



Alberta School Boards Association

Guide for School Board Trustees





Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. About School Board Trustees	4
Understanding the Roles	4
Understanding the Responsibilities	5
Skills and Attributes	5
Why Run for Trustee?	6
Considerations	7
Steps to Run	7
Key Dates	9
3. Deciding to Run	10
What makes you want to serve?	10
How to Prepare	10
Getting Started	11
4. Local Authorities Election Act	12
Recent Changes	12
5. Resources	13



1 Introduction

School board trustees are elected representatives who play a critical role in shaping the future of public education.

Locally-elected public, catholic and francophone school board trustees (“trustees”) oversee and provide important governance for school boards in our education system. School boards are crucial decision-making bodies that guide the educational experiences of thousands of students across Alberta.

This guide outlines the vital role of a school board trustee in Alberta’s education system and the path to becoming one.

It includes:

- An overview of trustees’ roles and responsibilities
- Skills trustees need to succeed
- Key considerations and details for trustee candidates

Whether you are a first-time candidate or seeking re-election, your decision to participate in this important democratic process highlights the crucial role of local governance and leadership in strengthening our education system and building a better society for everyone across the province.

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2 About School Board Trustees

Understanding the Roles

Trustees act as advocates for students, stewards of public funds and bridges between the community and the school division. Trustees work collaboratively as part of a school board to ensure students receive a high-quality education that reflects the values and needs of their community.

Their authority is rooted in the *Education Act*, which delegates governance powers to school boards, and the *Local Authorities Election Act* (“*LAEA*”), which regulates trustee elections. Trustees are elected every four years and are accountable to their communities, parents and Alberta Education for their decisions.

Trustees in Alberta’s Education System

In Alberta, school boards are considered statutory corporations empowered by the provincial government to govern local education. This structure reflects the principle that decisions made at the community-level are more effective and responsive to local needs.

School boards have significant responsibilities, including:

- Planning for the division and setting long-term priorities.
- Evaluating the performance of the superintendent and the overall system.
- Communicating achievements and results to the public and advocating for funding and resources.
- Promoting public education as a cornerstone of a democratic society.

By fulfilling these responsibilities as part of school boards, trustees ensure Alberta’s education system remains inclusive, equitable and high performing. Their role is a crucial one, emphasizing the importance of local governance and leadership in creating a better society for everyone across the province.

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Understanding the Responsibilities

Trustees are entrusted to govern their division by balancing the diverse needs of students, families and communities. Their work encompasses several key areas:

- **Setting Direction:** Trustees establish the strategic vision and priorities for their division, ensuring that all students can succeed. This includes approving goals that reflect community input and comply with provincial guidelines.
- **Developing Policy:** By creating policies, trustees set the framework for how their division operates. These policies guide everything from fiscal oversight and student wellbeing to annual school calendars.
- **Budget Approval and Oversight:** Trustees approve the division's annual budget, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and responsibly.
- **Superintendent Oversight:** Working together as the board, they hire and evaluate the superintendent, who is responsible for implementing board decisions and managing day-to-day operations.
- **Advocacy and Representation:** Trustees advocate for public education at the municipal and provincial levels, representing the interests of their communities.
- **Community Engagement:** Trustees actively communicate with parents, students and other stakeholders, ensuring everyone's voices are considered in board decisions.

The board is collectively responsible for governance and all trustees are bound by its decisions. Individual trustees hold no legal authority; decision-making power rests solely with the board. However, the role of a trustee carries leadership and accountability, both to their constituents and the broader community. In this capacity, trustees can serve as role models and set a positive example for others.

Skills and Attributes

Those with a passion for public education and community service can make a valuable contribution as a trustee. Essential skills and attributes for effective governance should be developed and strengthened to fulfill trustee duties to the highest standards.

These include:

1. **Leadership and Collaboration:** Trustees must work effectively as part of a team, contributing to strategic discussions and making decisions in the best interest of the students.
2. **Financial Acumen:** Overseeing large budgets requires the ability to understand financial statements and ask critical questions about spending and resource allocation.
3. **Knowledge of Legislation:** Familiarity with the *Education Act*, *LAEA* and related regulations and policies is vital for effective governance.
4. **Strong Communication:** Trustees require a repertoire of communication skills to engage effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, from students and parents, to elected officials and community.
5. **A Willingness to Learn:** Trustees are expected to participate in ongoing professional development to stay informed about developments in education policy and best practices.



Why Run for Trustee?

Seeking election provides an opportunity to make a lasting impact in your community and its future.

Serving as a trustee is a call to leadership and public service. Trustees contribute to the public good and help shape the educational landscape for generations to come.

Supporting Local Governance

Local governance in school boards is a cornerstone of democracy, with trustees providing citizens a direct way to influence public services. Trustees offer essential oversight of the education system, ensuring decisions align with community values while meeting provincial standards. This role enables trustees to make informed and balanced decisions.

Alberta's school boards operate with local autonomy, enabling them to address the unique challenges and opportunities in their communities. Trustees are instrumental in bringing local insights to educational policies and practices, ensuring that every student has access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

Answering a Call to Leadership

Leadership as a trustee requires vision, collaboration and a commitment to serving others. Trustees help guide the direction of education in their division, advocating for innovative solutions and equitable practices that benefit all students. They are champions of public education, working to ensure that every voice is heard and that schools remain places of opportunity and growth.

Trusteeship offers opportunities to develop leadership skills, deepen your understanding of governance and education and build relationships with fellow community leaders.

Committing to Public Service

Public education is deeply tied to the social and economic health of a community. Trustees contribute to collective well being and play a key role in addressing critical issues, such as equity, inclusion and student achievement.

Trustees also act as a bridge between the school system and the community, facilitating open dialogue and encouraging active participation in education and student learning.

Serving as a trustee is one of the most rewarding forms of public service. Trustees are part of a team working to solve complex problems, implement innovative strategies and uphold the values of public education.

Considerations

Time Commitment

Trusteeship requires a significant commitment of time and energy. On average, trustees dedicate 10–20 hours per week to their responsibilities. This includes preparing for and attending board and committee meetings, engaging with parents and community stakeholders, and representing the board at public events. Trustees should also consider participating in professional development sessions to stay informed about best practices and emerging trends in education governance.

Remuneration

Trustee remuneration varies between school divisions. The amount is determined locally and typically reflects the significant responsibilities and time commitments of the role. While the position is not usually sought for financial reasons, remuneration helps support trustees in fulfilling their duties.

Ethical Expectations and Conflicts of Interest

Trustees must adhere to high ethical standards, maintaining the trust and confidence of their communities. Transparency is key, trustees are required to disclose any financial or personal interests that could influence their decisions. Under the *Education Act*, trustees must abstain from votes or discussions where conflicts arise to ensure integrity in the governance process.

Steps to Run

Municipal elections in Alberta are a structured process that require careful preparation and adherence to provincial regulations. The election process ensures that candidates are eligible, nominations are properly filed and campaigns are conducted transparently.

Eligibility

There are a number of requirements to consider when confirming eligibility to run. Review these requirements in the *LAEA* and the *Education Act* before planning a campaign and submitting nomination papers.

- You must be eligible to vote in the election. You must be a Canadian citizen and must be at least 18 years of age.
- You must be a resident in the school division. According to the *LAEA*, a candidate for trustee of a board of a school division that is wholly or partly within the boundaries of a city must be a resident of the school division and the ward, if any, for the six consecutive months immediately preceding nomination day. Refer to the *LAEA* for more details.
- Some faith-based and francophone school boards have specific requirements to run for their school board. Reach out to ASBA or to the school board you are considering running for to find out specific requirements for that election.
- You must not be otherwise ineligible or disqualified. You would be considered ineligible if:
 - You are the auditor of the local jurisdiction.
 - You are employed by any school division, charter school or independent school unless you take a leave of absence.
 - You owe the municipality for taxes in default exceeding \$50.
 - You have been convicted of an offence under the *LAEA*, the *Election Act*, the *Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act* or the *Canada Elections Act* within the last 10 years.
 - You are employed by the Office of the Ombudsman unless you take a leave of absence.
 - You failed to file a campaign disclosure statement and the secretary of the school board transmitted a report under section 147.8(1) about the person and the Court did not dispense with or extend the time for compliance.
 - You use or expend an anonymous or unauthorized campaign contribution on or after giving written notice of intent to be nominated.
 - Refer to the *LAEA* for more details.



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Nomination Process

Nominations must be filed during the designated nomination period, which begins January 1 of the election year and closes at 12 p.m. on Nomination Day (four weeks before the election).

Candidates must:

1. Complete the required nomination forms, including *Form 4 (Nomination Paper and Candidate's Acceptance)* and *Form 5 (Candidate Financial Information)*. The forms can be found on the Government of Alberta website, in the [Municipal Elections](#) section.
2. Secure signatures from at least five eligible electors who reside within the school board's jurisdiction (or more, if the board has passed a bylaw requiring additional signatures).
3. Submit the forms in person to the returning officer at the school board office, along with any required nomination deposit (if applicable).
4. Submit a current criminal record check, if the board has passed a bylaw requiring one.

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Key Dates

January 1, 2025	Nomination period opens and the earliest date a municipal, school or Ombudsman employee wishing to be nominated may notify the employer that they are taking a leave of absence.
May 1, 2025	Start of “election advertising period” in which local jurisdictions must maintain a register of third parties who engage in election advertising.
September 22, 2025 12 p.m.	Nomination period closes.
September 23, 2025	Candidate may withdraw their nomination in writing, in person.
October 20, 2025	Election day.
October 22, 2025 4 p.m.	Deadline to receive a request for a recount.
October 24, 2025 12 p.m.	Recounts must be complete.
November 8, 2025	Last day for an elector to request a judicial recount.



3 Deciding to Run

What makes you want to serve?

While this may seem like a straightforward question – the answer is not always obvious. People need to trust you and your vision before they vote for you.

You need a rationale for running in your community. A good way to frame this is by tying your statement to an experience or narrative; consider how your campaign and policies address this.

Be accessible! Share your story, vision and background with your target audience. Highlight life and work experiences that are relevant to your platform and goals. Employ diverse types of media to your advantage, catering to the individuals who are most likely to vote for you. Use anecdotes, stories, photos, videos and testimonials that feed your campaign message. As well, you should address any vagueness or potential questions your target audience may have.

Most of all, it is important to be authentic. It is important to convey honesty and truth through your message, admit faults (such as a promise not kept or an unreturned phone call) and be as genuine as possible.

How to Prepare

The candidate has three tasks during the campaign:

1. Make a meaningful impression and convince constituents to vote for you.
2. Raise money (if required).
3. Recruit volunteers.

Given the limited resources a school trustee campaign may have, it may make sense for you to take on some campaign management roles as well. Candidates should be interacting with voters at every possible opportunity and speak directly with as many of them as possible.

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People need to trust you and trust your vision before they are comfortable voting for you.

Getting Started

The first step for any candidate is to complete the nomination package.

To complete the nomination process, each local school board or municipal elections authority will have their own set of forms and requirements for you to complete. Standard across the province, candidates will have to complete the required “Form 4 – Nomination Paper and Candidate’s Acceptance” as well as “Form 5 – Candidate Information.”

How to Access and Submit Nomination Forms

These forms can be accessed via your local returning officer, municipal elections authority or school board. You can also find them online on the Government of Alberta [website](#).

It is important to be exceptionally diligent when completing these forms and ensure they are submitted correctly. Please note that municipalities have varying requirements for these forms, including how many electors are required to have signed the form to validate your nomination.

It is recommended that nomination forms are submitted as early as possible before the nomination deadline. It is also suggested to have more electors sign your forms than needed for your nomination to guarantee you reach the minimum requirement. In most cases, signatures need to be collected in-person. You can inquire with your local returning officer or municipal elections authority about the types of signatures that will be accepted on the form, including signatures obtained via e-mail.

Once completed, you must submit the forms appropriately as per LAEA guidelines. According to the LAEA, individual school boards can adjust how they receive nomination papers from trustees.

All nomination packages must:

- Be signed by at least five electors or more (check with your school board/ local municipal elections authority for additional requirements);
- Have a valid deposit (check with your school board/ local municipal elections authority if this is required and your deposit total);
- Be signed and affirmed by the candidate (check with your school board/local municipal elections authority if there are any additional signing/affirmation requirements).

In addition to having the correct deposit value, some elections authorities require specific methods of payment. Make sure you check with your local returning officer or municipal elections authority which methods are valid in advance of you filing your nomination papers.





4 Local Authorities Election Act

Recent Changes

The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* came into force on October 31, 2024. While the involvement of local political parties and slates is **not applicable** to trustees, several of the amendments impact the rules for local elections.

Regarding employment, one must **not** be employed by a school division, charter school, private school or Office of the Ombudsman if seeking election as a trustee. If employed by one of the above, one must notify the employer on or after January 1, 2025 and before the last working day prior to nomination that leave of absence without pay will be taken.



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Notable additional changes:

- Debt to the local jurisdiction for which the election is being held cannot equal or exceed \$500 for one to be nominated as a candidate.
- The campaign period begins on January 1 the year immediately following a general election and ending on December 31 immediately following the general election.
- Donations by an ordinary resident in Alberta cannot exceed \$5,000 in the aggregate to all trustee candidates of a public school or separate school division.
- Donations by a non-prohibited corporation in Alberta cannot exceed \$5,000 in the aggregate to all trustee candidates of a public school or separate school division.
- A candidate may spend up to \$10,000 of their own money during the campaign period. This amount does not need to be reimbursed to the candidate by the campaign funds at the end of the campaign.

5 Resources

Local Authorities Election Act

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/l21>

The election law currently governing school board trustee elections in Alberta.

Education Act

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/e00p3>

List eligibility requirements, trustee responsibilities amongst other legal requirements for trustees and candidates.

ASBA Resources

<https://www.asba.ab.ca>

Contact ASBA with any questions.

