addresses and contact information for [county boards of elections can be found here](#). If the school district’s territory is in more than one county, the completed forms should be filed with the board of elections in the most populous county in the district. Candidates for the governing board of an ESC located in more than one county should file the completed forms with the board of elections in the county where the ESC’s central administrative office is located (RC 3513.255).

In 2025, the deadline for filing a petition to run as a school board candidate in a district or ESC without a primary is 4 p.m. on [Wednesday, Aug. 6](#). The filing fee for the nominating petition is \$30 (RC 3513.10(A) and (B)).

A candidate who is already serving as a public employee or in another elected position should check to make sure that the two positions are compatible, which means that, if elected, the person can serve in both positions at the same time. More information on the compatibility of positions is available from the [Ohio Attorney General’s Office](#).

SIGNATURES NEEDED

The number of valid
registered voters'
signatures needed varies.

TYPE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT/NUMBER OF VALID SIGNATURES REQUIRED

**Local and
exempted village**
25

City
*School district population
under 20,000*
25

City
*School district population
20,000 to 49,999*
75

City
*School district population
50,000 to 99,999*
150

City
*School district population
greater than 100,000*
300

**Educational
service center
(ESC)**
50

Financing your campaign

Candidates for school district boards of education or ESC governing boards can campaign for office in a variety of ways. Common types of campaigns for school board candidates include:

Filing fee-only candidate

These candidates receive no contributions and make no expenditures, other than the \$30 filing fee for their nominating petition.

Candidate spends only their own funds

These candidates receive no contributions from third parties and make campaign expenditures using only their own funds.

Single-beneficiary campaign

Candidates receive contributions from third parties and use those contributions to make expenditures on behalf of their campaign.

Multi-beneficiary campaign

Candidates partner with one or more other candidates who are seeking a position on the same school board. More information about establishing a multi-beneficiary campaign committee appears in Chapter 2 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Any candidate who wants to accept campaign contributions or spend money on their campaign, even if the money is their own, must have a campaign committee and register their committee with SOS. In addition to filing this initial registration form, campaign committees must file statements of contributions and expenditures (RC 3517.10). Each campaign committee must have a treasurer, who is responsible for receiving contributions and making expenditures on behalf of the campaign (RC 3517.081). The campaign committee must have a name, which must include at least the last name of the candidate (RC 3517.10).

More information about campaign committees, including designating a treasurer, opening a campaign bank account, managing records and submitting required reports, is included in Chapter 2 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Campaigning

Candidates can campaign by making personal appearances, participating in parades and other gatherings, distributing printed campaign literature, having a webpage or other digital presence and using yard signs, among other things. If a candidate is going to use webpages or printed materials, including yard signs, campaign literature and advertisements, there are specific requirements regarding disclaimers. A disclaimer discloses who paid for the material and must include the words "paid for by" followed by the name of the committee that paid for the material (RC 3517.20; Ohio Elections Commission Adv.Op.No. 2012 ELC-04). Certain items are specifically exempt from the disclaimer requirement. More information about campaign literature, signs and disclaimers is available in Chapter 12 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

There are some campaign activities that the law prohibits (RC 3517.21 and 3517.22). When you file your nominating petition, you may receive more information from the board of elections about these prohibited activities. The Ohio Elections Commission is responsible for investigating allegations of wrongdoing related to elections. More information

about the Elections Commission and complaints about wrongdoing is available in Chapter 15 of the [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Candidates should also be aware that districts may have policies that govern campaign activities on district property. For more information, candidates should review the policy manual for the district they seek to serve.

Campaign contributions

Campaign contributions include any loan, gift or other payment that is made, received or used for the purpose of influencing an election (RC 3517.01(C)(5)). Campaign contributions can be in the form of money or in-kind contributions of anything other than money (RC 3527.01(C)(16)).

Because almost all contributions, including money given by the candidate to their own campaign, are required to be disclosed, a candidate's campaign treasurer should maintain written, itemized records of them (RC 3517.10(D)(2); OAC 111:2-4-06). The treasurer should keep a log of the name and address of the contributor and the date and amount of the contribution. Campaign contributions must be deposited into the bank account established by the committee and cannot be deposited into a candidate's personal or business account or the campaign committee's personal or business account (RC 3517.10).

More information about campaign contributions, including permissible contributors and contribution limits, is available on pages 2-11 through 2-20 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Campaign expenditures

Campaign expenditures are disbursements or uses of contributions for the purpose of influencing the results of an election (RC 3517.01(C)(6)). Campaign expenditures must be legitimate, verifiable, ordinary and necessary. A candidate's campaign treasurer should maintain written, itemized records of campaign-related expenditures (RC 3517.10(B)(5)) that include the amount and date (month, day, and year) plus the full name and address of the person to whom the expenditure was made, and object or purpose of each expenditure. The treasurer should keep cancelled checks, bank records and receipted bills reflecting expenditures.

More information about campaign expenditures, including permissible uses of campaign funds and recordkeeping, is available on pages 2-21 through 2-25 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Campaign finance disclosures

Any candidate who receives contributions and makes expenditures to run their campaign may be required to file campaign finance disclosure statements. Even candidates who receive no contributions from anyone other than themselves and finance their campaigns using their own money may be required to disclose information about their contributions and expenditures. For this reason, candidates or their campaign treasurers should maintain careful records of all contributions and expenditures, as described previously.

Whether and when campaign finance disclosure statements must be filed depends on when the campaign begins and ends, how much was raised and how much was spent. Whether a candidate wins the election does not affect their obligation to file. Even losing candidates are required to file disclosure statements if they meet the criteria for reporting.

At a minimum, most candidates will be required to file the pre-general election report and the post-general election report. The pre-general election report must be filed by 4 p.m. on the 12th day before the general election. In 2025, the deadline for the pre-general election report is **Thursday, Oct. 23**. Candidates who must file the pre-general election report are those who either received more than \$1,000 in campaign contributions or spent more than \$1,000 in campaign expenditures in the covered time period. The covered time period starts either when the campaign committee was formed or after 4 p.m. on the last day reflected on the most recently filed previous statement. The covered time period ends at 4 p.m. on the 20th day before the election, which is Oct. 15.

The post-general election report must be filed by 4 p.m. on the 38th day after the general election. In 2025, the deadline for filing the post-general election report is **Friday, Dec. 12**. Any candidate appearing on the ballot must file a campaign finance report. The post-general election covers all activity not previously reported through the 31st day after the election, which is Dec. 5.

Failing to file required campaign finance reports by the relevant deadline may result in an investigation by the Ohio Elections Commission and fines. More information about campaign finance law penalties is available on pages 14-4 and 14-5 of the SOS [Campaign Finance Handbook](#). Information about correcting a mistake in a previously filed report is available on page 2-26 of the handbook.

If a candidate does not want to file campaign finance reports, the candidate can either:

File a local candidate waiver (Form 31-BB) within 10 days after filing their nominating petition.

The waiver requires the campaign treasurer to agree that the campaign will not accept more than \$2,000 in contributions or more than \$100 from any individual contributor other than the candidate and will not expend more than \$2,000 for the campaign. More information about the local candidate waiver is available on pages 2-5 through 2-6 of the [SOS Campaign Finance Handbook](#). The candidate's campaign must still have a committee and a treasurer.

Run as a filing fee-only candidate.

A filing fee-only candidate pays the filing fee with their own funds, receives no contributions and makes no expenditures on the campaign except the filing fee. Because they aren't receiving contributions or making any expenditures, these candidates are not subject to the reporting requirements. However, if the candidate accepts any contributions, even from themselves, or makes any expenditures other than the filing fee, even using their own funds, the person is no longer a filing fee-only candidate and must comply with all laws and rules that govern campaign disclosures (RC 3517.10; Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 111:2-4-01).

More information about campaign finance disclosures is available beginning on page 2-3 of the [SOS Campaign Finance Handbook](#).

Conclusion

School board members serve a vital role in their communities and in the lives of countless students, parents, families, teachers and school employees. Their importance to public education cannot be overvalued. We hope this information is useful to you. Best of luck in your campaign.

This document is not intended as legal advice. For specific questions, candidates should consult with legal counsel.



**OHIO SCHOOL BOARDS
ASSOCIATION**

HOW TO BECOME A SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE

**To run for a school board
seat you must be:**

- a U.S. citizen;
- at least 18 years old;
- a resident of the
school district;
- registered to vote in
the school district for
at least 30 days.

KEY DATES

AUG.

6

Nominating petition must
be filed with county board
of elections by 4 p.m.*

NOV.

4

Election Day

JAN.

1

Newly elected board
members take office

*If your district is one of the few with
a primary election, your nominating
petition will be due earlier. Check with
your county board of elections.