

## Now Is the Time to Run for Your Local School Board

By AL CAMPBELL

COURT HOUSE—Wanted: Citizens to be involved in the educational process, get an inside look at why school taxes are high, get a crash course in No Child Left Behind details, spend long hours at regular and committee meetings.

Does that sound like something you'd enjoy?

If so, consider circulating a petition to run for your local school board.

Deadline is Feb. 26 at 4 p.m. in local board administration offices to get one's name on the ballot in the April 17 school election.

Monetary benefits? Forget them. Board members gets no compensation other than a satisfaction of helping one's local school district.

To qualify as a member of a local board of education in New Jersey, candi-

dates must:

- Be able to read and write.
- Hold U.S. citizenship and one year's residency in the school district.
- Have no interest in any contract with, or claim against, the board.
- Not hold office as mayor or member of the municipal governing body or, in the case of county school districts, the county governing body.
- Be registered to vote in the district.

To get one's name on the ballot, candidates must:

- Obtain the signatures of at least 10 qualified voters living within the district, one of which may be their own.

- File a petition at least 50 days prior (Feb. 26) to the election in one's district.

Each candidate for election, including an incum-

bent, must be nominated directly by petition, signed by at least 10 people (one of whom may be the candidate).

Each nominating petition, addressed to the secretary of the board, must state:

- That signers are qualified voters in the school district.
- The name, residence and post office address of the candidate and the office for which the candidate is endorsed.

That the signers endorse the candidate and ask that his or her name be printed on the ballot.

- That the candidate is legally qualified to be a school board member.

One of the signers must make a sworn statement that the petition is prepared in good faith that he or she saw all of the signatures included in the petition and that he or she believes that the signers are duly qualified voters.

With the nominating petition, the candidate must include a signed statement certifying that he or she

is qualified to be a school board member, consents to be a candidate, and will accept the office if elected.

A candidate may withdraw his or her name by filing a signed notice (in writing) with the board secretary on or before March 5.

(While the statutory deadline for withdrawal is actually Sunday, March 4, the state Department of Education generally moves deadlines that fall on a weekend to the following Monday.)

Board candidates may request the Compliance Manual for Candidates from the Election Law Enforcement Commission

As a member of the board of education, citizens will be expected to fulfill certain responsibilities, including:

- Establishing goals for the public schools based on student educational needs, parent and community aspirations, state and federal standards and district financial resources.

- Developing a philosophy of education that

will become the basis for sound decisions that affect the governance of your community's schools.

- Developing policies to guide the administration in managing the schools; developing bylaws to direct the board in carrying out its governance responsibilities.

- Developing a community understanding of educational issues and school policies through the maintenance of effective communications systems.

- Providing adequate financing for the district's present and future needs.

- Ensuring quality education by providing adequate facilities and equipment.

- Establishing conditions that enable the administration to recruit and effectively evaluate professional staff.

- Engaging in board self-evaluation and in service training programs for the purpose of providing well-informed leadership and sound decision-making.

- Establishing a process for the board to negotiate in good faith with its em-

ployees, while representing community educational goals and financial interests.

Candidates should also:

- Understand that their responsibility is not to administer the schools, but to work with the board to see that the schools are well run.

- Understand that education is extremely complex.

- Listen to opposing views and be able to defend the board's philosophy and goals.

- Be willing to invest the many hours necessary to meet your responsibilities.

- Serve out of a sincere desire to benefit the community rather than for personal glory or to carry out personal objectives.

- Bear in mind that, as a state official, board members have a responsibility to all the children in the state, not only to those in the local district.

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