

Take Up Running...For Your Local School Board

Years ago, I was talking with three or four guys at a party in Asheville, North Carolina when one of them mentioned he was thinking of running for our local school board. "You better stock up on aspirin," one of the other men commented.

The prospective candidate never entered the school board race.

Most of you reading these words are aware of the school board controversies that have erupted around the nation these last few years. Critical race theory, in-class programs teaching sex and gender to children as young as kindergarten, and sexually-explicit books read in class or featured by school libraries have caused explosions at some of these meetings. Other parents are upset that their kids are failing to learn even the basics like reading, writing, math, and American history.

Short of withdrawing their children from government schools, mom and dad often don't know how to change the radical social agenda taught in some classrooms or how to help improve the curricula. Some protest, but I suspect most feel powerless, asking themselves, "What can we do?"

One answer: run for your local school board.

This week I looked online and found the Virginia School Board Association's "[School Board Candidate Guide](#)." Nine pages long, and written in clear, concise language, this guide gives candidates instructions regarding campaigning, outlines the duties of a school board member and the powers of the board, and even suggests questions for the public to ask potential school board members.

The directions for entering the school board race are simple.

Candidates must be registered voters, live in the districts they intend to represent, and file a petition for candidacy with a required number of voter signatures, which in this case comes to 125 signatures from registered voters. Certain financial and fundraising forms must be submitted as well. Candidates run on a non-partisan ticket, but may be endorsed by a political party.

The guide emphasizes that school board members should maintain open communication with all members of the board and the community and always remember that “the foremost concern of the board is to improve and enhance the teaching and learning experience for all students in the public schools of Virginia.”

These directions also remind potential candidates that being a member of this board entails spending a considerable amount of time on educational issues, visiting schools, and remaining well-informed. In addition, it cautions that “board members must be prepared to face both praise and criticism from the media and from people in the community.”

Put all these qualities together, and the ideal board members would be good listeners, hard workers, principled in their conducts and beliefs, and devoted to the students and schools they serve.

Now, let’s say that candidate is you. Here are a few steps you can take in your campaign:

1. Enlist some friends or family members to help you. Have someone who’s good with bookkeeping help with the financial forms. If you have friends who are skilled in the graphic arts, ask them to design the signs you’ll need. Delegate work, and you lessen your burdens.
2. You need a ripple effect, friends telling friends about your candidacy and spreading the word. This is a grassroots campaign in the most basic sense of that

word. Compared to someone running for high office, your voter pool is small and depends on personal appeal. Attending community gatherings and knocking on doors is essential.

3. Come up with a short, basic list of what you plan to do as a board member, promises that match the job description. Make those promises the heart of your campaign.
4. If you appear at a school board candidates forum, lay out the points of that list in straightforward language. Answer questions from the audience as directly and politely as possible. Refuse to rise to the bait of acrimony and accusations. Dignity can carry you a long way toward victory.
5. Seek the endorsement of a political party.
6. Ask questions. This one is key. Ask teachers what might be done to improve their schools. Ask parents about their concerns regarding the education of their children. If possible, issue an invitation to school administrators, parents, and even high school students for a general meeting centered on the question of school improvement.
7. Google "tips for running for school board." Here you'll find other suggestions that may give your campaign just the lift it needs.

Our country needs people committed to American ideals and values in all of our elected offices. We also need men and women dedicated to helping our children receive the best education possible. If you have the time, the grit, and the heart to make a difference serving on a board of education, I encourage you to run.

Who knows? You may find the work rewarding, even a joy...which means you can leave the aspirin in the medicine cabinet.

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