



Talking about Becoming a School Trustee

Overview

In Manitoba, **310 school trustees** serve on **37 school boards**. School trustees are elected officials, comparable in many ways to municipal councillors. School board elections are held **every four years**, at the same time as municipal elections. The next scheduled election will be held in October 2018. In addition to regularly scheduled elections which are held province-wide, a school division may hold a **by-election** to fill any vacancy which arises on the board between elections.

In order to run for the position of school trustee, an individual must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen, and actually live within the geographic boundaries of the school division. He or she must be **nominated** by having a certain number of electors (a maximum of 25) sign nomination papers. These nomination papers must then be returned to the designated place (usually the school board or a municipal office) by the deadline indicated (which will be several weeks before the actual election date).

From time to time, only one individual is nominated for a particular seat on a school board. When that happens, that individual is **acclaimed** to the position. In rare instances, there are no nominations for a seat. When that happens, one of the first responsibilities of the new school board is to **appoint** someone to fill the vacancy. Whether elected, acclaimed or appointed, all trustees are equals at the school board table.



Key Points

- School trustees are members and representatives of the communities in which they live. School trustees are not professional educators.
- Almost without exception, anyone who is a Canadian citizen, 18 years of age or older, and actually residing within the geographic boundaries of the school division, can serve as a school trustee. The few exceptions that do exist include elected officials of another level of government, and students in regular attendance at a school within the same division.
- School trustees must be able to commit a significant amount of time to fulfill their responsibilities, which go far beyond regular monthly or bi-monthly meetings, and must be prepared to invest the time required to learn about their new responsibilities.
- School board election procedures and aspects of school trustee conduct (such as provisions for dealing with conflict of interest situations) are covered in provincial legislation.

Becoming a School Trustee



Q&A

Do I have to know a lot about education to serve as a school trustee?

No, but you do need to have a genuine interest in children and education. As a school board member, your job is not to run the schools or teach the children, any more than it is to drive the school bus or tend the boiler. The school board employs highly qualified individuals to fulfill each of those roles. Your job is to engage and understand the community that you represent so that you can make policy decisions and set a budget that enables all employees to do their jobs in a manner that responds to student needs and community priorities.

I know I have to live in the school division to run for trustee, but I want to run in a different ward from where I live. Can I do that?

The residency requirement for school trustee is that you live within the geographic boundaries of the *school division*. This means that you can run in any ward, not just the one where you live. But be careful! In order to run, you need to have nomination papers signed by a certain number of electors (either 25 individuals or 1% of the electorate of the ward, whichever is less). For your nomination to be valid, the people that sign your nomination papers must reside in the ward in which you intend to run.

I'm an employee in the same school division where I live. Can I still run for school trustee?

Working for a school division doesn't prevent you from serving as a school trustee in that same division, but you do have to make some special arrangements. Before you can assume your seat, you have to take a leave of absence from your job. The leave is unpaid, must be granted by the division upon request, and will last for a period of time not exceeding five years. To learn more, contact your school board office.

I'm worried about the time commitment that comes with serving on a school board. Exactly how big a job would I be taking on?

The workload varies with the time of the year, and it can be very demanding. As well as regular board meetings (usually once or twice each month), there will be committee meetings, meetings with other organizations or other levels of government, and school and community events that you are expected to attend. Most of these meetings require a significant amount of preparation to enable you to participate actively, so you also need to factor in time taken to read and understand agendas and supplementary material. If you have serious concerns about your ability to dedicate the necessary time to the position, you may want to reconsider your decision to run. If you are elected trustee and are subsequently unable to attend three consecutive meetings, you may be forced to resign, which may mean that the division will be required to conduct a by-election.

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Q&A

From time to time, I hear about conflict of interest on school boards. What is conflict of interest, and could a conflict of interest stop me from running for school trustee?

A conflict of interest situation can arise when a trustee's personal life and public life overlap. For example, a trustee may own a business that sells something that the school division wants to buy. That trustee would stand to benefit personally if the school division decided to make its purchase from the trustee's business. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, the trustee must not participate in any discussions or vote on this matter, and must not even be present when those discussions take place. This is an example of a pecuniary (or financial) conflict of interest, and provincial legislation clearly outlines procedures for avoiding such conflicts at the board table, as well as remedies in law should conflict of interest provisions be ignored.

But there are other types of conflict of interest, ones that don't involve pecuniary interests, that aren't covered by legislation. Employment decisions that affect family members and disciplinary actions involving students are two of the most common areas of potential non-pecuniary conflict of interest. All school boards are required to have formal codes of conduct that provide direction, should trustees find themselves in these types of situations. The underlying principle is always the same: where trustees' personal interests or affiliations have the potential to bias their judgement about an issue, they must remove themselves from all related decision-making processes.

So, while conflict of interest would not normally prevent you from becoming a school trustee, it may impact your ability to participate in certain board deliberations and decisions.

How can I learn more about school board elections?

For an overview of school board elections (as well as information about school boards and school trustees in general), visit the website of The Manitoba School Boards Association (www.mbschoolboards.ca), where you will find the publication *School Boards and Trusteeship in Manitoba*. Detailed information about the conduct of school board elections is contained in provincial legislation (*The Public Schools Act* and *The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*).

If I'm elected as school trustee, how will I learn about the job?

After each election, school divisions work with newly elected school trustees to orientate them to their new role. As well, in the weeks following each election, The Manitoba School Boards Association offers training sessions designed to immerse new trustees in their role.



mbschoolboards.ca