



GET ON
BOARD



2025 GUIDE FOR IOWA SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

Provided by the Iowa Association of School Boards®

www.ia-sb.org/getonboard





IASB'S GUIDE FOR SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

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REWARDS OF SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

Serving on a school board is a challenging job that requires leadership, vision, and dedication. A school board member is entrusted with one of the most important responsibilities that can be assigned to a citizen: ensuring that Iowa schools help students reach high levels of educational achievement. Serving on a school board is a crucial aspect of grassroots democracy.

Experienced board members across Iowa say that the rewards of service lie in meeting the needs of children and their communities. Read for yourself why school board members serve.

WHY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS SERVE

IASB asked Iowa school board members why they serve on their local boards. While we found there are many reasons why they are willing to give their time and commitment to serve their communities, there is one that remains consistent no matter who you ask—they serve to make a difference for the children in their community. Visit www.ia-sb.org/getonboard for more testimonials on board service.



“I found early on in my American journey that serving one’s community is a great way to belong, so I found ways to be involved in every community I lived in from then on, serving in a variety of ways. The opportunity to influence the educational outcomes and personal growth of students in your community alone is reason enough and ultimately the most important. Being associated with such dedicated professionals is humbling.”

Armel Traore dit Nignan, Board Member, Waukee Schools



“I serve on my local school board because I believe education is the foundation for thriving communities. I understand how essential quality schools are to a community’s success and growth. As a parent of three children entering middle school, it’s important to me to stay informed about the needs of our district and contribute to its progress. By serving on the board, I can help ensure that our schools have the resources they need to continue succeeding, while also giving back to the community that has given so much to my family.”

Sheri Penney, Board Member, Osage Schools & IASB



“I have always believed that education is the foundation for a successful life and career. From PK–12, we lead and govern the people and systems that give our students opportunities with lifelong impact. Serving your community as a school board member provides many intangible rewards. Yes, you put in a lot of hours for which you do not get paid a dime, but if you are a service minded leader who cares about the education of all students in your community, it is absolutely worth it!”

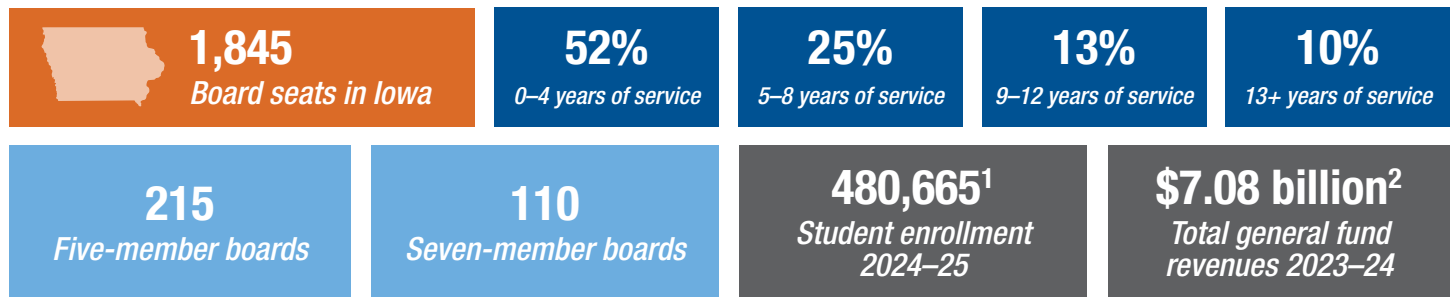
Chad Crabb, Board Member, Southeast Polk Schools & IASB

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL BOARDS IN IOWA

Board members are locally elected public officials entrusted with the task of providing direction for the education of students across Iowa. Iowa school board members represent a continuing commitment to local citizen decision making in public education. School board members do not receive compensation for their service.

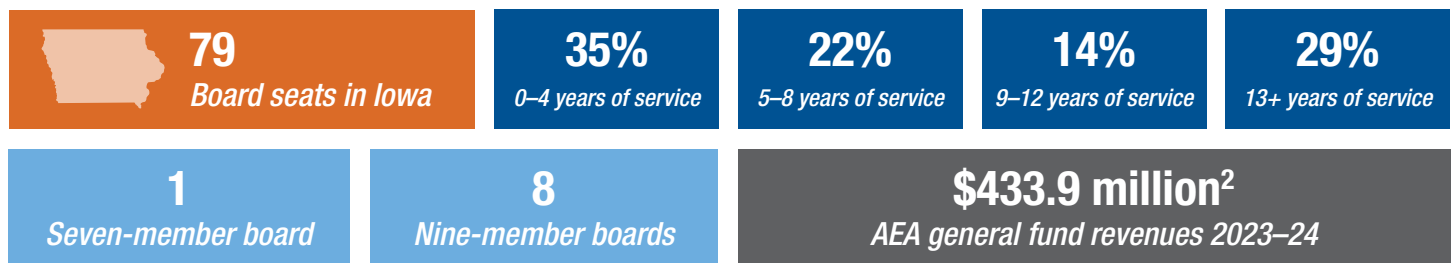
K–12 SCHOOL BOARDS

As of July 1, 2025, Iowa has 324 school districts with five- or seven-member school boards. School board members are elected by their local communities in an election held the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November in odd-numbered years. They may be elected at-large or from director districts and serve four-year terms.



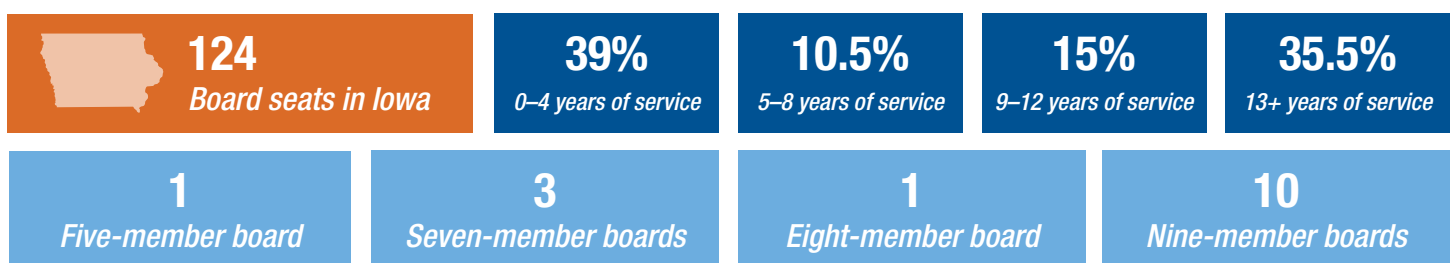
AREA EDUCATION AGENCY BOARDS

The state's nine area education agencies (AEAs) are governed by seven- or nine-member boards who are elected for four-year terms by public school board members. Iowa AEAs are intermediate service units that provide special education, media and educational services to local schools.



COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARDS

Iowa's 15 community colleges are governed by five-to-nine board members elected by local residents in an election held the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November in odd-numbered years. They are elected to four-year terms.



¹ Iowa Department of Education, October 2024 Certified Enrollment

² Iowa Department of Education, Certified Annual Report—FY 2024

WHAT DO SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS DO?

The school board represents the citizens of the community in overseeing the public schools. As the entity legally charged with governing a school district or community college, each school board is responsible to its community to govern effectively. This obligation imposes some fundamental duties on the board.

An effective school board member recognizes that governing requires teamwork and collaboration, accountability and transparency, future-focused decision making, community engagement, and above all else, a commitment to student achievement.

Among other responsibilities, the work of a school board is:

- Ensuring creation of a shared vision, plans, and goals that reflect common values and core beliefs of the school community. The board must ensure that student learning and success are central to the focus, monitor progress toward improvement efforts, and ensure accountability for student learning.
- Setting sound written policy to clarify the board's intent for district/community college direction, while also ensuring that board and district/community college actions comply with state and federal laws.
- Hiring, setting goals for, and evaluating the superintendent or community college president as the chief administrative officer. The superintendent or community college president is responsible to lead and manage the district or community college in compliance with written board policy.
- Overseeing employment processes for other school employees through policy. The superintendent or community college president as chief administrative officer is responsible for employee management and brings hiring or termination recommendations to the board, subject to provisions of law.
- Monitoring and evaluating the financial health of the district or community college, ensuring strong financial planning, approving an annual budget consistent with the district or community college vision, receiving financial reports, and ensuring an annual financial audit.
- Using ongoing, two-way communications and transparency to build trust and support among community, board, superintendent or community college president, staff, and students. School boards must meet in compliance with the *Iowa Open Meetings Law* and make public records available under the *Iowa Open Records Law*. Citizens are welcome at all school board meetings, except in a few legally specified circumstances.
- Acting as a corporate body. Individual school board members have no authority—the board only has authority through decisions made by majority votes during official board meetings.

While this list is not comprehensive, it illustrates the authority placed with school boards as the community's trustees of the public schools.



TIME COMMITMENTS OF A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

The time commitment of serving on a school board will vary based on the community and the needs of the school district or community college. If you are considering board service, talk with current or past board members, and the superintendent or community college president for the best insights. Generally, you should expect:

- **A regular schedule of meetings.** The official work of the school board is carried out at its meetings. Most school boards meet at least once a month, with a growing number meeting multiple times a month.
- **Time spent outside of meetings.** You will spend time beyond board meetings reviewing board materials, as well as communicating with citizens as a locally elected official. To stay knowledgeable and accessible, many board members commit to attending a variety of school activities.
- **A commitment to your own learning.** To understand education trends and issues, legal requirements, and effective governing practices, Iowa school boards have access to board learning opportunities through the Iowa Association of School Boards. See p. 11 for more information.

Serving on a school board is a significant responsibility that takes a commitment of time and energy. Many school board members also say it is one of the most rewarding experiences of their civic lives.



THE BASICS OF BECOMING A CANDIDATE FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD

School board members for school districts and community colleges are elected by their local communities in an election held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in odd-numbered years. The election is held in conjunction with the regular city election.

K–12 BOARDS

K–12 school board members may be elected at-large, from director districts, or in several combinations of at-large and director districts, depending on the system locally adopted. The school board secretary will have materials to help you get started, including the auditor's school election calendar, nomination petition, and general information about school boards.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARDS

Community college board members must be residents of the director districts in which they are elected. Each board member is elected by eligible electors from within their director district. Boards are comprised of one director from each director district within the merged area. Community college board members may not serve as school board members or AEA board members at the same time as their service on the community college board.

QUALIFICATIONS

Any person who is a United States citizen, 18 years of age or older, a resident of the school district (and director district, if applicable), and is eligible to register to vote may become a candidate for the school board.

Nomination petitions must be filed with the school board secretary or community college secretary not more than 71 nor less than 47 days prior to the regular election. The process for filing nomination petitions is as follows:

- Request the original nomination petition from the school board secretary or community college secretary.
- **K–12 School Board Signature Requirements**—Ask your school board secretary for the minimum number of signatures. Obtain the nomination signatures from eligible electors of the school district equal to at least 1% of the registered voters of the district or 50 eligible electors of the district, whichever is less, but at least 10 signatures.
 - **At-Large Districts**—If board members are elected at-large, the number of signatures needed is calculated from the number of registered voters in the entire school district, and petition signers may live anywhere in the school district.
 - **Director Districts**—If board members are elected by director district, rather than at-large, and are voted upon by the entire school district, the number of signatures needed is calculated from the number of registered voters in the school district, and petition signers may live anywhere in the school district. In school districts where directors are only voted on by the residents of the director district, the number of signatures is calculated from the number of registered voters in the director district, and petition signers must live in the director district. A person may sign nomination petitions for more than one candidate for the same office.

- **Community College Board Signature Requirements**—Obtain the nomination signatures of at least 50 eligible electors from the director district. Note: Nomination signers must include their home address and the school district in which they live.
- Attach a notarized affidavit acknowledging the candidate's eligibility.
- File the petition with the board secretary not more than 71 days and not less than 47 days prior to the election. Petitions must be filed with the board secretary by 5 p.m. on the 47th day preceding the election.

Each candidate is assured a place on the ballot by successfully filing the completed nomination petition. A candidate's name may be withdrawn from the ballot after the completed petition is filed by submitting a written statement to that effect with the school board secretary or community college secretary by the withdrawal deadline.

An individual may be elected as a write-in candidate. Space must be provided on the ballot for write-in candidates. The write-in candidate is not required to file a nomination petition.

This list is a summary of signature requirements. Please see the **Iowa Secretary of State's Candidate Guide** online at sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/electioninfo/schoolcandguide.pdf for all signature requirements.

2025 KEY DATES

- **Monday, Aug. 25, 2025:** Candidate filing begins.
- **Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025:** Candidate filing deadline by 5 p.m.
- **Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2025:** Candidate withdrawal deadline by 5 p.m. (last day for candidates to withdraw by filing a written request with the school secretary).
- **Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2025:** School election day. Polls are open from 7 a.m.–8 p.m.
- **Monday, Nov. 10, 2025 or Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025:** Tier 1 canvass of votes for all school districts: first Monday or Wednesday after the election, unless these dates fall on a legal holiday, then it pushes back one day. This is the only and final election canvass for school districts located within one county.
- **Monday, Nov. 17, 2025 or Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2025:** Tier 2 canvass of votes for districts whose boundary lines fall within multiple counties: second Monday or Wednesday after the election, unless these dates fall on a legal holiday, then it pushes back one day. This is the second and final election canvass for those districts.
- **Dates vary:** No date is legally specified for the organizational meeting. It is the first regular meeting or a special meeting held before the first regular meeting following the final canvass. During this meeting, the board organizes for the new term.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CAMPAIGNING

CAMPAIGN FINANCE DISCLOSURE LAW

School board candidates must comply with the *Iowa Ethics Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws* (Chapter 68A and 68B). Candidates should be aware that failure to comply with these laws can result in fines and other penalties. The laws also apply to write-in candidates. Candidates may obtain more information about Iowa's campaign finance laws and access the **Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board's** web reporting system at ethics.iowa.gov.

CANDIDATE COMMITTEES

Candidates who receive contributions, make expenditures or incur debts more than \$1,000 (including personal funds) must form a committee and file reports. This holds true for such actions done by a committee on behalf of a candidate. The committee must file its statement of organization within 10 days of the \$1,000 threshold being crossed. The committee name must include the candidate's last name. Every candidate who crosses the \$1,000 threshold is mandated by law to file his or her statement of organization and campaign disclosure reports electronically using the **Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board's** web reporting system. A candidate committee must identify a treasurer who is an Iowa resident and at least 18 years of age. A candidate may serve as their own treasurer. A candidate committee's bank account must be with a financial institution in Iowa.

DISCLOSURE REPORTS

Every candidate committee is required to periodically report its financial activity to the **Ethics Board**. Reports disclosing campaign transactions are due by 4:30 p.m. five days before the election, as well as on the 19th day of January. For committees that do not dissolve, they must also file reports on the 19th day of January of each year in which the candidate's name does not appear on the ballot.

CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Iowa does not have campaign contribution limits. Contributions from relatives within the third degree of consanguinity and affinity must include a description of the relationship to the candidate. Candidates are required to deposit all contributions within seven days of receipt in an account maintained by the candidate's committee in a financial institution. (Exception: A separate account need not be established if the candidate receives no funds from others and finances the campaign out of his or her own pocket; in this instance the candidate files reports to show expenditures from personal funds as in-kind contributions from the candidate to the committee).

CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES

Candidates may spend campaign funds only for campaign purposes, educational, or other expenses associated with the duties of office or constituency services, and may transfer funds only as provided in *Iowa Code* sections 68A.302 and 68A.303.

CAMPAIGN SIGNS

Prohibited locations for candidate campaign signs include: any property without the permission of the property owner or lessee, property owned by the state or governing body of a county or city considered the public right-of-way, and property owned or leased by a corporation, financial institution, or insurance company except when leased as campaign headquarters or office. On

Election Day, signs cannot be placed on the premises of any polling place or within 300 feet of an outside door of the polling place, or on any motor vehicle if it is parked on public property within 300 feet of the outside door of the polling place. See Advisory Opinion IECDB AO 2008-14 or *Iowa Code* 68A.406 for more detailed information on where you can and cannot place campaign signs.

ATTRIBUTION STATEMENTS

Any printed political material must include the words “paid for by” and identification of the individuals, committee, or organization which paid for the ad (includes newspapers, brochures, videos, posters, billboards, mailings, and websites, but not items too small to include such credit, such as buttons or pens). Candidates who have not registered a committee must include their full names and addresses as part of the identification, or file form DR-SFA to use the shorter “paid for by” statement.

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR CAMPAIGN USE

School resources cannot be used to promote either candidates or ballot issues, including the use of school mail boxes for distribution of campaign advocacy materials or school email for promotional or solicitation messages.

SIX TIPS FOR CAMPAIGNING

IASB recommends the following tips for all school board candidates as they campaign for election:

- 1. Attend school board meetings.** Watching the current board in action will help you begin to understand the practicalities of school board operations and learn more about issues in your district or community college. Board agendas and virtually all materials before the board are public documents; reviewing them can build your understanding.
- 2. Ask questions.** The superintendent or community college president, board secretary or community college secretary, business manager, and current board members can help you understand district issues.
- 3. Be proactive in helping the community understand your views.** Help citizens understand what you stand for by speaking at candidate forums, talking with reporters, stating your views in campaign materials, and using other forums.
- 4. Carefully consider your campaign promises.** As an individual, a board member has no authority. It's only when a majority of the board takes action through a vote that the board's authority is exercised.
- 5. When campaigning for the board, state your position on issues.** But avoid making promises that you alone cannot keep.
- 6. Encourage voter participation.** Strong voter turnout is more than a grassroots campaign strategy. Voter participation in school board elections helps engage citizens and creates a strong bond between the public and their public schools.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONFLICT OF INTEREST & GIFTS

Board members, as elected public officials, are duty-bound to serve the public interest. Yet, as private citizens, they may also participate in outside employment and activities. The most critical conflict of public versus private interest in decision making arises in financial transactions—the spending of public funds. School board members must comply with the conflict of interest laws in *Iowa Code*.

Statutes remove certain potential conflicts of interest by excluding a board member from:

- Receiving compensation from the school district for one or more contracts for the purchase of goods or services which benefit a board member unless the benefit to the board member does not exceed \$20,000 in a fiscal year or the contract is publicly bid in writing.
- Appointing a relative within the third degree to a paying position, except a teaching position, unless it was first approved by the board.
- Being an agent for a textbook or school supply company involved in a transaction with a staff or board member of your own school district.
- Being a statewide elected official or a state legislator.

The law does not prohibit a spouse or other family member of a school district employee from running for the board.

Generally, Iowa law prohibits school board members and candidates from accepting gifts and honoraria from people who may be financially affected by actions of the school board. Candidates are advised to inquire about the status of restrictions or reporting requirements at the time of the election by contacting the **Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board** (see *Iowa Code* section 68B.22).



GET ON BOARD—CANDIDATE & ELECTION RESOURCES

GET ON BOARD DIGITAL TOOLKIT

Our elections toolkit at www.ia-sb.org/getonboard contains many great resources to educate and inform candidates, including:



- Guide for School Board Candidates (PDF)
- School Board Election FAQs
- Key Dates
- Informational Video
- Member Testimonials
- Links to Iowa Secretary of State's Office and Iowa Ethics & Campaign Disclosure Board Resources

SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE WEBINAR SERIES

We are offering a webinar series for candidates to get up-to-speed on all elections-related topics. While we recommend that candidates attend all four, the first webinar on Wednesday, Aug. 13 is an essential first step for any individual interested in running for the board.

- **Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2025:** Running for the School Board 101 —Essential Tips for School Board Candidates, Noon–1 p.m.
- **Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2025:** Legal & Ethical Campaigns for the School Board, Noon–1 p.m.
- **Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025:** The Building Blocks of Financial Advocacy, Noon–1 p.m.
- **Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2025:** Student Learning—Do Boards Really Make a Difference?, Noon–1 p.m.



SO, YOU'RE ELECTED TO YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD—NOW WHAT?

Attend the board's organizational meeting. Organizational meetings are held at the first regular meeting (or the first special meeting prior to the first regular meeting) following the canvass of votes. Check with your school district or community college for a local meeting schedule.

Take the oath of office at or before the organizational meeting. Each new board member must qualify to serve by taking the oath of office.

Hit the ground running with help from IASB. The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) is a nonprofit membership organization that provides many services designed to help board members improve Iowa schools and carry out their legal responsibilities. After you're elected to the school board, we'll be here to help you be effective in your work. Our services include training, advocacy, consultation, and many others. Mark your calendar for the following essential workshops for newly elected board members.

WELCOME ABOARD—GET ORIENTED TO BOARD SERVICE

IASB BOARDCON

Wednesday–Friday, Nov. 19–21, 2025

Iowa Events Center, Des Moines, IA

Board members serve to make a difference for students and for their communities. IASB BoardCon showcases innovations in education, how schools are raising the bar, and tackling issues affecting students. You'll find inspiring speakers and countless ideas to make public schools strong!

This year's convention features two esteemed keynote speakers:

- **Thomas C. Murray**, Educator, Author & Director of Innovation at Future Ready Schools
- **Anne Marie Anderson**, Award-Winning Speaker, Author & Broadcaster

We are offering topics for both experienced and newly elected board members, as well as other important members of the governance team.

In addition to two general sessions presented by our keynoters, we are offering a special closing general session this year focused on *Iowa Open Meetings* and *Public Records* laws. While only required for newly elected and appointed board members, annual participation is encouraged.

Completion earns a certification and ensures board members are prepared to meet their legal obligations. Stay, learn, and leave BoardCon confident in your legal responsibilities as a board member!

Join us this November and learn together to deepen skillsets and build board unity. To learn more about sessions offered, registration information, and more, visit www.ia-sb.org/boardcon.

Registration and lodging open on Wednesday, Aug. 6!



READY, SET, GOVERN! NEW BOARD MEMBER ONBOARDING WORKSHOPS

CALLING ALL APPOINTED OR NEWLY ELECTED SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS! Our interactive Ready, Set, Govern! workshops are designed to set you on the road to success. During each of these workshops, we will cover foundational elements of good governance, such as understanding the governance roles of the board, management roles of the superintendent, and tips for fostering good communication to support an effective board-superintendent team partnership. We'll also review policy and explore strategies for responding to questions or concerns from community members, families, and staff. The application of engaging real-life scenarios will provide the opportunity to apply what we've learned and deepen your understanding of the vital nature of your governance work. We're thrilled to offer workshops hosted at various locations across the state:

- **Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2025:** PreCon Workshop (at BoardCon), Iowa Events Center
- **Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025:** Forest City Schools
- **Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2025:** Fort Dodge Schools
- **Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025:** Northwest AEA in Sioux City
- **Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2025:** Sioux Center Schools
- **Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025:** Emmetsburg Schools
- **Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025:** Marshalltown Schools
- **Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026:** Chariton Schools
- **Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2026:** Van Meter Schools
- **Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026:** Mississippi Bend AEA in Bettendorf
- **Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026:** Mount Pleasant Schools
- **Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026:** Clear Creek Amana Schools
- **Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026:** Corning/Southwest Valley Schools
- **Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026:** Glenwood Schools
- **Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026:** Carroll Schools
- **Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2026:** Decorah Schools
- **Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026:** Oelwein Schools

Visit www.ia-sb.org/rsg or email IASB's Board Development Team at boarddev@ia-sb.org for more information.



IASB IS HERE FOR YOU

IASB's Get on Board campaign is designed to help interested citizens understand school boards in Iowa, qualifications and steps to become a candidate, key dates and deadlines, frequently asked questions, and more.

If you or someone you know is looking to give back to your community, then perhaps school board service is right for you!

You'll find many of the campaign resources in this guide as well as on our website. We are available to answer your questions, provide information, and point you in the right direction if we are unable to help. Visit www.ia-sb.org/getonboard for election resources and email Jen Woodley at jwoodley@ia-sb.org with questions.

www.ia-sb.org/getonboard





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