

Board of Education Candidate Information

Below is a communication from Beth McLaughlin, former Board President, outlining the steps for running, the duties, and reasons why Board membership is an excellent service to the community.

How to Run for the School Board

On Tuesday, April 1, 2014, there will be two open seats on the Fort Atkinson Board of Education. Although the spring election is months from now, the deadline for individuals to declare their candidacy for those positions is fast approaching. Serving on the School Board is both challenging and rewarding. If you have an interest in our schools and the education of our community's children, a position on the Board of Education is an opportunity to participate in community service at its finest. For those individuals who are considering running for a position on the School Board, the following will provide you with information on running for election, as well as the roles and responsibilities of Board Members. Finally, please feel free to contact any Board Member if you have questions about running for a position on the School Board.

Becoming a Board Member

The Fort Atkinson School Board has five at large elected members who serve for three-year terms. One or two positions are open each year on a rotating basis. In order to run for election, you must be 18 years old and reside in the School District of Fort Atkinson. **Prospective candidates must file a Declaration of Candidacy and a Campaign Registration Statement by 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 7, 2014.** These forms may be obtained from the School District's Administrative Offices located at 201 Park Street, Fort Atkinson. The offices will be closed December 24, 2013, December 25, 2013, December 31, 2013, and January 1, 2014, for the holidays. If more than four individuals file for the two open seats on the School Board, there will be a primary election on Tuesday, February 18, 2014, followed by the general election on Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

The cost of running for the School Board varies depending on whether the election is contested. Some candidates simply file a Declaration of Candidacy and a Campaign Registration Statement, which costs nothing. Others may purchase yard signs, newspaper advertisements, and informational mailings. All candidates are invited to speak at School Board meetings, at any local candidate forums, and are interviewed by the local newspaper. New Board Members are seated at the May Board meeting following the election in April, and a reorganization meeting during the last week of April. School Board Members receive an annual stipend of \$1,200 per year.

Why Run For Election?

There are many reasons to run for a position on the Fort Atkinson Board of Education including, but not limited to, community service, an interest in fiscal and policy issues, and improving curriculum, instruction and academic achievement in the School District. There may be a variety of reasons to run for election, but at the heart of it for most candidates is the desire for excellent schools at a reasonable cost to the citizens of this fine community.

You Won the Election. Now What?

New School Board Members find that there is a lot to learn and typically spend their first year educating themselves about the District and their roles and responsibilities as Board Members. The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) provides seminars for new Board Members as well as continuing education, often in the form of one day meetings in southern Wisconsin, for experienced Board Members. Board members typically attend the WASB convention in Milwaukee in mid-January. In addition, our Superintendent, Dr. Jeff Zaspel, and our Director of Business Services, will spend time during that first year bringing new Board Members up to speed. Board members also attempt to mentor new members.

School Board Members attend a two to three hour monthly business meeting, which is held on the third Thursday of the month beginning at 7:00 p.m. Prior to the monthly Board Meeting, individual Board Members meet with Dr. Zaspel to review the agenda for that meeting. Between meetings, Board Members receive weekly packets of information to keep them up to date on what is happening in the District.

Board Members also attend special meetings and committee meetings, which are held periodically throughout the year. Special meetings include meeting with administration in January and May on strategic plan initiatives; evaluation of the District Administrator and a self-evaluation of the Board in January and June; a July Annual Meeting, and October budget adjustments. Committees, consisting of two Board members, include Finance and Operations, as well as Policy, which meet most months, with appropriate administration. Other committees that meet with appropriate administration, as necessary, include: Communication & Technology, Instruction / Pupil Services, Personnel, and Sponsorship. One or two Board members are also a part of the Student Advisory meetings held quarterly during the school year with high school students, and are a part of the Superintendent's Advisory monthly meetings with the Superintendent and selected parents. Board members are also a part of one or more of the bargaining teams which negotiate contracts with the three unions representing employees in the District. As necessary, the Board also meets for grievance and expulsion hearings.

Finally, Board Members often attend many special events honoring students and staff members, although they are not obligated to do so. Examples include: Rotary Academic Awards, employee years of service reception, employee retirement reception, Senior Portfolios, graduations, new teacher welcome breakfast, and convocation.

Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members

Some individuals take the position that the School Board's job is to set policy and approve the budget and that boards that go beyond those roles are micromanaging, or getting involved in the administration's job of running the School District. Since there really is no definitive answer in drawing the line between policy making and administration, it is important for the School Board and the administrative team to establish ground rules to move the District forward. In the School District of Fort Atkinson, the School Board decides the "what" and the administrative team determines the "how". The Board has developed and adopted a Strategic Plan which sets clear goals (the "what") and then action plans are developed by the administrative team (the "how") to achieve those goals. These ground rules have helped to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Board Members.

Finally, there is no "I" in School Board. An individual Board Member can accomplish nothing alone. Each Board Member brings different skills, opinions, and backgrounds to the Board. A successful Board treats each other with respect and learns to work together to best use our available resources to positively impact student welfare, learning, and achievement.